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Organizational talk: an investigation into how banking employees informally influence work culture towards their interests

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Chapter 1:

Introduction:

"*Eventually, a process of (non-essentialist) identity formation may emerge in organizations, in which a long history of 'unfree labour' and South Africa's cultural and ethnic diversity are appreciated*." (Van den Heuvel, 2008: 52)

This research has studied the cultural dynamics, particularly in gossip and humour, of two of South Africa's largest retail banks, and in turn has been a study of a history[1] of colonialism, of South Africa, of corporations and capitalism, of banking in Southern Africa and of the people who populate these massive institutions. While capitalism itself has a long and particular history in Africa:

: "*... this system is historically a violent and exploitative one, since it constructs a lesser 'other' which it seeks to control, and from which it appropriates. Historically too, the ruling class under capitalism has always been male gendered.... Yet, that power entails massive abuse of human rights, given the facts of the global imperialism of the west*" (Amadiume, 1990 in Moahloli, 1997: 30).

The terrain of this, in the nuances of the local socio-political situation, has in many ways been uniquely South African:

"*Cultural theorizing in South Africa, with its emphasis on separation and segregation, has been based until recently on the following tendencies: the over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance, and the fixation on race, or more particularly on racial supremacy and racial victimhood as a determinant of identity*." (Nuttal and Michael, 2000: 1-2)

[1] "…there ought to be no "relationship" between history and anthropology, since there should be no division to begin with. A theory of society which is not also a theory of history, or visa versa, is hardly a theory at all." (Gintzburg, 1980 in Comaroff and Comaroff, 1985: 13)

My work, for the last ten years, has involved comedically entertaining some of South Africa's most powerful corporate leaders, and often involved 'joking around' with staff after and before my shows – this study was inspired by the marked differences between what executives perceived to be the case, and what employees said, leading to a performative view of organizations:

"*A person's gender, race, assigned work, and place in the hierarchy all influence how they are expected to act at work… Everyone's desire to embody social characteristics that are prized in the workplace culture structures how people work. People will act deceptively to meet these demands in the workplace*." (Shulman, 2007: 12)

While many South African organizations seem to have a particular white male bias (Marthur-Helm, 2006; Moahloli, 1997), a product of our social history, there would seem to be little research into how this "micro-political" (McNay, 1982; McNay, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005) dynamic is maintained or subverted in actual face-to-face interaction by South African workers. In conjunction with this, the dearth of research into the informal organization[2], the often "covert discourses and ruses" (Foucault, 1980: 38) that are required for a business to run, in relation to gossip and humour would seem to be a severe lack in South African (and general) organizational research (Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Noon and Delbridge, 1993).

"… *it is important to remember that organizations and societies are socially constructed and that individuals are not passive entities who are totally determined by external forces. Individuals are knowledgeable and creative agents who, in forging relationships and constructing various selves, significantly shape the societies and organizations they inhabit*." (Collinson, 2003: 541)

[2] As Clegg reminds us: "Gouldner termed formal organization design a 'mock bureaucracy' where the actual practice of power routinely breached the formal design of rules for its comportment" (1954, in Clegg, 1997: 483).

That the process of colonialism has involved a co-creation of cultural norms, albeit with severe power asymmetries, and is by no means a mere assimilation by the west of the 'Other' (Comaroff, 1985), would indicate that our organizational forms would themselves be reconstructed, not merely replications of western business models. The nuances of the microecological aspects of this are seem severely understudied in South African contexts, and the manner in which race (Nuttal and Michael, 2000)[3], ethnicity (Thornton, 1981), gender (Moahloli, 1997), age (Van Dongen, 2005), class (Abdi, 1999), sex (Spruill, 2008), and so forth are constructed in negotiation with corporate hierarchy are an area of urgent importance to South Africa and to its organizations.

"*First, work and personhood are inextricable from one another. In transforming the material world, my informants also transformed themselves*." (Kondo, 1990: 48)

Therefore, this study of how South African employees informally influence their workplace cultures towards their interests, is motivated by 1) the need for study into how power is maintained and constituted in South African organizations, particularly in the light of the changing nature of South African society after the radical social violence of *apartheid*; 2) the need for research into gossip and humour and the informal organization, in which I believe South African companies have something particularly unique to offer; 3) the need to understand how identity and culture are created and creolised in South African workplaces, in which people, previously separated through state control are meeting, mixing

[3] Furthermore, Nuttal and Michael (2000) have called for research into how 'whiteness' in particular is constructed, which, in the face of resistance to Employment Equity, and the lack of accountability by South African organizations regarding their *apartheid* past , is of overwhelming importance. If we bear in mind that "the bourgeois subject" creates him/herself defined against the "colonized, colored "others" "(Kondo, 1997: 7), and in turn that "it follows that those whose subject-positions are protected by the prevailing hegemony will be more interested in the efficacious use of power than in examining its misuse" (JanMohammed and Lloyd, 1987: 13), we can see how the questioning of how people work to reconstruct each other and their subsequent cultures (Kondo, 1990) is a crucial dynamic in the politics of South African businesses today.

and negotiating reinventions and reassertions of their own identities and those of others[4].

Defining culture:

"*history is that which transforms **documents** into **monuments***." (Foucault, 1972: 7)

The study of culture in South Africa has been problematic from the outset, not least because the terms that have come to be the pillars of ethnographic vocabulary, "field", "tribe", "language" and "culture"[5] itself were developed in an era of nineteenth century colonial enquiry (Thornton, 1981: vii, 2000; Peirano, 1998). This project has faced complications on many levels in this regard, in that being an ethnography of business it must negotiate with incommensurability (Lewis and Grimes, 1999) around some of the more functionalist organizational theorizing (Alvesson, 1993) relating to these ideas, which in many cases have theoretical connections to the above colonial definitions (Gordon, 1995). In addition, the discourses proposed by informants frequently called upon organizational theories – their own reflexivity informed by commonly held social perceptions and individual education, often with a 'corporate culture' slant. This is further complicated by the fact that workplace research is no way foreign to anthropology, the ethnographies of Cockburn (1983) and Burawoy (1979) being groundbreakers in this regard, and Goffman's work in a psychiatric hospital (*Asylums*, 1961 in Branaman, 1997) having huge influence in our anthropological understanding of interpersonal interaction in institutions. This thesis draws on further works from the likes of Collinson (1999), Kondo, (1990), Scott (1985), in passing on Hofstede (1980a, in Kirkman, Lowe, Gibson, 2006), and others, who have taken corporate culture thinking into new areas.

[4] "…in the interaction of global and peripheral systems, the conjuncture is one between unequal orders, and between systems in contradiction", but simultaneously "the conjuncture was mutually transforming, and the encompassing formation that emerged was the product of the interplay of both systems." (Comaroff, 1985: 192)

[5] The word is attributed to Adolf Bastian, a nineteenth century German ethnographer who adapted it from German Romanticism's "*Volksgeist*". (http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/def/culture.htm)

In this light, the term ‘culture’, anthropologically, should in many ways be seen as “deeply compromised” (Thornton, 2000: 39; Asad, 1979 in Wright, 1994), Abu-Lughod (1991 in Thornton, 2000: 42; Peirano, 1998) even suggesting we replace “culture” with “discourse”.

In this arena a further drive has been the reduction in the distance between researcher and subject (Peirano, 1998), the move from anthropology as the study of “the Other” to one of post-modern reflexivity, or, as Clifford and Marcus hinted at, a sense of “post anthropology” (1986 in Peirano, 1998: 111). Visweswaran suggested that we abandon “fieldwork” for “homework” (1994 in Kondo, 1997: 21), as for non-Western anthropologists this is exactly what it is.[6] The drive here is that anthropology has in many ways moved out of the “Other” village and into our own back yard. This is precisely where this fieldwork lies – my research sites are literally ten minutes from my house, in the middle of one of Africa’s most politically, economically and academically central cities. My research subjects were literally collaborators, discussing the nuances of their work cultures, while simultaneously demonstrating them, consciously and otherwise.

Organisational theorists and culture:

In order to decide upon a system for thinking about ‘culture’ here I need then to give a larger sense of the dynamics at play. Firstly we have business culturists, such as Ouchi (1981), with his call for greater employee involvement as the key to productivity; Schein (1992 in Rashid and Sambisavan, 2003: 710), seeing culture as a “set of basic assumptions” developed by a “group” in order to survive; Deal and Kennedy (1982), seeing culture as a set of “dominant values”; Peters and Waterman (1982 in Wright, 1994), suggesting excellence as a result of “strong” culture. These business minded authors’ theoretical heritage can be

[6] Subsequently it has been argued that the distinction between anthropology and sociology is “basically xenophobic” (Goody, 1966 in Peirano, 1998: 108).

traced to “human relations” thinking from the likes of Elton Mayo and Mary Follett (Newfield, 1998: 33), who proposed an alternative view to organizational understanding than that offered by scientific management (Marcus, 1998). These corporate culture authors were part of a drive during the early 1980’s to humanize the workplace, and can historically be seen as a response to the uncertainties of late-capitalism (Gordon, 1995), specifically in the time of their writing[7]. The need to mobilize more effective and adaptive management styles drove a change to value “soft” issues such as culture.

These corporate culturists are widely criticized on a variety of fronts (Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines, 1991): Peters and Waterman, and Deal and Kennedy, based their research on the interviews of just a handful of top managers (Wilson, 2001); their views often create an essentialised view of culture as a bounded unit (Gordon, 1995), unaware of the ever changing base that capitalism, in particular, creates (Newfield, 1998); these "guru authors" glorify femininity in ways that confirm an essentialist idea of women, where femininity is used in instrumental ways (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004: 448); they are accused of protecting middle class interests in business discourse (ibid.); and creating a view of culture as something managers can use to manipulate staff, an ideological critique of espoused corporate culture as the business version of Orwellian ‘newspeak’[8] (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995: 742; Morgan, 1986). This last critique is particularly important, as Wilson (2001) points out, there is no empirical evidence to support the view that leaders have the “totally overpowering” effects that these authors (e.g. Schein, 1983, Kotter and Hoskett, 1992 in ibid: 359) suggest.

[7] Circumstantially there were pressures on US companies to compete with economies such as Germany and Japan, with the closing of many US plants and a more competitive economic climate, and focal point for the start of this spiral being the 1973 leap in US oil prices (Newfield, 1998).

[8] "Willmot (1993) elaborates this theme by comparing corporate culturalism with the philosophy of control favoured by the Party in George Orwell's '1984'. Corporate culture, he argues, develops a kind of Orwellian 'newspeak'; a hegemonic programming or thought control designed to secure employee self discipline. He concludes, "There is yet little sign of sustained questioning of, or organized resistance to, the implicit political philosophy of corporate culturalism'." (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995: 742)

With regards to my overall argument about employee agency and workplace culture, it is historically vital to note that in the light of increased globalization and competitive capitalism this purported “human relations revolution never took place. We got the Reagan revolution instead. Finance was back. Rational-choice theories ran economics” (Newfield, 1998: 39):

"*drawing attention to the 'economic revolution' of the 1980s, in which the quest for price stability and exchange stability has taken precedence over the full-employment policies that had dominated western governments' economic policies since 1950. Keynesianism had failed and was replaced by monetarism*." (Jones, 1992: 8)[9]

Corporate culturalism has certainly not been abandoned (Marcus, 1998) [10], indeed it was applied to varying degrees directly by management in both organizations studied here, and formed an integral element of the discourse used to both resist and promote corporate objectives. Gordon (1995:3-7) suggests that we see it as a “mode of governance designed to provide a new habitus of sense-making for the citizens of the corporation”, in line with the rapidity and logic of change in late-capitalism “wherein culture's powers are severed from history … Corporate culture is all present and future”. The manner in which these companies understood their and South Africa’s history was strongly influenced by this preceding sentiment.

While there is much thinking on culture from a more critical and reflexive perspective, drawing on Marxism, postmodernism, post-structuralism and feminism (e.g. Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Clegg, 1997; Collinson, 1994; Jermier,

[9] Global trends, while important, do not necessarily translate into the South African context (Thornton, 2000), particularly in the light of the apartheid/post-apartheid economic outlooks. The impact of these trends on South African management styles and banking will be touched on later.
[10] Gordon (1995) suggests that in spite of its inadequacies corporate culture research holds some valuable thinking (e.g. Rashid and Sambisavan (2003) in relation to organizational commitment and performance; Davis (2004), Lund (2003), Silverthorne (2004) and Bussing (1997); Harrison and Carrol (1991) on cultural transmission occurs in organisations in relation to job satisfaction), which should not be ignored.

Slocum, Fry, and Gaines, 1991; Hassard 1994; Knights and Wilmott, 1989), which we will thoroughly explore later, there is agreement that anthropological ideas of culture have much to offer.

"…the more rigorously (anthropologically) the term (culture) is applied, the more the concept of organizational culture gains in theoretical interpretive power" (inserts from original) (Westley and Jaeger, 1985 in Alvesson, 1993: 30).

Anthropology and culture:

Thus, turning to anthropological versions of culture, we need to keep in mind the subject matter of this research: informal communications and how employees influence workplace culture towards their interests. The deciding line, then, is that of agency and interests.

It is important to note the work of Gert Hofstede (1994; 1998), who is significant in his anthropological stance, while still gaining acceptance in orthodox business (1980a in Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson, 2006). His main work, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (ibid.) has been the base of over 180 studies[11] of cultural difference and values[12], and has been applied in the South African context (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000; Urban, 2006).

Post-modernism has of course radically affected anthropological understandings of culture, and there is some work in organizations in this regard[13]. While, for

[11] Between 1980 and 2002 (Lowe and Gibson, 2006).

[12] He defined culture as: "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (1980a in Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson, 2006: 286). He has been critiqued for oversimplifying culture to merely a five values, limiting his sample to one multinational corporation and ignoring the incredible cultural complexity within a single country (ibid.).

[13] Jacobson, for example used Clifford Geertz's (1973a in Jacobson, 1987: 49) "structures of meaning" and "frames of interpretation" view of culture to argue for a more contextual and less solidified view in the analysis of social networks.

example, Clifford Geertz (1974 in McCracken, 2008)[14] has given useful discussion within anthropology towards questioning western individual identity, we need to take the critiques offered by feminist (McNay, 2000; Kirby, 1993; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004) and subaltern/minority studies (JanMohammed, 1987; Morley and Chen, 1996; Spivak, 1988; Zhao, 1983) into account, particularly in the light of this project's subject matter. McNay writes that in a post-structural understanding of identity, "subjectivity becomes a free-floating and atemporal entity which lacks the historical depth of *durée*" (2000: 17). Spivak (1988) argues that the utter relativism of postmodern and of many post-structural cultural writers is often ignorant of the historical struggles of colonized others, and thus biased in its lack of critique. JanMohammed (1987) asserts that, while postmodernism and post-structuralism add much to minority arguments, the political distance from the centre that minorities experience cannot be excluded.

In the light of the political dimension of my research, to examine how employees at all levels apply agency to change cultural dynamics towards their interests – structure and agency in a workplace setting, the optimal description of culture needs to be historical, as implied by the critics above. In this regard, three authors need to be considered in particular, Jean and John Comaroff (1992), relevant in their South African and historical depth, and Marshall Sahlins' (1985) *Islands of History*.

"*culture functions as a synthesis of stability and change, past and present, diachrony and synchrony*." (Sahlins, 1985: 114)

For Sahlins culture is fundamentally historical, lived in daily practices and "inflection[s] of meaning" (ibid: 152). He differentiates between the "Great Tradition", the "heroic history", the history of the "Significant One"[15], as opposed

[14] McCracken (2008) uses Geertz to expose the uniqueness of the western view of a bounded self as a peculiarity in comparison to many other cultures.
[15] Note the relevance of this for this project, in which officially sanctioned interpretations of a bank's history, usually involving restructures, mergers and CEOs, are met and sometimes

to the lived, “short and simple annals of the poor” (ibid.: 49), going on to note that: "For them, the culture is most 'lived' - in practice, and as *habitus*. Their lives are run on an unconscious mastery of the system, something like Everyman's control of grammatical categories, together with the homespun concepts of the good that allow them to improvise daily activities on the level of the pragmatic and matter-of-fact" (ibid. 51). Thus the stories that people tell each other, in gossip, in folklore, and in what “news” is worth telling becomes highly salient on a cultural and historical level (ibid. 51-52). He shows that culture is historically not merely repeated, but in the repetition is constantly at risk of subversion, “the risk of categories in action” (Ibid: 144-145). Vitally he argues that it is people’s “social interests and biographies” which often motivate such change, experienced by subjects as “the maximization of their personal satisfactions” (Ibid: 52). This point, that it is in seeking satisfaction of personal interests, and the complexities and contradictions therein, that culture change occurs, will comprise a major aspect of my overall argument regarding how my informants went about joking and gossiping with each other, and turn affected their cultures.

Comaroff and Comaroff (1992), in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, define culture as follows:

“*Culture always contains within it polyvalent contestable messages, images, and actions. In short it is a historically situated, historically unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action, signifiers at once material and symbolic, social and aesthetic… the field of signs and practices, in which human beings construct and represent themselves and others, and hence their societies and histories*.” (ibid. 27)

This definition is optimal in the light of this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, it reiterates the “historical” and “contestable” nature of social life, as was implied

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contradicted by discourses, emotions and lived practices which often seemed to speak a different story.

by Sahlins, and asserts the symbolic and material aspects of culture. This definition, in the light of the Comaroff's larger work, connects to ideas such as "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977 in Comaroff, 1985: 5), "ideology", "hegemony", "resistance", "identity", etc. (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 29; Comaroff, 1985 Comaroff and Comaroff, 2004: 190), and offers a means to examine the dynamics through which behaviours, meanings and relations become naturalized and contested, fixed and ambiguous in historically based systems of power (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). These are ideas that drive at the heart of my argument, and connect with larger theorizing on resistance, informal communication and organizational behaviour, as I will shortly show. Most importantly they include a sensitivity to the colonial encounter, and a questioning of the individual agent as separate from society:

"*If historical anthropology is to avoid recapitulating the eccentricities and ethnocentricities of the West, the individual and the event have everywhere to be treated as problematic*". (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 26)

The diversity of South African workers, on race, gender, sex, class, ethnic, age and other fronts demands a questioning of any essentialised idea of the self and society (Abdi, 1999; Barber, 2001; Dolby, 2001; JanMohammed and Lloyd, 1987; Kondo, 1990, 1997; Magubane, 2000, 1973, 1971; Marenin, 1989; Moahloli, 1997; Nuttal and Michael, 2000; Thornton, 2000, 1981; Spivak, 1988; van den Heuvel, 2008).

Chapter 2: The informal organisation, Goffman, gossip and humour:

Informal communication:

The idea of the ‘informal’ organization has been studied for well over fifty years (Fortado, 1994; Meyer and Rowan, 1977, citing Dalton, 1959, Downs, 1967), and has been connected with the Hawthorne Studies (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1943 in Kurland and Pelled, 2000) earlier in the twentieth century. The writings on this topic suggest that:

"*Unlike the formal organization, which appears in organization charts and reflects prescribed patterns for officially sanctioned messages, the informal organization consists of spontaneous, emergent patterns that result from individual's discretionary choices*”, [also called the] "*grapevine*." (Kurland and Pelled: 2000: 428)

These studies generally propose that official organizational structure and officially sanctioned behaviour are often a façade, a symbolic homage to larger social requisites (Clegg, 1977; Izraeli and Jick, 1986; Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Pfeffer, 1981; Shulman, 2007). One central argument in work on the topic is that of “official cultures”, “subcultures”, and “counter cultures” (Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines, 1991; Ogbor, 2000; Jordan, 2003; Martin and Siehl, 1983; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Wilson, 2001) as a means to explaining organizational dynamics. The concept here, in very generalized terms, is that we should see organizations as sets of subcultures, or alternatively as having a mainstream, official, culture and countercultures which speak back to this power. Van Maanen’s (1991, in Wilson 2001) work is a classic example of this work. His study showed how the employees at Disneyland in fact did not subscribe to the official party line of Disneyland’s

management, but instead formed a variety of subcultures, which viewed themselves as being distinct from the whole[16].

"*Often we find that if the principal ideal aims of an organization are to be achieved, then it will be necessary at times to by-pass momentarily other ideals of the organization, while maintaining the impression that these other ideals are still in force…*" (Goffman, 1959)

Focusing specifically, then, on the area of informal communications, by far the most influential theorist in this regard is the work of Erving Goffman (1952; 1959; 1961; 1977), with numerous works basing their arguments upon his propositions (Abrahams, 1970; Collinson, 1999, 2003; Fortado, 1994; Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Hallier and James, 2000; Handelman, 1973; Hatzakis and Searle, 2006; Izraeli and Jick, 1986; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Manning, 2000;Mechanic, 1962; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967; Westphal and Khanna, 2003), and specifically in relation to humour, joking and gossip (1959, 1961, 1977; Shulman, 2007; Collinson, 1994; Katovitch and Reese, 1993; Hodson, 1991; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995).

Probably the most important idea within Goffman's work is his perception of the self as a "social product" (Branaman, 1997: xivi). This has two main features: on the one hand he sees the self as a performance we put on in social situations, and two, that, as performers, we are constrained by the opinions, norms, "social rules" and roles that the social setting allows (ibid.)[17]. The constraints of those

[16] Another relevant work is Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines' (1991) study of a police department in which they found a variety of subcultures which officers used to legitimize and to gain political support for their behaviour. They associated with this, in attempts to hide gender and racial discrimination, with the idea of "mock bureaucracy" (ibid.: 189; Gouldner, 1954 in Clegg, 1997: 483), or organization as performance.

[17] "Self, then, is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them… the culture itself prescribing what sort of entity we must believe ourselves to be in order to have something to show through in this manner" (Goffman, 1974 in Branaman, 1997: li). This perception is useful as it provides a system of thinking about subjectivity and the self in a non-essentialised manner, which connects well with more post-structural theories of identity (e.g. Kondo, 1990; Collinson, 2003; McNay, 1992).

around us act as an "interactional *modus vivendi*", a "working consensus", (Goffman, 1959: 9, 10), in which we use a variety of strategies and compromises to create a situation that is to some degree acceptable to all present, or more precisely, which those present agree to in the light of current power dynamics, and in spite of the nuances of their individual interests, a framing "that they find at least temporarily acceptable" (Ibid.: 10). This dynamic is profoundly influenced by South African social politics, and, as will be shown in these findings, is a theoretical description of the actual terrain of compromises and small victories that embody the lived realities of daily life.

In the light of this sense of performance in identity claims and construction Goffman distinguishes between "front stage" and "backstage" in our social lives (1959). The concept being that in social dynamics one has those, an out-group, with whom one must maintain an image, and an in-group, or "team" with whom one is expected to let down one's guard, or with whom one does so for strategic purposes: the one is more informal and the other more formal (Ibid: 111). He offers this idea of backstage as a mode of speaking which is more intimate and more "familiar" than front-stage performances[18]. An important dynamic is that a backstage scenario is converted to a more formal front stage the moment an audience member arrives (Ibid: 69). Analytically, however, he suggests "that no claim is made that surreptitious communications are any more real than are the official communications with which they are inconsistent" (ibid: 149). This is very important regarding the project at hand in that numerous collaborators shared opinions of the 'real' dynamics, opinions gleaned from their informal networks, which we need to remember represent no more 'fact' than the versions put out in officially sanctioned discourse.

[18] This is a pivotal point in this work – consider Tepper's (1995) findings that in mentor relationships informal, 'backstage' intimacy has far more impact than formally created mentorships. In a country where young, previously disadvantaged workers are trying to gain access to previously established networks of power in organizations this is highly salient – what matters is how well people actually get on, over and above performed civility.

Shulman, in his book *From Hire to Liar: the Role of Deception in the Workplace* (2007), uses Goffman's idea of "secondary adjustments" (ibid.: 10) to propose that workplaces often require subordinates to create deceptions in order to maintain ordinary functioning, although Shulman asserts that these are usually justified by the performers in terms of the morally acceptable perceptions of business practices. This idea of a secondary adjustment "represents ways in which the individual stands apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him [sic] by the institution" (Goffman, 1961a in Branaman, 1997: lxi)[19]. In Goffman's later work, having articulated a clearer idea of the self (Collinson, 1999; Branaman, 1997), and particularly in his study *Asylums* (1961a in Branaman, 1997), Goffman explains how he discovered that patients in a mental institution, while derogated to a status level with very few, if any, esteem building roles available, would engage in secondary adjustments, small acts to show one's lack of commitment to the role at hand: "homely little histories, each in its own way a movement of liberty" (Goffman, 1961a in Branaman, 1997: lxi). With regards to secondary adjustments, we need to see the purpose of "double-talk" (Goffman, 1959: 170), innuendo, sarcasm, etcetera, which aid in this role distancing process while front of stage.

One can see then, that the distinction between formal and informal communication becomes blurred in social practice – informal/backstage styles can be called upon in formal situations, and informal situations can have formal elements: "activity in a concrete situation is always a compromise between the formal and informal styles" (Ibid: 11). The decision to research the 'informal' organisation is thus a necessary, but somewhat fictitious limit.

[19] Or, alternatively: "any set of habitual arrangements by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, to get around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be." (Goffman, 1961 in Shulman, 2007: 10)

A useful idea proposed by Goffman is that agents strategically withhold, express, or misrepresent information about themselves[20], their work and others for the maintenance of certain impressions[21] (Goffman, 1959, 1977; Shulman, 2007; Collinson, 1994; Katovitch and Reese, 1993; Gardner and Martinko, 1988), after all "that which we make knowable or acknowledge can always be used against us" (Katovitch and Reese, 1993: 395). With his idea of performance and this control of information, given off through social cues (Goffman, 1959) and talk, goes an “idealization”[22] of self (Branaman, 1997: lii) – the image we create having bearing on access to resources, opportunities and one’s sense of security (Goffman, 1983 in ibid.). Thus the style of clothing, and other such “artificial displays” (Gardner and Martinko, 1988: 331), or “sign-equipment” (Goffman, 1959: 32) act as social cues for a person’s wealth, status and personal opinions. This micropolitical dynamic will be examined in the section on gossip. Suffice to say the details of face to face interaction are where one frames how one expects one’s self and position to be treated (Goffman, 1959, 1977), and in this research proved to be a significant aspect of how identity and status were negotiated.

In relation to the above, an important area of discussion for Goffman is that of “frames” and “displays”, where frames act as "principles of organization which govern the subjective meaning we assign to social events” (Goffman, 1974 in Branaman, 1997: lxxvi), while displays provide “evidence of the actor's alignment in a gathering, the position he [sic] seems prepared to take up in what is about to happen in the social situation" (Goffman, 1979 in Branaman, 1997: lxxx). This is particularly important in informal situations in which the claims one can make about oneself are not as constrained (Ibid.). Goffman (1977; Giddens, 1984)

[20] Giddens points out the correspondence of theory between Goffman and Foucault (1980) in this: "both accord great importance to the socially and historically fluctuating lines between closure and disclosure, confinement and display" (1984: xxvi).
[21] Hodson (1991) gives an example of municipal workers who measure water levels in waste tanks approximating levels rather than actually measuring them, while management rather overlook these deviances because the costs of challenging them would be too high.
[22] When an agent is in the presence of others there is often reason "to mobilize his [sic] activity so that it will convey an impression that it is in his interests to convey." (Goffman, 1959: 4-5)

asserts that gender is a display we put on, and have thrust upon us, through the most subtle cues and signs[23] in every social situation.

In order to connect Goffman's concept of social practices with larger work on gossip, humour and resistance (e.g. Foucault, 1980, Collinson, 2002; Spivak, 1988; McNay, 1982), it is useful to look at Giddens (1979), who drew extensively on Goffman[24]:

"*The fixity of institutional forms does not exist in spite of, or outside, the encounters of day-to-day life but is implicated in those very encounters*" (Ibid.)

In this Giddens develops Goffman's view on tact, connecting it to "reflexive self monitoring" activities, demonstrated through body language, facial expressions, "controlled alertness", and the ability to "exhibit presence", broken by "situational improprieties" (Ibid.: 79), the control of which demonstrate one's agency, or *praxis*, and are essential in maintaining trust in social situations. Giddens connected this with Foucault's (1980) work on power and surveillance, which is a useful theoretical bridge to more post-structural theories on identity and resistance in organizational contexts.

In a similar vein, Collinson (1999) critiques Goffman, using Giddens (1987 in Ibid.), suggesting that on matters such as impression management Goffman's view of the process of information revelation, retention and misrepresentation, or "information game" (Ibid.: 593), does not take into account power asymmetries, and suggests that employees are more likely to engage in impression management when subjugated and under surveillance. He vitally comments that this is a lack that Foucault (1977) has explored in depth, while Mumby (2005)

[23] "Here let me restate the notion that one of the most deeply seated traits of man [sic], it is felt, is gender; femininity and masculinity are in a sense the prototypes of essential expression - something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual." (Goffman, 1977: 222)

[24] Noting his critique, using Gouldner: "The social world Goffman portrays is not simply highly culturally specific but deals only with the transient, not with enduring institutional forms that mould people's lives" (Gouldner, 1971 in Giddens, 1984: 69).

points out Foucaultian studies' shortage of focus on everyday dynamics. Collinson (1999) suggests that taking both theorists into account, as this project will endeavour to do, is a suitable area for analysis.

Referring to Goffman in particular, it is interesting to note, therefore, that:

"*The late modernists* [i.e. Goffman] *provided a foundation for a postmodern perspective by describing how selves cope in situations that are not altogether favorable or agreeable to their interests*…" (Katovitch and Reese, 1993: 393)

The impetus for this research will be strongly fuelled by the strength of the power/knowledge and surveillance perceptions of Foucault (1977, 1980) in conjunction with the face to face 'pragmatism' of Goffman[25].

Gossip:

Goffman saw gossip as "among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we are called upon to analyze"[26] (Goffman, 1963 in Noon and Delbridge, 1993: 23). Perhaps the place to start is with definitions: what is gossip? Kurland and Pelled (2000: 429) point out that "Gossip traditionally has been defined as idle chatter, chitchat, or the evil tongue." This idea of "idle talk" seems to catch a sense of it – in fact Heidegger's '*gerede*'[27] translates into exactly this term (Spacks, 1982: 22). Publicly it is seen as something one is expected to hide – an immoral and destructive activity: "Few gossip without guilt, few defend without ambivalence" (Spacks, 1982: 21).

[25] Katovitch and Reese go on to suggest the use of Goffman, who, in their eyes, "can be on the cutting edge of the post modern scene by combining a tradition of pragmatic enquiry with emergent postmodern criticism..." (Katovitch and Reese, 1993: 405)

[26] In fact Gluckman (1963: 314) points out that the word "*anthropologos*", as used by Aristotle, stood for "scandalmonger" more than it did for "student of man [sic]"

[27] Spacks (1982: 22) points out that for philosophers of the likes of Kiergaard and Heidegger "Gossip, as they describe it, opposes "real talk", concerns the superficial and external, involves trivia, implies no struggle for understanding. Anyone can do it. It represents an obstacle rather than a means to communication... From their assumptions stem their conclusions: gossip emerges from minds not seriously engaged, from inferior states of culture."

Gossip, above all then, is a type of talk loaded with morality (Abrahams, 1970; Branaman, 1997; Gluckman, 1963; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967; Spacks, 1982; Yerkovitch, 1977), and carries a judgement (Paine, 1967; Tucker, 1993). Noon and Delbridge's (1993) highly regarded definition is that gossip is "the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social setting" (Noon and Delbridge's, 1993: 25). They further cite Rosnow (1977 in ibid: 26) that gossip serves the purposes: "information, influence and entertainment."

The groundbreaking article in this area was Gluckman's[28] (1963) *Gossip and Scandal* (e.g. in Abrahams, 1970; Handelman, 1973; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967), in which he argues for a view of gossip as a cohesive element of society, defining group membership both in moral norms and in out-group exclusion and in-group inclusion through what one does not know:

"*Gossip and even scandal unite a group within a larger society, or against another group, in several ways. Firstly, all groups try to thrust their roots into the past; scandal by creating a past history for the members in relation to one another, into which new-comers have to be inducted if they are to be full members, achieves this; Secondly, no groups are undifferentiated*." (Gluckman, 1963: 313)

The above is highly relevant in relation to this research, and has implications regarding hierarchy. Indeed, it is through informal communications that both Goffman and Gluckman saw the exclusivity of high status groups being maintained[29] – Goffman (1959) asserting that managers have more investment in maintaining this front-back duality, and more to loose if their cover is blown. As

[28] Who defined gossip as: "the practice of talking about other people's business as a technique for maintaining community control through the elucidation of a public morality" (Gluckman, 1963 in Abrahams, 1970: 290).
[29] Consider this dynamic in informal gatherings (Westphal and Khanna, 2003), corporate holidays, and golf (Kottis, 1993) which are often in group sites of exclusivity, frequently with a gender component (ibid.).

will be seen, more senior people in this research lived up to this – they hid their gossip far more cautiously.

Gluckman (1963) noted that gossip's scandalous component tends to increase with group exclusivity, but that if a person scandalizes too much public sentiment will turn against them. The primary critique of his work[30] was his excessive focus on the cohesive aspect of gossip – he did not give enough weight to the potential for gossip to assist social change (Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967). However, Gluckman did assert the place of gossip as a form of oral social memory and history, as has been proposed by the likes of Sahlins (1985), Spivak (1988), Noon and Delbridge (1993), Said (1988) and Spacks (1992).

What I am attempting to show here, based on earlier and more recent theorizing, is that gossip needs to be examined in the light of social "encounters" (Goffman, 1961 in Handelman, 1973: 210), and the rules, norms, tactics, power dynamics, and identities therein, and in terms of a presentation of self through information gathered and offered in social settings (and a justification of one's self and one's actions), and in turn in relation to a theory of social change.

In any social situation it has been shown above that people function to some degree as performers, and simultaneously as audiences for the performances of others (Goffman, 1959). This brings up the topic of interests[31] (Paine, 1967; Handelman, 1973; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Spacks, 1982; Yerkovitch, 1977) in how the socially held definition of the situation will be maintained (Goffman, 1959, Shulman, 2007), in how our identities will be perceived within that (Goffman, 1959; Handelman, 1973; Yerkovitch, 1977; Abrahams, 1970; Eder and Enke, 1991; Spivak, 1988), in what information is conveyed to whom (Goffman,

[30] While Gluckman (1963) did suggest that without social cohesion gossip can cause further social fragmentation, this critique is in line with other critiques of him and the Manchester school (Macmillan, 1995; Magubane, 2000; Nash, 1975), and represent a historical shift in anthropology's understanding of structure, conflict and change.
[31] The idea of "interests" has political implications (Zhao, 1993), and needs to be unpacked in this light. This analysis will follow later.

1959; Handelman, 1973; Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967; Shulman, 2007; Spacks, 1982; Yerkovitch, 1977), and in what "modes of accomplishment" (Handelman, 1973: 215), or styles of communication are used.

"*In my view, a discussion of the values of gossipers is best related to what we can find out about their self-interests; I would hypothesise that gossipers also have rival interests; that they gossip, and also regulate their gossip, to forward and protect their individual interests... to explain gossip as purposive behaviour in terms of communication and individual interests affords, I believe, greater sociological penetration*." (Paine, 1967: 280-282)[32]

However, in the light of interests and similar to Goffman's (1959: 10) "working consensus", Spacks (1982) suggests that we need to understand a gossiper's objectives in terms of the larger social situation, and not merely that of the individual[33], while Yerkovitch (1977: 196) adds that within a "moral context" people will necessarily demonstrate ideals that suit "the common interests and concerns".

It is also important to realize that gossip involves some degree of risk – proposed selves, or information, may be rejected, challenged or reframed by others (Goffman, 1967 in Branaman, 1997; Paine, 1967). In organizations this is an essential point, as senior people have more access to the power and resources to ensure that their version of a situation will stand (Scott, 1985; Izraeli and Jick, 1986; Pfeffer, 1981; Noon, 2001). Also, the act of gossiping itself can lead to negative perceptions – gossiping as an amoral act (Yerkovitch, 1977; Spacks,

[32] Note how this view differs from that proposed by Gluckman (1963: 314), who suggested that "gossip and scandal will not contribute to the cohesion of a grouping of persons, unless these persons are united by a sense of community which is based on the fairly successful pursuit of common objectives...". That a group will maintain some degree of performed agreement in spite of differing interests internally is an important turn in understanding.

[33] See how this is vital in our later post-structural analysis: ""If historical anthropology is to avoid recapitulating the eccentricities and ethnocentricities of the West, the individual and the event have everywhere to be treated as problematic" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 26).

1982), as above, putting one at risk of being labelled a “trouble maker” (Yerkovitch, 1977: 195), and the threat that one might become the gossip’s next target, or have one’s self gossiped about (Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Eder and Enke, 1991). In fact an interesting point in organizations is that many companies are outright against gossip (Kurland and Pelled, 2000) – as my research will show, listening itself has political and risk implications. Kurland and Pelled (2000) convincingly connect gossip with power in this regard, arguing that gossiping increases one’s “referent” power, in that one becomes a source of information, (having “network centrality” (Ibid.: 432)), but might decrease one’s credibility if it becomes overly slanderous – it all depends on the “gossiper-recipient relationship quality” (Ibid.: 434). In relation to this, when one engages in a gossip encounter one, by default or strategically, reveals alliances and levels of intimacy:

"*Gossip alliances also sometimes bear guilt because they reflect hierarchies of intimacy. By choices of who one will gossip about, whom one will gossip with, one registers often uncomfortable discriminations among people. Gossip says that we like some people better than others, we take some more seriously than others. Even the declaration of values in gossip can generate discomfort, for we may discover in intimate interchange the divergence between what we profess and what we believe*." (Spacks, 1982: 35)

In this research, claims of diversity and tolerance were often exposed by the above alliances – people’s actual and claimed intimacies were not always aligned. This again has implications for post-structuralism’s arguments around the insecurity of self that late capitalism engenders (Mumby, 2005), as will be shown. Handelman importantly points out that the less the risk, the easier it is to gossip, which explains the tendency for smoke rooms (Goffman, 1969), toilets (Collinson, 1994), corridors, and so forth to be places of informal discussion, and are where much of this research took place.

As well as its process of moral assertion of group norms, gossip's system of "information storage and retrieval" (Roberts, 1964 in Paine, 1967: 279) has very practical implications for workplace analysis. Employees at all levels use such informal communications to assess and compare their workplace conditions, managers, and the "effort bargain" (Hodson, 1991: 68; Shulman, 2007). Fortado (1994: 261) points out that managers frequently use such strategies to assess the 'real' interests of their employees, with the informality of "random meetings in halls or on the way out the door" inciting a supposedly more "off the record", "spontaneous", and "unrehearsed" response[34].

Finally, with the space constrictions that such a work allows, in order to analyse the data gathered in the two banks researched here we need to look at the event of gossip itself:

"*Participants in any gathering must take up some sort of microecological position relative to one another, and these positions will provide ready metaphors for social distance and relatedness, just as they will provide sign vehicles for conveying relative rank. More important, the management of talk will itself make available a swarm of events useable as signs. Who is brought or brings himself* [sic] *into the immediate orbit of another; who initiates talk, who is selected as the addressed recipient, who self-selects in talk turn-taking, who establishes and changes topics, whose statements are given attention and weight, and so forth*." (Goffman, 1977: 207)

Goffman's point is that such microsocial details are controlled and negotiated through contextually relevant rules relating to power, status and identity. Consider how Goffman uses the above to argue that it is within such social interactions that gender is again and again referenced, which carries weight in

[34] Consider in the light of Goffman's (1959) assertions that backstage talk is no less real or performed than front stage talk, that there is an argument to made that the perception of authenticity that organizational members seem to give to such 'off the cuff' interactions offers fertile ground for more believable, 'sincere' performances and manipulations.

the light of, for example, Judith Butler's (1994 in McNay, 2000; Butler, 1995) post-structuralist feminist assertion of the citation, or interpellation, of race and gender in social interaction as central to the construction of such identities. In practical terms this means that how people treated each other microsocially demonstrated fat larger aspects of South African culture and history - the massive impact of minute actions.

Humour, joking and laughter:

Humour is widely proposed as a coping strategy for dealing with stress (Caverley, 2005; Collinson, 2003; Coombs and Goldman, 1973; Iwasaki and Mactavish, 2005; Yarwood, 1995), while the enjoyment of humour (Holmes and Marra, 2002) can be related to a larger academic interest in pleasure in the workplace (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). In business writing it is has been seen, since the Hawthorne studies, as an important way of critiquing the status quo (Ibid: 740). This again brings us back to theories on resistance (ibid.). However, in order to proceed we need to examine the works that have built up to our current position.

Robert Provine points out that Hobbes (1650/1999 in Provine, 2001:14) saw laughter as "sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly". Provine argues that fundamentally laughter is a social response, arising more from social dynamics than from joking specifically[35]. In this light, perhaps the most significant early work, anthropologically, is Radcliffe-Brown's analysis of the "joking relationship" (1965 in Apte, 1985: 45; Yarwood, 1995), which he proposed was a "peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism… the relationship is one of permitted disrespect" (1965 in Collinson, 2002: 271). Radcliffe-Brown examined the dynamics of this ambivalent association in family settings in African contexts (Apte, 1985), suggesting that it functions as a means

[35] Fascinatingly he points out that this is why they introduced laugh tracks into television comedies during the 1950s – we laugh more when we hear or see laughter.

to manage social tensions, particularly pertaining to individuals and relatives with differing interests required to interact in a social setting. His views are useful in being based upon research from outside of a specifically western perspective[36] (Collinson, 2002), although the functionalist perspective from which he wrote has been critiqued (Rodrigues and Collinson, 2002). As well as his lack of consideration for motivation in joking relationships (Kennedy, 1970 in Collinson, 2002)[37], Radcliffe-Brown has been critiqued from within the functionalist framework for lack of clarity regarding his ideas of friendship and kinship in joking (Apte, 1985). Certainly, however, the idea of a joking relationship and the sense that one has a more friendly connection with people with whom one jokes is very useful here.

Humour thus reinforces social relationships, while simultaneously confirming power relations between agents (Holmes and Marra, 2002); with varying levels of power symmetry in this regard (Yarwood, 1995). The pleasure aspect of humour should not be overlooked – laughing with one's colleagues increases solidarity and friendship (Holmes and Marra, 2002), lessens the effects of boredom (Yarwood, 1995), and "lubricates" official organizational social environments: "Equally, it may be a means of ingratiating self (Collinson, 1992) or a medium through which employees introduce meanings, symbols and pleasure into their subjective workplace experiences with no thought of control or resistance" (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995: 744). Handelman (1973) associates joking with more symmetrical friendship relationships, while Abrahams (1970: 299) suggests

[36] Two points to note in this regard – Gluckman's "rituals of rebellion" (1963) is another important African and anthropological perspective on humour (Apte, 1985) in more localized contexts, in which he describes the Swazi *incwala* ceremony, part of which includes a mockery and ridicule of the king. He explains the social process in terms of a cathartic and tension filled reaffirmation of social unity. The other point regarding Western versus Africanist perspectives (if such a comparison makes any sense considering the creolized sociocultural situation of current South Africa (Nuttal and Michael, 2000)) with regard to humour is that: "Joking relations in contemporary, western organizations are typically not restricted to specific partners (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) and are frequently characterized by much more aggressive teasing (Collinson, 1992)" (Collinson, 2002: 272).

[37] Kennedy (1970 in Collinson, 1992: 272) argued that people joke for "pleasure, play and amusement", as opposed to social control, as contended by Radcliffe-Brown.

that within friendship groups one can be more “gregarious”, being playfully rude as a sign of closeness.

Goffman (1959) associated humour, profanity, the use of first names, smoking, and sexually related remarks with a backstage environment, but pointed out the strategic use of sarcasm and joking to reframe one’s identity and show distance from a failing role or social mishap (1959; 1961; 1977), and as a means by which others help one to save face in such circumstances (1977). A key point then is that humour enables one to express distance from a situation, role, identity or group without excessively disrupting the position of others – a socially legitimate form of dissent (Collinson, 2002; Goffman, 1959; Handelman, 1973; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Hodgson, 2005)[38].

“*the shifting alignments of a team are reflected in the ways they humorously parody the behaviours or subvert the values of other groups within and outside the organization*” (Holmes and Marra, 2002).

It has therefore been proposed that humour can be seen as a form of identity work, as with gossip, a point which post-structuralists and post-structural feminists have attached to “cynicism, alienation and disenchantment” in late capitalism, and in line with postmodernism’s association with irony and ambiguity (Collinson, 2003: 270; Kondo, 1990; McNay, 1992). Notable works here are Collinson’s study of masculinity on a shop floor (1988, 1992 in Mumby, 2005), in which he found that humour confirmed worker’s identities, but simultaneously undermined any chance at actually resisting management (demonstrating the social control of group membership, values and norms, and resistance within this); and Dorinne Kondo’s (1990 in Collinson, 2002) work in which she

[38] Hodgson relates this to Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993, 1995 in Hodgson, 2005: 60-62) ‘performativity’ in which “humour and distancing constitute action in itself”, as a resistance of “categorization and classification”. In line with this, Holmes and Marra’s (2002) study of organizational meetings in New Zealand found that 40% of the humour was subversive in this nature.

demonstrates how workers in a small Japanese sweet factory constructed gendered selves through humour.

Humour is thus a type of frame (Goffman, 1977), which is subject to risks – one needs the audience's "licence to joke" (Handelman, 1972: 485), which are accompanied by societal rules as to how joking should proceed, who is entitled to participate, and what topics are permissible (Handelman, 1972). When someone initiates a joking frame they are at risk, on the one hand because someone may reframe one's joke in another light[39] (ibid.), or even having one's attempt at humour rejected for a more serious frame, which seemed to be a common trend in serious South African banking. Take, for example Collinson's research (1992b in Collinson, 1994) in a British vehicle component manufacturer, where the staff rejected attempts by the new American management team to create a more personalized approach with workers, framing it as being part of a "Yankee plot" (ibid.). In this vein, see how humour has been associated strongly with the reification of masculine identity[40] and male hegemony (Collinson, 2002; Provine, 2001), which will be explored thoroughly in my findings, and that humour is often a tool for management control (Fortado, 1994; Closer, 1959 and Goffman, 1961 in Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995), particularly in the culture driven management styles of western late capitalist workplaces[41]. Following the above, the analysis of the humour found in the two banks examined here will vitally need to be conscious of how humour is offered and received with regards to South African identities, as far as race, gender, class, ethnicity and age dimensions and power relations therein.

[39] Consider the relevance of this to South African cultural and racial dynamics – being framed as a racist, or stereotyped through humour frames.
[40] "'Having a sense of humour' is also an important criterion on which many men assess one another (Collinson, 1992)."
[41] A good demonstration of this is Deal and Kennedy's (2000 in Collinson, 2002: 278) assertion that managers promoting and using humour and fun can "revitalize as fear-bound and overly tense workforce". Collinson points out and critiques the power asymmetries that accompany managers joking with employees.

We also need to note the historical western, middle class cultural attitudes towards humour – consider Aristotle's opinion: "Those who go into excess in making fun appear to be buffoons and vulgar" (1941 in Provine, 2001: 14). A similar sentiment is similarly demonstrated in upper class western European attitudes to laughter in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Thomas, 1977 in Collinson, 2002)[42], and again in what Weber (1930 in Collinson, 2002: 276) termed the "Protestant work ethic". Religion and capitalism created an environment in the early and mid twentieth century which, for example, led the Ford Motor Company's management to view "laughter as a disciplinary offence" (Beynon, 1980 in Collinson, 2002: 276).

Finally we need to recognize the theoretical and ontological similarities between humour and gossip, particularly in humour's subversive role, which is in line with that ascribed to gossip (Douglas, 1993 in Noon and Delbridge, 1993: 32).

Goffman implies a similar point when he states that:

"*There seems to be no grouping which does not have a ready supply of these games, reveries, and cautionary tales, to be used as a source of humour, a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction for inducing individuals to be modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations*." (Goffman, 1959: 12)

Handelman (1977: 215) uses the term "modes of accomplishment" to consider how "rhetoric, sarcasm, banter, wit" and so forth are various styles people use to offer and receive gossip. This, as with gossip, can be related to a subaltern history (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992) of the workplace: the "poetic practice" of ordinary people "who [speak] of their history with their bodies and their homes, in their puns, jokes and irreverence's" (Peel, 1995: 586).

[42] Collinson (2002) notes that this sentiment had a counter response of mirth and parody against the puritanical controls, which implies something about attempts to control humour in (Western?) society.

Chapter 3: Marxism, post-structuralism, resistance and identity:

While Goffman did suggest the connection between identity, roles, displays and the frames available in any social setting as representative and connected to larger, pre-existing societal constraints (1971, 1974 in Branaman, 1997; 1959), these dynamics need to be connected more convincingly with a theory of power, agency and structure (Giddens, 1984; Collinson, 1999), and specifically within a capitalist organizational context.

Both Durkheim and Weber were concerned by the tension between capitalist drive for profit and morality (Hochschild, 2007), while Weber's work on bureaucracy has been influential on the theorists I will utilize later (Clegg, 1997; Giddens, 1984; Mechanic, 1962), and Durkheim's (1984) ideas around the "division of labour", the manner in which organizations give meaning (Collinson, 2003), and *anomie* – the conflict and destructive individualism that a specialized, hierarchical form of organization creates – was an important development in organizational theorising. Indeed, Durkheim's proposal that capitalism depends on community and social relationships, but in turn destroys that solidarity in the name of self-interest, is highly relevant in the light of our focus on informal organizations (Hochschild, 2007; Marcus, 1998).

Marxism and Labour Process Theory:

Marx saw power as lying in the control over the means of production, while Weber placed power in the knowledge of the operations of production (Clegg, 1977). This is an important difference, as, for example, it leads Weber to assert that bureaucrats have power over politicians through this knowledge (Mechanic, 1962) – they have been around longer and understand the system better (or, as this research found, middle managers were often to CEOs what the bureaucrats were to politicians). Giddens (1984) points out the convergence of views between Marx and Weber with regards to the reflexive self control that capitalist

bureaucracies require. This, theoretically, has been an essential component of Foucault's (1980) work on surveillance.

The Freudian idea of 'resistance' was apparently taken up by Marx, who saw resistance as ineffective and the proletariat as weak (Nord and Jermier, 1984). Giddens (1984) gives credence to Marx's assertion that labour must participate in the capitalist system to survive, in spite of the alienation from society and themselves that Marx saw this creating (Collinson, 2003). However, in Poststructuralist and feminist theory these views have been widely critiqued, in part because of Marxism's reduction of social politics to a simple class based struggle, ignoring gender, ethnicity, race, sex, age and so forth (Collinson, 2005b; Knights and Wilmott, 1989; Larrain, 1996; Thomas and Davies, 2005). As Spivak (1988) argues, we cannot necessarily reduce the experience of colonized others to a simple class based analysis, a particularly pertinent point in the South African context. Cockburn's (1983) study demonstrates this - in her case gender and masculinity were often more salient than class: "he is small in relation to capital, he is big in relation to his home and wife" (Cockburn, 1983 in Knights and Wilmott, 1989: 548).

Importantly for this study, the Marxist concept of "false consciousness" (Ogbor, 2000; Scott, 1985) is seen as problematic (Larrain, 2996; Nord and Jermier), 1994), in that it "implies a derogation of the lay actor by regarding actors as 'cultural dopes' with no worthwhile understanding of their surroundings" (McNay, 1992: 69)[43]. Bourdieu (1977) similarly suggests that it is better to see people's 'interests' (which are the issue in question in relation to false consciousness and whose ideology and desires will prevail (in Marxian terms)) as being a negotiated and partly conscious dynamic affected in part by the field around them, partly by

[43] "To reject 'false consciousness' is to take a large step towards abandoning the politics of Enlightenment modernism. For it means rejecting the view that personal autonomy is to be reached by way of a progressive transcendence of earlier, less adequate cognitive structures." (Lovibond, 1989 in Larrain, 1996: 63)

their own desires, and all of this influenced by their habitus, or partly congealed past experiences.

Foucault (1980), in particular, rejected such large globalizing versions of class based power and Marxian “economic functionality” (Foucault, 1980: 88), suggesting that power is more dispersed than in the progress driven Enlightenment version thereof offered by Marx (Foucault, 1972; Zhao, 1993). Ideology, in Marxist terms, was seen as implying a more real ‘truth’, which Foucault (ibid.), Poststructuralist (Thornton, 2000; Zhao, 1993), and Culture Studies (Hall, 1983 in Larrain, 1996) writers find highly problematic.

In terms of organizations and resistance, we should acknowlege Labour Process Theory[44], and notably Braverman’s neo-Marxist work *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism* (1974), which was highly influential, but was critiqued for creating a romanticized view of resistance, overly influenced by Enlightenment humanism (Knights and Wilmott, 1989), and for portraying workers as overly passive. Giddens protests in response: “the most seemingly ‘powerless’ individuals are able to mobilize resources whereby they carve out ‘spaces of control’” (1982 in Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 183)[45]. The above mentioned Burawoy (1979) and Cockburn (1983), also associated with this, are cited frequently (e.g. Fortado, 1994; Fournier, 1999; Hodson, 1991; Mumby, 2005), and were highly instrumental in developing a theory of subjectivity into the Marxian paradigm (Collinson, 1994; Knights and Wilmott, 1989), in response to this lack in Braverman (Collinson, 1994). Mumby (2005: 26) also suggests that they provided a means by which critical theorists could examine “extensively how employee identities are constructed in ways that reproduce the managerially

[44] Particularly popular during the 1970s (McNay, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005) and foregrounding current thinking on resistance (Collinson, 1994; Collinson, 2005a; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Prasad and Prasad, 2000).

[45] Interestingly Knights and Vurdubakis (1994: 183) further critique Giddens’ statement above, which incidentally mirrors Gidden’s critique of Foucault, for creating a grand theory of power, where people, by virtue of their humanity, have power, and point out that seeing people as "knowledgeable human agents" in all contexts ignores that different spaces require different knowledge’s and types of relationships – another ahistorical depiction of power and resistance.

defined organizational culture and ideology". A central theme in this is the manner in which managerial control is resisted – particularly in contradictory circumstances where employees are treated as both valuable and disposable (Collinson, 2005a). Part of this conception was valuable work in relation to the way power produces "truth-effects" – people take part in the production of truth and of power relations (Knights and Wilmott, 1989: 541). Certainly, in these research sites the practices by which people maintained a realm of acceptable opinion, through specific forms of economic and social rationality, showed in intimate detail the ways in which lines of discrimination are created and reinforced in South African business.

However, these neo-Marxist works are critiqued for the overemphasis on class, as above, as well as the binary view they offered of resistance (Mumby 2005; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994), in which one either consents or resists, without an exploration of the actual complexity in localized practices (Fournier, 1999)[46], creating a totalizing, global and decontextualised grand theory thereof (Collinson, 2005b; Thomas and Davies, 2005):

"*the focus of critical research should be on neither the bow (an ostensible act of obeisance to power) not the fart (a covert act of resistance to power) but rather on the ways in which these intersect in the moment to moment to produce complex and often contradictory dynamics of control and resistance*." (Mumby, 2005: 21)

A particular problem, therefore, was these theorists' overemphasis of the effects of power – focusing on "asymmetrical power relations" and regarding employees as "passive, unquestioning and malleable" (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995:

[46] "much of this research fails to adequately theorize the possibilities of human agency at the level of everyday organizing. Gidden's (1979) characterization of agency as the ability to "act otherwise" is frequently absent from these studies." (Mumby, 2005: 27-28)

742)[47]. These studies tended to see "manufactured consent" in which resistance is "outflanked" (Collinson, 1994: 26), confirming the hierarchy, as demonstrated by Burawoy's concept of "making out"[48] (1979 in Mumby, 2005: 26). In relation to the focus on class, in which schisms in the ideology of the bourgeoisie are ignored in Marxist thought (Hall, 1988 in Larrain, 1996), Labour Process Theory has vitally been chastised for ignoring the degree to which professionals and managers are too constrained, with an excessive focus in research on blue collar workers (Hodgson, 2005; Thomas and Davies, 2005). This will prove an essential element of the analysis here – the lines between labour and capital, manager and employee, and so forth were invariably complicated by the daily truths of South African workplace politics.

Michel Foucault:

Foucault's (1972, 1977, 1980) works regarding domination, power, resistance, truth, knowledge, surveillance and subjectivity, have instigated a plethora of theorizing and discussion around the topics of identity, agency and domination, and are an extremely useful means to critique systems of control from 'outside' (or less within?) of the enlightenment paradigm.

In order to understand Foucault, it would perhaps be best to start by examining his ideas around power, and their connection to matters such as knowledge, truth, surveillance and resistance. Most importantly Foucault offered a historical means to examine power and subjectivity outside of the *telos* of the humanist/Enlightenment framework (Hodgson, 2005; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; McNay, 1992; Spivak, 1988; Zhao, 1993): "'Power' he argues is the name given to a certain coherency of social relations which in turn makes possible the construction of a 'grid of intelligibility' of the social order... 'it is the name one

[47] Collinson makes an important point in this regard, suggesting that while some critical theorists view workers as misinformed and ignorant (e.g. Clegg, 1989 in Collinson, 1994), they do have knowledge and an ability to use that knowledge to their advantage. This will be demonstrated thoroughly in the research data to follow.

[48] Burawoy was suggesting that the employees in the organization he studied would engage in practices that helped them to establish a sense of self and accomplishment, but ultimately just reconfirmed the hierarchy (1979 in Mumby, 2005).

attributes to a complex strategical relationship in a particular society'" (1981 in Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 172).

In seeing power as operating in circulation through a "net-like organization" (1980: 98), Foucault suggests that people are the "vehicles of power, not the points of application"[49] (Ibid: 98). This power is fundamentally connected to knowledge; one must have knowledge to use power: having knowledge cannot be without power (Ibid.). Power for Foucault, then, also dictates what is considered to be truth in any social field, and in doing so "delineates the thinkable" (Foucault, 1978 in Fournier, 1999: 282).

With regards to rules and laws versus discourses of truth and normalizing judgment, Foucault (1980: 103-106) importantly explains the shift from law to protect the body of the sovereign king, to "ideology of right", by which we protect the "social body", sovereign law in a modern context. The distinction between law and 'norms' therefore is that norms involve a moral homogenization of self, whilst laws merely stipulate what cannot be done (ibid; Foucault, 1977). Therefore, in this study it will be important to see the way people apply laws strategically: laws as tactics (Foucault, 1980; Gordon, 1995).

Essential to this, in terms of the micropolitical process of power, is Foucault's idea of surveillance (Collinson, 1999, 2003; Foucault, 1977; Foucault 1982 in Knights and Wilmott, 1989), developed through his discussion of the panopticon (Foucault, 1980), and seen as a "historical transformation" from the above "relations of sovereignty" (Foucault, 1977: 208) to a disciplinary "generalized surveillance" in a "disciplinary society" (ibid.: 209). He thus asserts that:

[49] Gossip/rumour has many similarities, then, to Foucault's "relationships of power": "Rumour evokes comradeship because it belongs to every 'reader' or 'transmitter'. No one is its origin or source. Thus rumour is not error but primordially (originally) errant, always in circulation with no assignable source. This illegitimacy makes it accessible to insurgency" (Spivak, 1988: 23)

"*although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally…. supervisors perpetually supervised… And, although it is true that its pyramidal organization gives it a 'head', it is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field*."

Thus, while one can argue, as Foucault did (1980), that surveillance to some degree protects the interests of the bourgeoisie, they themselves are subject to its discipline (ibid.). This "subjugation" is a "self-*disciplining subjectivity* [italics original]" which is "tied to [a person's] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1982 in Knights and Wilmott, 1989: 550). Thus discipline through surveillance in self-reflexivity and in society is profoundly normalizing (Collinson, 2003; Foucault, 1977, 1980): power producing truth, which in turn has impact upon agents' individuality and identity (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). As Foucault (1977: 137) suggests, the control is "retail", "individually" disciplining the body by "exercising on it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body". Indeed, in line with the microecological approach to face to face talk offered by Goffman, who was controlled by such norms and who was able to break them (and at what costs) will prove to be essential to this analysis. Power, culture and identity are not merely theoretical constructs – they are the actual arena of social interaction.

In line with this control of the body, we should note Foucault's (ibid: 143) "art of distributions", in which "Particular places were defined to correspond not only to the need to supervise, to break dangerous communications, but also to create a useful space". The work spaces studied here all had an open plan style, which while inviting communication in terms of access, might be argued to increase "visibility" (Ibid.: 200) – "to break dangerous communications". As Pfeffer observes (1981: 43), the open plan is the opposite of how (US) corporate culture

actually works: "its symbol of equality is inconsistent with the decision-making style and hierarchical structure..."[50].

"*there are no relations of power without resistances: the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised*..." (Foucault, 1984 in Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 176)

Imperatively, Foucault offered a view that moved thinking beyond the binary view of power/resistance (Collinson, 2005a; Foucault, 1980; Gordon, 1980; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), connecting power with freedom, and seeing resistance as using precisely the same apparatuses as those engaged by power.

Consider, then, the emphasis placed by Foucault, on subaltern forms of knowledge such as the opinions and gossip offered by the bank employees here:

"*a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity... it is through the re-appearance of… these local popular knowledges… that criticism performs its work… they are concerned with a historical knowledge of struggles*." (Foucault, 1980: 82-83)

As Spivak (1988) has suggested, this is vital, in that it connects directly to the information and "games of truth" (Foucault, 1985a in McNay, 1992: 50) of 'the grapevine', gossip, rumour and humour, and places the information gathered in

[50] Hodgson (2005) observes the trouble with this in relation to interviews. In a cubicle situation everyone around can hear, which both limits privacy and increases the chances that the interviewee will perform as if in front stage, in terms of Goffman (1959). Certainly this was a difficulty in conducting this research. Similarly, one can argue that this more 'open plan' style of office is an attempt to humanize the workplace, in terms of corporate culturalism's drive towards equality, but in turn creates an "unintended consequence" (Giddens, 1994) in creating a greater visibility/surveillance, and subsequently more control.

this research within the post-structuralist and feminist theoretical frame[51]. As we will see, the microecological claims of status and legitimacy described by Goffman proved to be integral elements of how this above subaltern knowledge offered by the banking employees I spoke with could gain influence in these networks of power.

Perhaps the most driven critique of Foucault, over and above being labelled a "crypto neo-conservative" (Knights and Verdubakis, 1994: 186), and criticized by Feminists for being "nihilistic, pessimistic and politically inadequate.... [offering an] androcentric analysis, failing to address his own partial, situated and gendered knowledge" (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 735)[52], is his overemphasis of the effects of power to create "docile bodies" (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; McNay, 1992, 2000), with insufficient agency (Giddens, 1984) and within this an inadequate conception of the relation between the individual and structure (McNay, 1992).

In terms of this "missing subject" (Hodgson, 2005: 59) in his work, Foucault later developed a theory of the "arts of existence" (McNay, 1992: 52), "technologies of the self" by which individuals create and fashion their identities to "attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality" (Foucault, 1978 in Fournier, 1999: 303; McNay, 1992), whilst still offering an historically based de-essentialised view of identity, but demonstrating the costs that this creation and lack of certainty in self formation entails (Hodgson, 2005; McNay, 1992). Thus, we need to realize in this that Foucault, particularly in this later work did not see power as entirely negative, indeed it is through power and the force of normalization and normalizing discourses that people achieve symbolic and

[51] "Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today." (Foucault, 1980: 83)

[52] While Foucault's seems to have underestimated and undervalued feminism, which he considered to be a part of humanism (although he did recognize its place as an alternative, "subjugated knowledge") (Knights and Kertfoot, 2004: 349), feminist authors have certainly adapted his ideas on power, resistance and these "technologies of the self" to a more nuanced and gender sensitive framework (e.g. McNay, 2000; Kondo, 1990, etc.).

material validation and pleasure in who they are (Collinson, 2003; Foucault, 1980; Fournier, 1999; Giddens, 1984). It is in this view of identity and resistance that much of the valuable work on resistance lies (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Kondo, 1990, 1997; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995).

"*An understanding of culture at the beginning of the new millennium emphasizes its creative power as much as its coercive power*." (Thornton, 2000: 43)

Post-structural feminism and resistance:

Notable anthropological writings on resistance include the likes of David Collinson's (1999; 2002; 2004) works on humour, performance and resistance; Dorinne Kondo's (1991) highly acclaimed (Collinson, 1994; Hodgson, 2005; Rosenberger, 1991) *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* and James Scott's (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, which has been particularly significant in offering a means to understand "routine resistance" (Scott, 1984 in Prasad and Prasad, 2000: 316), although not without critique (Kondo, 1991)[53].

Mumby (2005) points out the change in theorizing from Labour Process Theory, to Foucault and Foucaultian works, to the more recent poststructural theory, strongly influenced by feminist ideas from the likes of Lois McNay (1992, 2000) and Judith Butler (1995):

"*resistance is framed as a form of identity work; that is, social actors engage with organizational discourses as a means of securing a stable sense of identity, even though under contemporary capitalist conditions, identities are inherently subject to contradictions and insecurities*." (Mumby, 2005)

[53] "That people inevitably participate in their own oppressions, buying into hegemonic ideologies even as they struggle against those oppressions and those ideologies - a familiar fact of life to women, people of colour, colonized and formerly colonized people - is a poignant and paradoxical facet of human life given short shrift in Scott's schema." (Kondo, 1991: 221)

Thus the primary area of contention is resistance in terms of identity construction (Collinson, 2005a; Knights and Wilmott, 1989; Mumby; 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000). Subjectivity is central to this, seen as “invariably creative and knowledgeable, but also multiple, shifting, sometimes fragmentary, often inconsistent and frequently contradictory” (Collinson, 1994: 28; Kondo, 1991). As with, and following, Foucault above, post-structuralism rejects the western view of an essential self (Collinson, 2005a; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Kondo, 1991; McNay, 1992), influenced by Lacan’s questioning of a unified identity (McNay, 1992), moving towards a rejection of Enlightenment humanism (Kinights and Kerfoot, 2004) and the separation of the individual from society (Collinson, 2003). Thus “sex, class, age, occupation, sexuality, nationality, language, politics, clothing, body, ethnicity, religion, possessions, family status” (Collinson, 2003: 534), and race (Kondo, 1997) provide the grounds for contradiction, fulfilment and resistance. Indeed, a highly relevant issue for this project is the manner in which power is generative, creating identity, both through discipline and punishment, as suggested by Foucault[54], but also through the social delineation of interests[55] and prescribed paths to fulfilment (Kondo, 1991; McNay, 1992).

In unpacking identity and social dynamics these authors expose the ambiguity, complexity and inconsistencies in how people in local settings actually engage with power, reminding us that success through one’s career and through climbing the corporate hierarchy provides material and symbolic security (Collinson, 1994; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Knights and Wilmott, 1989). Thus, in the banks researched for this thesis, the degree to which people supported or rejected

[54] "Interest, both at the level of the each individual who goes to make up the population, and also the interest of the population as such, regardless of individual interests and aspirations, this is the new target and the fundamental instrument of the government of population." (Foucault, 1979 in McNay, 1992: 68)

[55] On the matter of interests, then, these authors do not argue, as Marxism tends to, for any ‘real’ interests (Knights and Wilmott, 1989), although they do point out that the process of identity assertion does not always match their material needs/interests, highlighting the contradictory nature of identity formation in late capitalism. Hindess (1982 in Knights and Wilmott, 1989: 540) argues that "the definition... of objectives is unavoidably uncertain and contested if only because 'the forms of discourse available to agents allow the formulation of a variety of distinct and often incompatible objectives."

corporate interests had much to do with how they peceived their own interests within this – their behaviour significantly influenced by perceptions gleaned through gossip and humour.

In this post-structural framework social structure is generally seen in terms of history and is contained in the actual identities, memories, social behaviours, habitus of people, who both repeat those forms of behaviour, those patterns of signification, but simultaneously put those 'structural' repetitions at risk (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; McNay, 1992; Butler, 1994 in McNay, 2000). Many theorists draw on Gidden's idea of structuration (e.g. Collinson, 1994, 2003, 2005a; Mumby, 2005), driving at an idea of "unintended consequences", in which structurally placed actions have unintended results which change the conditions for action. People are seen as having a bounded knowledgeability of social norms and rules, reflexively monitoring, rationalizing and motivating action (Giddens, 1994). People, for Giddens, are "social theorists" (1984: 18) who negotiate consciously and unconsciously with 'structural' dynamics. Norms are not "factual boundaries" (ibid.: 4) of social life, rather people have a "practical consciousness" through which they decide to follow these norms, or create an appearance of this through a variety of identity positions, drawing heavily on Goffman's (1959) idea of "tact".

Bourdieu's "habitus" is another important construct for connecting agency and structure in that it gives an historical and bodily view of the self (McNay, 2000), in which our feelings, desires, dispositions and personalities express both our past and present structuring environments, a sort of "practical mastery" (Bourdieu, 1977: 87), which is not blindly repeated, but rather that:

"*we should bestow on some creative free will the free and wilful power to constitute, on the instant, the meaning of the situation by projecting the ends aiming at its transformation, and that we should reduce the objective intentions*

and constituted significations of actions and works to the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors." (Bourdieu, 1984: 73)

For Boudieu these intentions, however always have effects that go beyond our conscious objectives and understandings.

Judith Butler's conception of "performativity", influenced by Lyotard (1984 in Knights and Kerfoot, 2004: 449) and Derrida (Butler, 1988 in Kondo, 1990: 7), sees identity and action in terms of citation – action interpolating past behaviours and signifiers. This view holds that every citation has a degree of ambiguous space in which the possibility of disruption allows for signs to be reinvented with new meaning in specific contexts (McNay, 2000). As contexts so do the range of possible meanings available to any signification: "Such changes cannot be understood through binaries of domination and resistance, but rather involve more complex processes of investment and negotiation" (McNay, 2000: 58).

This, however, leaves us with the question of what, then, actually comprises resistance? The question drives at the heart of this thesis – acts of gossip, humour, rumour and informal talk and friendships are by no means seen here as insidiously resistant to some overbearing power, as Marxism, and on occasions Foucault might have perceived, rather I intend to examine them as locally placed, micro-political attempts to gain security, both material and otherwise.

In my focus being on informal communication, I certainly do not mean to engage any *a priori* assumptions (Prasad and Prasad, 2000) of resistance, which, after all, is itself a theoretical construct (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Mumby, 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005):

"*Given these kinds of complexities - the contradictions, nuances, and multiplicities engendered by any act or appropriation of meaning - how can one*

account for the lives of my co-workers within the narratives of "resistance" provided in the social science literature?" (Kondo, 1990: 218)

This project has set out to examine the ways by which the people in the companies studied influenced the cultures of their workplaces, through various informal communication practices, towards their interests. What counts is that we see the way practices are manifest in *local* settings, a discursive view of identity and power (Mumby, 2005). The theory here is useful in as much as it aids in this.

We need to see workers as negotiating meaning (Kondo, 1990; Mumby, 2005; McNay, 1992, 2000; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995; Spivak1988) amongst the multiplicity of discourses available in both the South African and banking workplace setting, and how these clash, contradict and parallel each other. In this view “selves are rhetorical assertions” (Kondo, 1990: 225), and an “aesthetic process” (Baudrillard 1983 in McNay, 1992: 66). This process is vitally imaginative (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Thomas and Davies, 2005), what people said to me in the smoke rooms and offices needs often to be understood as myth (Sahlins, 1985), the stories of their lives and identities as they create selves, and in turn cultures, on occasion to the fulfilment of their interests:

"*Culture, from this standpoint, is no reified thing or system, but a meaningful way of being in the world, inseparable from the "deepest" aspects of one's "self"*." (Kondo, 1990: 300)

One remarkable example of such research worth discussing is Kondo’s (1990) aforementioned study of a Japanese sweet factory in the Shitamachi district of Tokyo in which she sensitively discusses the deep complexities in how her co-workers used warmth, parody, technical and cultural knowledge and gender based cultural tropes to both confirm and contradict identity. She shows in depth

how the "historical, political, and economic discourses" (ibid: 301) are culturally specific, and by no means objective[56]:

"*People mobilize and employ the idiom, but their acts are shaded by ironies and unintended consequences*." (Kondo, 1990: 306)

Consider the incredible relevance of this to a South African context, in which a 'culture of human rights', capitalist logic, race, ethnic and gender politics, "rainbow nationalism", and so forth are all open to reinvention in specific local contexts – the politics of identity were repeatedly and strategically drawn on by the informants spoken to in this project.

Professionalism and late capitalism:

We need to recognize the role of masculinity in work identity (Collinson, 2004), which is strongly connected to current corporate professionalism, a style of identity construction strongly drawn upon in both research sites.

"[Power] *institutionalises, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit... we must produce truth in order to produce wealth*..." (Foucault, 1980: 93-94)[57]

Hodgson, citing Fournier (1999 in 2005: 53), argues that people develop a "professional conscience", which dictates that as members of a professional group they are required to act in a certain way[58], to adopt an identity that portrays professionalism, and is a strong trend in banking in particular (anonymous,

[56] This may seem obvious, anthropologically, however for many of the business people with whom I was interacting the assumed truth of their positions were often incredibly unreflexive, the "monastic conceit of disinterested objectivity" (Kondo, 1990: 305)?

[57] This dynamic has tremendous significance in terms of the material value that the organizational hierarchies studied here give/gave to my informants. As was pointed out in relation to Marxism above – 'labour' needs to work with 'capital' in order to survive. Foucault, however, gives depth into the effects this relationship has on identity. On an organizational level Collinson (1999, 2003), using Foucault, extensively examines how attempts by organizations to measure and assess employees forms an important part of this surveillance, and that, in many ways employees collude extensively in such subordination.

[58] Note the similarity in this to Goffman's (1959) view of professionals, describing professionalism as a performance we put on in order to maintain status and exclusivity.

2008). Both Fournier (1999) and Hodgson (2005) consider this move to professionalize the workplace, where nowadays "non-professional labour is being caught in the discourse of professionalism" (Fournier, 1999: 281), as part of larger managerial attempts at cultural control. While this is seen here as a neo-liberal, micro-political drive to protect middle class power (Fournier, 1999; Gordon, 1995; Hodgson, 1995) [59], Gordon (1995) connects this with racism through obscuring these middle class interests behind neo-liberal claims of equality, as has been suggested with regards to claims of meritocracy and equality (Collinson, 2003; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). Vitally, it is through their exclusive knowledge that they are both subjugated and empowered – in current western society[60] one can only, legitimately, talk with "the approval of established regimes of thought." (Foucault, 1980: 81)[61] – as Goffman (1959) has suggested, professional identity is itself a performance.

Pfeffer (1981: 22 – 29) notes that it is important for a leader to demonstrate that an “organization's operations and outcomes appear to be consonant with prevailing social values and useful to the larger social system… [and that leaders are under pressure to show an] identification of the organization with socially valued and accepted individuals, institutions, and methods of operation”.

This professional identity needs to be seen in line with the post-bureaucratic styles of business, as being attempted in both my research sites, propagating an insecurity of self (Collinson, 2003). Those who do not partake in the system are stigmatized as ‘unprofessional’ and associated with the now old and supposedly

[59] Although Thomas and Davies (2005) provide the obligatory contradiction of professionalism as a form of resistance – a strategy that holds immense complexity in the research results found here.
[60] Although Foucault (1980: 66) stipulates that science and "the obligation of truth" have been produced in such a way, and so focused on, that they have "become the general law for all civilizations."
[61] Foucault connects this with the “network of writing” (1977: 189), through which professionals, such as in Human Resource departments, hold the power to dictate how cultural issues will be officially perceived (Pfeffer, 1981; Shulman, 2007). Both banks here had numerous surveys assessing how employees felt about their workplaces. The results of these assessments were not always clearly agreed upon as different parties argued for their version of the true state of affairs.

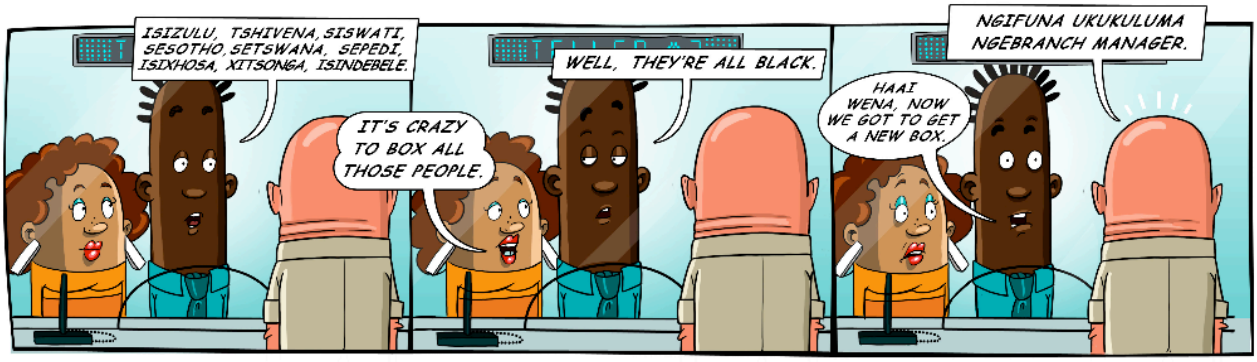
defunct bureaucratic model (Fournier, 1999). Thus this sense of "identity formation" as an "aesthetic process" (McNay, 2000: 66) is in line with:

"*Baudrillard's (1983) argument that late-capitalist society is increasingly dominated by a referentless logic that leads to a dedifferentiation of the distinct spheres of activity and thought characteristic of the era of high modernity*." (McNay, 2000: 66)

Thus it has been argued (Gordon, 1995), in the spirit of this "dedifferentiation" that people of colour, women and minorities (as well as more hegemonically central workers (Hochschild, 2007)), are now expected to contribute those parts of themselves, which previously had been excluded, towards the logic of the marketplace. Kondo (1997) convincingly critiques this sense of a globalized and tolerant middle class culture, in which historical and political difference are subsumed by a homogenizing transnational view of the self, hiding racist and sexist assumptions [62].

[62] This is of utmost importance in the South African context, as Dolby's points out with regards to whiteness in South Africa, and in some ways globally: "At times, whiteness is invisible. It becomes 'the norm' that undergirds the structures of society" (McIntosh, 1988 in Dolby, 2001: 6), while amongst the white youth she studied in a Durban high school, "whiteness is able to reposition itself as part of a global whiteness that promises the power and privilege unavailable within the confines of the nation" (ibid.: 12).

Chapter 4: Race, ethnicity, gender, sex, age and class:



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"*When "race" is enunciated at the contemporary historical moment, the black-white binary is immediately invoked, and race becomes the marked term designating "black" of "people of colour", while "white" remains the unmarked site of privilege*." (Kondo, 1997: 6)

In theorizing here, we should certainly not overemphasise race, an already over stated component of South African social analysis (Nuttal and Michael, 2000). In this light, the categories inherited from *apartheid* and colonialism presuppose a basic four racial groups in South Africa: black, white, Indian and coloured. While these ideas have been associated with the very worst aspect of anthropology's history (Gordon, 1995), and an evolutionary and discriminatory hierarchy (Thornton, 1981), race, a fallacy which Baran (2007: 3) relates to "imagined ancestral groups", is still very much a part of South African popular language, daily jokes, assertions, and conflicts. As Nuttal and Michael (2000: 11) ask: "If 'race' is a genetic fallacy, how does it continue to dominate imaginings of identity?"[64]

[63] A cartoon I created, with illustrator Caroline Vos, for one of these bank's Employment Equity programme.

[64] The similarities between South Africans culturally is greater than many would expect, as Nuttal and Michaels note "white landlords and black sharecropper developed a *modus vivendi* embracing shared ideas about dress, health, justice, language, production, recreation and religious life." (van Olsen, 1996 in Nuttal and Michael, 2000: 9)

Deconstructing black and white, we need to realize that 'whiteness' is an imagined identity aimed at securing privilege for a disparate group of vaguely associated[65] people (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Dolby, 2001). 'White' is argued to be a position created through comparison with the non-white 'Other' – race is often only implied when someone 'of colour' is present (Hall, 1996; Kondo, 1997), while whiteness is an often ignored and invisible social distinction (Dolby, 2001; Moahloli, 1997; Morley and Chen, 1996). The trouble, again, is that when one speaks of 'whiteness' one cannot ignore the gender, ethnic, age, class and sexuality issues which create complexity therein[66].

Similarly, blackness is too a politically placed and constructed identity position which cannot be considered without "reference to the divisions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity" (Hall, 1988 in Morley and Chen, 1996). Stuart Hall, and 'culture studies' (1996), have been very vocal in this regard, proposing that, blackness was developed specifically as a political position in resistance to white hegemony, a "necessary fiction" (ibid.: 444), which "cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature" (ibid.: 443)[67]. This process of "strategic-essentialism" (Spivak, 1988 in Kondo 1997; Hall, 1992 in Morley and Chen, 1996: 9), is seen as a position taken up by those outside of the political mainstream as a means to survive. JanMohammed and Lloyd (1987) explain that the challenge is to reject the essentialist humanism which would solidify and naturalise such positions,

[65] "Whiteness is a fairly new category of identification, only coming to have meaning within the context of European imperialism/colonialism within the past 500 years (Hill, 1997). Whiteness was launched within specific circumstances. Today, it is not a 'fact' that patiently waits to be encountered, but an ensemble that must be actively created and invigorated anew within changing circumstances. Because of this constant need to re-invent itself as a way of maintaining its privilege, whiteness also shifts... White expands, constricts, and changes, creating a circle pf privilege that produces desire... At times, whiteness is invisible. It becomes 'the norm' that undergirds the structures of society (McIntosh, 1988)"(Dolby, 2001: 6)

[66] Consider Spruill's (2008) study of sexuality in the 'New South Africa' in this regard, in which she examined the tensions between western liberal sexuality and 'African' ideas around sexuality and the process of creating constitutional protection around sexuality and human rights.

[67] And which Baran (2007) suggests is connected with "imagined ancestral groups", a political and identity history, based on his research amongst Brazilian school children.

while still maintaining a position from which to critique mainstream assumptions. As Spivak notes, minority resistance often takes the form of "*communitas*" (1988: 30), while Hall (1996) argues, in line with JanMohammed and Lloyd, that a position that deconstructs race, without loosing the political efficacy of grass-roots identity resistance, needs to be found.

"*The received notion of polities based on cultural homogeneity and horizontal fraternity, real or fictive, is giving way to imagined communities of difference, of multiculturalism, of "ID-ology*" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000 in Comaroff and Comaroff, 2004: 190).

John Comaroff argues that we are seeing a time of "Ethnicity, Inc" (Wiser lecture, Wits, 2006), with the commoditization of culture a significant issue in current South African identity dynamics (Hansen, 2000). Indeed, within this there are several issues which it would be prudent to keep in mind:

Firstly, the process of colonialism forced almost all within the South African context into a system of capitalist relations, and for people of specifically African origin, a violent coercion towards assimilation into Western lifestyles, commodity fetishism and monetary economy (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Magubane, 2000; Masilela, 1996; Thornton, 1981). An important aspect of this was the Western notion of 'tribe', in which missionaries, colonists and anthropologists envisioned African identity in terms of bounded nations, in line with the European ideas around progress and evolution (Magubane, 1973; Thornton, 1981), a forced, although in many ways also asymetrically discursive, version of African modernity (Masilela, 1996). Despite the racism, and 'divide and rule' (Magubane, 2000: 8) history of terms such as 'Xhosa', 'Tsonga', 'Tswana', etc [68] (Harries, 1988; Mngomezulu, 1999), they have been adopted into South African

[68] As Van Warmelo (1974: 60) suggests: "This fictional aspect must at no time be lost sight of. These are not languages but clusters of dialects, some so marginal that they are classifiable as intermediary between clusters or as *sui generis*."

consciousness as ethnic and linguistic truths, and form an important aspect of the identities of many of the people interviewed for this research.

Indeed, the view of South African 'cultures' today (in the nationalist sense that South African corporate people seem to use the term), is strongly influenced by the fixated version of identity as received through *apartheid*. I will argue here that this is frequently obscured behind a neo-liberal[69] discourse, oftem in the form of a sort of "Rainbow Nationalism"[70] (Barber, 2001; Nuttal and Michael, 2000: 1). While South African identity, in truth, is highly creolized (Nuttal and Michael, 2000), if, for example, we look at the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1988)[71], it defines "black people" as a "generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians" (pg. 3)[72], which has vital implications as far as identity politics in the banks studied here:

"*Earnings regression show that even after the abolition of apartheid, after controlling for education, age and location, race is by far the most important predictor of earnings, which is related in part to differences in the quality of education and the legacy of discriminatory access to jobs in the past... Jansen (2004) predicts that the non-racial utopia in SA is receding fast, which becomes clearly evident with the widening gap between poor Blacks and Black elite. Additionally, the 'comfortable accommodation of an inclusive Black (i.e., the fragile bond of Colored, Indian and African solidarity) is easily fragmented when the chips are down' (p. 9). Provocatively, Jansen asks if ethnic identities will*

[69] Barber suggests South African culture, in its tribalised sense, is being offered to foreigners in essentialised, easy to consume packages, "the global commercial imaginary" , but that "the banality of racialized poverty and class differentiation" is overlooked while popular culture, such as the SABC 1's "Simunye" gives us "self-advertisements featuring images of cultural and racial diversity... providing the audience with a gratifying and purely symbolic arena for negotiating the difficulties of living in a world of polarized interests around scarce resources, of violence and political uncertainty" (2001: 180-181)

[70] As Urban (2006: 175) notes, the discourse of the 'Rainbow Nation' "complicates this mosaic of ethnic and linguistic diversity."

[71] Note that the banking sector is controlled by the more stringent Financial Services Charter, an agreement between the major financial institutions as to targets with regards to gender, race and disability representations in staff at various levels of their organizations.

[72] And has recently, under political pressure, included people of Chinese origin.

again be mobilized to make demands on dwindling resources." (Urban, 2006: 175)

Indeed, liberal 'diversity', as was often engaged in the sites studied here, has been condemned as masking political inequality[73] (Gordon, 1995; Gordon and Newfield, 1994). The underlying process of assimilation that writers see behind claims of diversity (Gordon, 1996), or what JanMohammed and Lloyd (1987: 9) term "humanist pluralism", is seen as deeply biased (ibid.; Magubane, 1973), and opens a terrain in which the Other is always at a disadvantage to those holding a position of assumed 'normality'. We need to acknowledge, however, that theorists fairly broadly agree that such processes are not unidirectional, and, in line with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995), that in assimilating the 'mainstream' is itself changed by the 'Other' (Burawoy, 1975; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Kondo, 1997)[74].

"*One of the most pronounced effects of these macrostructural tendencies towards detraditionalization is the transformation of the social status of women in the last forty years and the restructuring of gender relations that it has arguably initiated... Instead, inequalities are emerging along generational, class and racial lines where structural divisions amongst women are as significant as between men and women*." (McNay, 2000: 1)

While McNay has argued that in the light of a move in western culture in recent years towards "detraditionalisation" (2000: 1), and hence increased relevance of

[73] "Liberal multiculturalism contends that there is 'a natural sameness' between ethnic groups. In this view, eventually anyone can compete equally in the capitalist marketplace, if measures are taken to create equal social and educational opportunities. Left liberal multiculturalism reveals a tendency to essentialise cultural differences and exoticise 'otherness' while ignoring the social and historical construction of difference 'that is constitutive of the power to represent meanings'" (McLaren, 1994 in van den Heuvel, 2008: 49).

[74] In South Africa the complexity of this is immense – take for example Dolby's (2001) study of a Durban high school, in which she found that, under pressure from a sudden change of demographics post-1994, the white teenagers, rather than identifying with their black fellows, tried to reinvent their 'whiteness' in line with a more global white youth culture, particularly through techno music. Doldby points out the incredible irony in this, in that techno is itself a creation of African Americans in Detroit.

differences[75] between women rather than a mere male/female binary "it is only for a few privileged, white western women that sexism is the main form of oppression. Dominant new wave feminism, however, takes white women's experiences as the norm and generalizes them in the assumption of a universal and shared oppression between women" (1992: 64). In this light, we need to see the way gender, as with race, offers both a counter point to hegemonically central male norms, what Baudrillard (1983 in McNay, 2000: 69) has termed "the lucidity of the excluded". Thus feminism's impact on post-structuralist thinking above[76], in which gender is seen in terms of citation and performativity (Butler, 1994 in McNay, 2000), a deeply sedimented re-confirmation of self that is simultaneously highly unstable (Knights and Kerfoot, 2005). As demonstrated by Goffman (1959, 1977) and Butler (1994 in McNay, 2000), gender does not exist outside of social interaction, but is constituted within the behaviours studied in this project, in which identity positions are both gendered in interaction, and have signification that crosses gender positions (McNay, 2000). How people joked, and with whom, had profound and contradictory gender dimensions in this research.

Thus, as has been noted, work identities "often take on highly masculine forms" (Collinson, 2003: 533; McNay, 2000)[77], while it has also been asserted that South African workplaces (Moahloli, 1997), and particularly banking in South

[75] Mc Nay (1992: 64) further adds that "Black and other women of ethnic minorities have different histories and experiences in relation to slavery, forced labour, enforced migration, plantation, colonialism, imperialism, etc… For power differences between women can be so great that apparently similar struggles against men can be, in practice, fundamentally different". This was a significant dynamic in this study, and will be examined later. Certainly, whether interviewees frame their frustrations in the light of gender, ethnicity, race or some other dynamic was strongly influenced by their own identity positions in this regard.

[76] While we do not have time to explore it here, feminism's contribution in deconstructing a romanticized view of identity and resistance is essential, and should be kept in mind through this research (Collinson, 1999, 2005a, 2005b; Hodgson, 2005; Mumby, 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

[77] Kondo's (1991: 257) research demonstrates the manner in which masculine identity is constantly under threat from those in the periphery, and how a reassertion and reinvention of those identities is a continual and necessary aspect of masculine identity positions. Within this she sees gender positions as fragmentary, with "creative possibilities for subversion amidst the ironic twists of meaning that complicate the crafting of gendered selves within fields of power."

Africa (Marthur-Helm, 2006), often have highly masculine workplace cultures[78]. The processes of "identification and differentiation" (Collinson, 2003: 533) in which certain more masculine identities are included and others are excluded will form a major aspect of this study. Within this, theorists have examined the way in which certain emotions and positions are acceptable, and seen as legitimate[79] (McNay, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005), as Moahloli (1997: 32) notes:

"*Against this tough facade, it becomes almost an embarrassment to admit that you care. Women, fearing to be tied to stereotypes, distance themselves as if this is a questionable value. Caring is a value that has clearly not found its way into the value system of the corporate world.*"

It has been noted, in this, that women in management face a particularly difficult set of contradictions in that as managers they have power, whilst as women they do not - the power lines that run through informal communication channels would seem to often be masculine in nature (Kottis, 1993; Moahloli, 1997)[80]. While this position is certainly not universal, and cannot be generalized to the entire female experience in South African organisations[81], the “glass ceiling” certainly does exist, although to widely varying degrees for different women (Mathur-Helm,

[78] It is suggested that women in business then have limited subject positions available, often needing to take on masculine identity approaches in order to cope in workplace environments, a sort of ‘tough woman’ identity (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Moahloli, 1997).
[79] Knights and Kerfoot (2005) have associated this with measurability, in which that which cannot be measured is seen as worthless in more masculine frames of thought. A fascinating example of masculine emotion is Nisbett’s (2007) study of middle class youth in Bangalore, India, in which he found that the young men he studied frequently used humour as a socially legitimate means to express otherwise feminised emotion – note, then, the link between masculinity, emotion and humour.
[80] On this topic, Jick and Mitz (1985), however point out that women often seem to handle networks of relations better than men, while Hofstede (Tannon, 1990 in Hofstede, 1998: 11) asserts that men engage more in “rapport”, as to the more masculine “report” styles of talk. Indeed, in the light of this Hofstede suggests it may be appropriate to think in terms of “gender cultures” (ibid.).
[81] In the light of McNay’s (2000: 1) “detraditionalisation” of feminine subject positions in recent years, Mathur-Helm (2006: 323) points out that in relation to South African banking "Most women from the EXCO team stated that women are made to feel most comfortable in the boardrooms these days and their inputs are highly appreciated... It seems that efforts are being made by SA banks to be more women inclusive, however, whether to pave a way for them to reach the top management or not still remains a dilemma."

2006: 324). While women in business, on average, do suffer from greater pressure and stress (Jick and Mitz, 1985), have education as a barrier to success (Marthur-Helm, 2006), and are often disadvantaged by male hiring practices (Kottis, 1993; Moahloli, 1997), we need to acknowledge the tensions between gender and race in Employment Equity practices in South Africa (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Russell, 2007)[82].

A further very central area of concern in South African businesses, as this study will show, is that of age. Indeed, ageing is a "neglected dimension of social stratification and the life-course is an essential component of the analysis of status" (Turner, 1998: 299), while Burr and Mutchler (2007) argue that the intersection of ageing and race is understudied. Take, for example, Van Dongen's (2005: 526) research in a Cape Town old age home inhabited by working class Xhosa men and women. It was found, in their situation at least, that "Older people in South Africa are the flesh and blood of what younger generations want to forget: oppression, lack of freedom, submissiveness, servility and compromise... The different interpretations and explanations of the past by older and younger people may well be the source of the many problems that older people are experiencing at present." While generational conflict, which is based on a perception of "age cohorts" (Turner, 1998) and the idea that a particular historical era of structuring factors and "regimes" (Giddens, 1991 in Gordon and Longino, 2000: 701) would create certain shared habitus (Gordon and Longino, 2000) amongst peers, it has been argued that there is little evidence that actors within and age cohort necessarily share interests[83], and that there is significant reason to look more at intra-generational inequality (Irwin,

[82] Russell (2007: 7) reported in the Financial Times that in response to research suggesting that the "glass ceiling" had to some degree dropped for white women, Jimmy Manyi, of the Black Management Forum stated that: "We say: 'Wow. It's good news it's working'… If only blacks were doing so well... The preference for white women is because of racial stereotyping… The people who make the hiring decisions are still largely white males. There is a pattern here: the more distant you are from western culture, the less you are likely to be heard."

[83] However, in reply to Turner (1998), Irwin (1998: 305) argues that "generation related self-interest" is central to age related conflict - they "assert the salience of intra-generational cohesion and inter-generational difference in shaping consciousness and action in efforts to secure social advantage".

1998: 301). Certainly older people are seen to argue for credentialism, and have different ideas as to what should be valued (e.g. “experience, knowledge, work habits… loyalty”), while younger people are seen to challenge this with claims of “obsolescence”, “unable to keep up with change”, and the pressure on the elderly to retire being major aspects of these tensions (Dennis and Thomas, 2007: 86; Turner, 1998) [84], particularly in the light of the higher pay warranted for more experienced older workers (Burr and Mutchler, 2007). Burr and Mutchler (2007: 43) associate decisions on retirement, and having the resources to do so, with identity factors such as gender, race, class and ethnicity[85].

"*The elderly are seen to be distant from current developments, out of step and out of time. These perspectives coincide with a general opinion of youth as (an investment in) the future whilst the old not only carry, but are the past. Psychological, cultural and social processes coalesce in producing ageist sentiments and practices which disadvantage the elderly or increasingly it seems, those who cannot lay claim to independence and a youthful outlook, the so called 'old-old'... The stratification metaphor entails a theoretical marginalization of the elderly*." (Irwin, 1998: 310)

This issue will prove to be extremely relevant here. We need to understand that the rise of ‘youth culture’ is associated with the culture of consumption (Rizzo, 2005), and is seen as part of a drive towards middle class values and lifestyle (Nisbett, 2007; Rizzo, 2005; Young, 2007), and a reaction to “the fragmentation of the western bourgeois subject” (Sandoval, 2000 in Rizzo, 2005: 8) in the light of transnational cultural influences of late-capitalism. Indeed, Nisbett demonstrates the manner in which “producing ‘youth’ *is* producing the middle class” (Liechty, 2003 in Nisbett, 2007: 936) in his study of middle class youth in

[84] On the topic of ageism Bendick, Brown and Wall (1999 in Dennis and Thomas, 2007) found that younger applicants were rated higher in job interviews whilst holding the same qualifications as their older counterparts.
[85] They further point out the lack of “transferable human capital” (Burr and Mutchler, 2007: 43), such as English language skills and education, of foreign born US workers – consider how this applies to Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, etc, older workers in the sites studied here.

Bangalore. Alcohol, clothing, cigarettes, cars, mobile phones and so forth become the symbols of this. Note then, particularly for the findings to come, that I aim to show how age and class come together, and further how this could occur through the manner in which gossip, humour and social interaction transpire.

On the topic of class then, it is expedient to cast our eyes to Kondo's (1990) study, in which she found that the Shitamachi dwellers lacked certain "cultural capital" (Boudieu and Passeron, 1970 in Kondo, 1990: 61) with regards to Western cutlery and imported vocabulary, as depicted in Bourdieu's (1984 in ibid.) study on taste. Alvesson's (1994: 539) study of status and talk in an advertising agency similarly points out that people engaged various types of cultural capital to increase status – the power "in the competence to act culturally correctly". In this study, people's ability to utilize culturally valued symbols, tropes and artefacts in conversation will be an important component of analysis, to examine how, amongst other factors, the "class-based myth tied, as always, to local experience" (Scott, 1985: 44).

Chapter 5: Banking in South Africa:

"*South Africa was the only country in the world where one could go into a bank and get gold in exchange for notes or cheques*." (General Smuts, source withheld, 1988)

A major difficulty in this section, as noted by Pfeffer (1981) and Shulman (2007) regarding organizations in general, is the requirement of secrecy in findings and limitations in what one is allowed to research in corporations. Thus both what I can say, and access to certain research on South African banks is somewhat curtailed by the secrecy with which companies seem to handle their internal affairs. The need to maitain an image to shareholders, staff and the public seems, at times, to stifle corporate transparency.

An interesting study to note on South African businesses is Thomas and Bendixen's (2000; Urban, 2006) research comparing various language groups, and South African managerial culture with other international studies on the topic, using Hofstede's cultural values model. In this they had two significant findings, one that South African managers of 'black' descent were no more or less collective in their thinking than their 'European'/'white' counterparts, to some degree dispelling popular stereotypes about these managers being more 'communal' in their thinking. They also found that previously disenfranchised 'groups' had an exacerbated intolerance for hierarchy, in the light of South Africa's dominating and racist past.

While banking has historically been the domain of wealthier *men* (Prather, 1971), it has in the last fifty years, and particularly more recently, become a mass market product – even the SACP has contemplated opening a bank (Nevin, 2003)! While working class, 'black' South Africans, historically excluded from formal banking often utilized localized micro-lending arrangements, or "*stokvels*" (Nevin, 2003: 27), until recently banking "history has been almost exclusively a history of white development in South Africa" (Source withheld, 1988). While there is a historical split between Afrikaans and British banks, the localized settings of these research sites, both operate on a similarly British banking model (Jones, 1992) – a conservatism which is in part why South African banks are slightly more protected than some international couter parts in the current financial crisis. Deregulation of the industry in the 1980s brought about a rapid increase in competition and growth of the industry (Jones, 1992; Source withheld, 1988). This, simultaneously, was predicted to coincide with a change from an employment style guaranteeing employment for life, to an influx of younger, more educated, professional staff, with a far higher rate of turnover. This, as suggested by an official document from the 1980s put out by one of the banks studied here, would be accompanied by an influx of employees "of colour", both for political and for pragmatic market related reasons.

"*looking to the future it seems that the developments in the banking sector in the 1990s are going to be characterized by two issues: competition and capital adequacy…. Given the strategic nature of the industry, competition will not be based upon price, which will increase the need for effective marketing and innovation in the financial products field*." (Skinner and Osborn, 1992: 78)

As Prather noted in 1971 regarding US banking, there has been a hierarchical shift in banking status, with male, educated employees being valued over the previously prestigious, but now feminised[86] and down-classed, teller and branch staff positions. As Nevin (2003: 26-27) noted of South African bankers, such as those studied here: "One gets the impression that inside every South African commercial banker is a corporate banker trying to get out and that the masses would be better served by post office savings banks and building societies". While the professionalization of the industry (Anonymous, 2008) is in line with the greater competition and indeterminacy of late-capitalism (Knights and Wilmott, 1989), we need to bear in mind that these changes are by no means complete, or without deep tensions. As Mathur-Helm (2006: 311) points out, in 2004 women held only "4 percent of all executive positions in South Africa's banks (Bank survey Report, 2004)", and further states that:

"*Apparently, SA banking sector is largely dominated by males at the top levels. They still form part of the men's network groups and belong to the so-called "old-boys clubs" which excludes women, consequently alienating them*." (ibid: 321)

[86] The change to mass market retail banking created a need "for enlarged staffs and highly trained officers. Although traditional banking policy was to promote from within the bank so as to reward employees for loyalty, honesty and steadfastness, the demand for highly trained officers led to a program of recruiting among college graduates for men who would shortly move into management positions rather than begin in the clerical or teller positions... With the new policy of hiring young, but highly educated men to become officers, the teller's position diminished in prestige, responsibility, skill, and advancement opportunities. And in keeping with tradition, the teller's salary remained low... Hence, by default, rather than design women were hired as tellers in major banks" (Prather, 1971: 777-778). Again, see how this international trend occurs in recent South African banking, although with many local nuances, as we will soon see. An interesting point regarding status and teller work is that "this position, until the last decade, was frequently closed to minority women, particularly blacks, and thus for these women it can be a prestigeful [sic] position among their peers" (ibid.: 779).

Chapter 6: Methodology and ethics:

Methodology:

"*In order to construe the gestures of others, their words and winks and more besides, we have to situate them within the systems of signs and relations, or power and meaning that animate them… Ethnography surely extends beyond the range of the empirical eye; its inquisitive spirit calls upon us to ground subjective, culturally configured action in society and history… That spirit is present… in the work of historians who insist that the human imagination itself is perforce a "collective, social… phenomenon (le Goff, 1988: 5)"*" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 11)

While the fictional nature of ethnographic research and writing[87] (Castãneda, 2006; Geertz, 1988, 2000; Peel, 1995), with its subjective content, methodologies, and claims to truth, is both its failing, in terms of Descartes and Kantian 'truth' (1988 and 1991 in Hastrup, 1994), but also its validity, claiming legitimacy because of the bodily and emotional depth of the long and occasionally intimate fieldwork experience (Hastrup and Hervick, 1994). This claim to knowledge, however, should be tempered by reflexivity (Castãneda, 2006; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Cross, 1990; Geertz, 1988; Kohn, 1994; Metcalf, 2002; Ryang, 1997)[88]. Significantly, it is exactly because the claims that will be made here are not generalisable social truths (McNay, 1992), but rather

[87] "Anthropologists should know that we do not so much share other cultures as imagine them *in situ*." (Kohn, 1994: 25)

[88] Two important matters in this regard. One, it has been claimed that there is a gender bias in anthropological research and theory, with an undervaluing of feminist and female perspectives (Kondo, 1997; Moore, 1988). This is a matter, as an English speaking, white, heterosexual, younger, male, South African researcher, that I definitely need face. The second concern re reflexivity is what Kondo (1990: 300) refers to as "stakes", the bias that each theorist and researcher has in analyzing and gathering data in terms of the interests of his/her own career. Magubane (2000: 2) notes that social knowledge is never without some form of "dogma". Certainly this idea has been extensively examined by the likes of Thomas Kuhn (1970 in Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and is a contentious point regarding bias in management writing, and has been used for arguing against the lack of reflexivity in more orthodox theorising (Burrel and Morgan, 1979). With regards to this project, I have been contracted for large EE initiatives, as a result of this research, by one of my research organizations, and am conscious of and allowing for any bias I may resultantly have.

based on an experiential, “holistic” (Agar, 1996 in Walcott, 2005: 67) view, including my own experiences of these places, as a an outsider walking in[89], in dialogue with my respondents (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992), that what will be said here has significance. Indeed, it has been claimed that a major function of anthropologists is for us to examine how truths become true, how identities, relationships and discourses become naturalized (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Magubane, 2000; McNay, 1992). In this light, as has been suggested earlier, I do not here mean to determine the ‘truth’ of statements made by my informants, although on occasion we will examine this, but rather how certain truth claims within the social fields examined here define a “terrain of discourse” (Scott, 1985: 205).

Specifically looking at research techniques for informal gossip, humour and resistance in organizations, Pfeffer (1981) has suggested that there has been an excess of narrative type ethnography, and too little quantitative research, while Analoui (1995) points out that an over focus on quantitative results can miss out on deeper perceptions. We need to realize that the study of such ‘underground’ behaviours is inherently difficult (Collinson, 1994; Prasad and Prasad, 2000), partly because the stories to be found often speak against managerial hegemony (Nord and Jermier, 1994), and because in looking at subaltern communication one runs the risk of becoming polarized with regards to inclusion into managerial/employee groups (Fortado, 1994). Indeed, a fascinating dynamic that will become apparent later is the manner in which bank staff took me as yet another (manipulable) aspect of their social field: "the people I knew asserted their own power to act upon the anthropologist. This was their means for preserving their own identities” (Kondo, 1990: 17). In this, an interesting insight from other researchers (Collinson, 1999; Handelman, 1973), is the tendency for

[89] The emotional experience of the fieldworker has much to offer (Hastrup, 1994; Metcalf, 2002; Wolcott, 2005) – one is literally experiencing cultural sensations, biases and controls for the first time.

organization staff to reveal inside secrets to researchers, who offer a safe outside confidant, as I repeatedly discovered[90].

Goffman (1959: 216) himself suggested that the “case-study method” is best for examining these social phenomena, and that we should attempt to understand what frames people use in specific, local instances (Goffman, 1974 in Fortado, 1994: 257). Indeed, in this view, it is through specific and local (Prasad and Prasad, 2000) observed conduct (anthropology’s unique offering (Jordan, 2003)), that the social self may be understood (Williams, 1998 in Manning, 2000). In the same tone, we cannot ignore larger contextual matters influencing local dynamics (Gregory, 1983), and need to see joking and talk in their local historical contexts (Handelman and Kapferer, 1972). Indeed, as suggested above, it is because of the deeper and longer term study that participant observational approaches require (Martin and Siehl, 1983) that local, contextual and vitally important meanings (Prasad and Prasad, 2005) can be examined. As Sahlins (1985) asserts, a social event has significance as it is interpreted by local actors, and our prerogative as ethnographers should be to understand both the local “commonsense” understandings, and the larger, longer term dynamics (Scott, 1985: 46). I have aspired, therefore, to create understandings from within the "'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the politics of everyday life" (Mumby, 2005: 20).

In actual terms, this means that I went about spending several months, ‘hanging out’ with staff, in all the places where staff ‘hang out’. Thus smoke rooms, coffee areas, passages, and just sitting around at people’s desks, as employees seem inclined to do, became my research sites. While there were significant differences between the two organisations in how local norms would allow me to carry this out, as will be seen, the process was extremely performative

[90] The political intent behind my informers’ revelations, knowing my connections within the business, and where this text will be read, to define organizational happenings in a certain light is a vital point both ethnographically and ethically.

(Castãneda, 2006; Metcalf, 2002; Wolcott, 2005) and improvisational[91]. Where I had planned to job shadow, and engage in hands on participant observation, on the ground high pressure environments required that I keep out of the way of actual work, but interact and observe in all the spaces in between (of which there were many!). I did a fair amount of sitting at an empty desk and observing what people were doing, but most of my time was involved in informal “chats” and discussions, quite a few social gatherings, such as conferences and baby showers, and a significant amount of semi-formal and informal interviewing.

"*We treat the interview setting not as an arena for finding out facts, opinions and perceptions but more as a social event and therefore it is the interview itself that acts as an empirical setting*." (Alvesson, 2003 in Tomas and Davies, 2005: 722)

While many employees did also reveal an unexpected amount in interviews, some did not, and many did not on the first interview. The process of developing trust, how certain ideas were framed by people of particular rank, age, class, ethnicity, gender and so forth, formed a significant part of the research. While Bourdieu (1977 in Callaghan, 2005) argued against interviews, seeing them merely as an opportunity for agents to justify their behaviour, it is perhaps more expedient to consider them in the light of micro-political analysis, as promoted by post-structural feminism:

"*Invoking these identities is contingent and processual (Kondo, 1990) within the interview setting as individuals reflect on their lives as* [bank employees]*, positioning their social selves in relation to discursive practices (Weedon, 1987). It is these instances of pitching 'self as other' against the dominant position offered within discourses that can be understood as moments of micro-political resistance (Sawicki, 1994)*." (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 725)

[91] Note for example how Metcalf (1994) needed to entirely rethink the research question in the light of unforeseen local circumstances, while Hodson (1991) argues that the best interview strategy regarding resistance research is to talk about the most pressing issue.

The interview schedule here (see addendum A), therefore, offered a context from which to approach people's views on gossip and humour in their workplaces, but frequently became unstructured in the light of specific rank, job, life history and identity subject positions. Furthermore, once an interview had taken place, the contact and rapport created therein would often create an 'in' to various social groups, leading to more nuanced data.

Ethical considerations:

Ethically the main dilemma in a project of this nature, which has drawn out views on discrimination, secrets, game-playing, and on many occasions unsubstantiated gossip of various very partisan perspectives, is that of secrecy. As seems usual with such studies (see Collinson, 1994; Prasad and Prasad 2000; etc.) the actual companies studied need to remain anonymous, and most importantly the identities of the individuals involved. However, this poses a further dilemma. These organizations are very prominent - a basic understanding of how the main South African banks are internally structured may give direction as to whom I am writing about. In this regard I will endeavour to ensure that the most inflammatory 'secrets' and allegations are not attached to a specific organization, and have in a few instances chosen not to include such findings in this write up. Organizationally specific terms, locations, and less relevant ethnographic data will be unmentioned or changed. Thus, as to anonymity for my interviewees and informants, gender, race, age, ethnicity, and so forth will only be mentioned if relevant to the discussion, and specifically excluded if such information may compromise that individual's anonymity. This is ethnographically limiting, as the entire social picture would provide a more compelling argument, but this argument would come at too great a cost, and would be ethically compromised.

A further ethical dilemma faced here has been how to handle information given to me that implies direct discrimination, of which I am the only witness. How do I deal with a senior manager who tells me that he has decided, for internal political

reasons, to “stop hiring Indians”? In this same vein, and on one occasion with this same director, employees and managers started to see me as a source of information, a go between, who had the ears of the most senior and most junior stake holders. Thus finding out what ‘that group of men’, or ‘my staff’ are saying was seen as something that, for some of these informants, friendship with me could bring. On one occasion I found myself dealing with a very subtle, and very experienced Human Resource director, who wanted to get a sense of the general issues in his department, which I am obliged to share – he had after all allowed me to conduct research in it – but simultaneously need to protect the identities and faith of my informants. Senior people seem to very adroit at reading the most subtle of cues and innuendo (Goffman, 1959), which demanded severe caution on my part[92].

Regarding informed consent, I ensured that the senior manager in any department in which I studied was both informed of and had agreed to this research. In turn they would send out an email to their staff informing them of my presence, and informing them of the intent and nature of this study. As far as interviews, subjects were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement, and were under absolutely no pressure to co-operate[93]. The only situation in which informed consent was difficult to maintain was in general, out of department observation. Sitting in the cafeteria, or standing in the lift does not offer much opportunity to inform every pedestrian, amongst a population of thousands, of your researcher status. I would, as often as possible, bring it up in interactions, which also allowed people the chance to contribute and discuss their views on my topic and their workplaces.

[92] Such information seeking comprised an important theme in this research. So, while I needed to protect the identities of my informants, I was simultaneously observing who knew what, who trusted whom, and what lines of allegiance these revelations implied (Krackhart, 1990; Krackhart and Hanson, 2003; Moore; 1954).

[93] In fact on the few occasions when people agreed to be interviewed but were then not forthcoming with information or opinions, the process of their dissent provided some fascinating insights.

Chapter 7: Research sites overview:

For the above confidentiality I will refer to the banks studied here as Big Bank, and Boodle Bank. My research was conducted in the head offices of the sections specifically involved in running the network of branches. They were usually accorded less status, and had far larger staff contingents than more corporate aspects of banking. As one young professional employee put it:

"*The other thing that impacts us* [head office] *is the culture of the* [the branch network]*. There is a lot of low EQ and low IQ. I mean, you don't become a teller to be stimulated*."

Similarly, a CEO at Boodle Bank suggested that the view of retail from a corporate banking point of view is that:

"*You had to have half your brain removed and sense of humour destroyed*."

The support offices for these banks occupy large offices, to which access is extremely well controlled, with a variety of security cards and pre-booked parking a necessity. Once inside one leaves the developing world hustle and bustle of Johannesburg for a far wealthier environment (Abdi, 1999). As one very likeable CEO, Dumisane, whose politically conscious bent should not be ignored, told me:

"*Most of us are first world, and we are in a country that is third world… Over fifty percent of our staff are women, most of whom are black, and they bring to work what is South Africa. Most of us sit on the twelfth floor... we live the high life… We sit here on the eleventh and twelfth floor in our refined environment*."

One story which demonstrated the contradictions of these places is that of Mr Ngwenya, who sits on the same twelfth floor as mentioned above. This elderly black man seems to have a fairly mundane job receiving and giving directions to

people who arrive on the floor. If one watches him for a while he seems to be on unusually good terms, considering his station, with many of the senior people who walked by. We cracked a joke together while I waited for my next interviewee, and he told me that he was once a messenger for the chairman of the board, in fact for six chairman over a span of twenty five years, but since the inception of email communication had become redundant, but, as Janine, my young, professional, and very well connected contact at the bank put it “Ja, shame. He had through being made redundant, but we still kept him on...". Mr Ngwenya is fascinating not so much because he is “Ja shame”, but more because in spite of his working class pay and background he seems to maintain some degree of face with the senior (particularly male) staff by talking with them about golf. In fact he tells me that his brother is a professional golfer overseas, and had played with one of the above mentioned chairman. This expresses the incredible complexity of South Africa and the banks studied here. Class, race, gender, age, ethnicity, status and hierarchy were undercut by complications and contradictions at every turn, on occasions used strategically to argue for a claimed position, and on others directly and purposefully ignored.

Chapter 8: Big Bank findings:

The landscape of Big Bank:

Big Bank, most importantly, is a subsidiary of a larger banking and financial services group, 'Bigger Big Bank', which took over in the late 1990s:

"*Today's group is a network of largely autonomous but interdependent profit centres. An entrepreneurial, independent-leader mindset is rewarded. The role of the holding company,* [Bigger Big Bank]*, is to facilitate and not to control*."
(Source: bank intranet)

The conceptual operating structure of the bank, in 2007, was one in which 'leaders' are able to operate their business units with relative freedom, as Bigger Big Bank's most senior office holder expressed in the press: "We appoint you to run this department in your way, as if it is yours and you need to tell us how you intend on contributing to the region's targets". Within this there are several key issues. Firstly, the culture was fundamentally performance focused, which seemed, for the most part, to hold true in both corporate "ideology"[94] and in daily practice and thinking. This has deep historical relevance, as was indicated previously regarding the change in corporate and banking culture with regards to "monetarism" (Jones, 1992: 8) and competition.

Secondly, this independent department strategy was devised to encourage 'innovation' and 'accountability'. In other words, people (or more specifically, 'some people') have the opportunity try risky new ideas, and the support to drive them through. On the other hand, in the light of the high performance requirements, mistakes were not always tolerated. The dynamics around this

[94] I use the word here in the 'neutral' sense as suggested by Culture studies: "A neutral concept of ideology does not make direct reference to a single objective truth, but underlines the fact that the interests of different classes, fraction of classes or groups are represented or articulated by different ideologies" (Larrain, 1996: 62). This view, which differs from Marxism's ideology/truth stance (ibid.) is further supported by Thornton "the sense of resistance to dominant or hegemonic forms of culture-as-ideology is still important" (2000: 36).

become extremely complex. Consider the view of Jane, a middle manager in the marketing section of the bank:

"*The independent-leader culture is what is different about being here, compared to another company… You can move fast, but the lower ranks are disempowered because they can't land anything because they don't have the networks and power… Even when you are at the CEO level, they are not really working together, because we have different goals*."

A common critique, so common in fact that I saw it expressed everywhere from very senior managers on stage[95] in front of hundreds of employees to junior staff in smoke rooms, is that this independent department strategy creates corporate silos[96], 'empire building' and alignment of these 'leaders' more with personal than with corporate interests. While these assertions were frequently made from extremely politicized subject positions, there did seem to be widespread informal agreement about this issue, at least amongst those interviewed.

The performance based element of the culture was supported by a system of performance appraisals, based on managerial assessments of one's completion of targets set over a three month period. One's bonus, increases and career chances were decided upon through these appraisals. This is important for this study in that these appraisals formed an important topic for employee resistance and informal communication.

This bank also had some very relevant direct initiatives for managing their culture. The most relevant were 'The [Bigger Big Bank] Philosophy', an initiative aimed at instilling a set of values, "an entrepreneurial culture… essentially

[95] "As we all know, at [Big Bank] we operate in silos". Note the assertion in this manager's statement. One does not need to say 'As we all know" if that is actually the case. This statement has some risk for her – resistance from a very formal public platform.
[96] "As a result, their department's interest takes precedence over the well-being of the organization. Once one sector starts to see its own goals as more important than those of the organization as a whole, and when individualism predominates over team spirit, silos emerge" (2007, http://www.camagazine.com/index.cfm/ci_id/6798/la_id/1.htm).

captured by the concept of 'traditional values, innovative ideas'" [emphasis original] (Intranet); a large scale diversity drive, which here we shall call "*Ubuntu*", which involved workshops, excursions by banking staff to township locations, and honesty sessions amongst staff, '*Legotlas*', in which people were expected to express interpersonal issues between each other and managers; and finally a series of workshops aiming at instilling a caring and supportive culture, which we shall call here "Care and support", mainly aimed at managerial employees. These offered the main arena for managerial attempts to create certain behaviours, emotions, attitudes and identities in staff, and functioned as essential discourse against which employees at all levels were able to make counter-arguments, or use to develop viable work identities (Izraeli and Jick, 1986; Shulman, 2007; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995; Pfeffer, 1981; Mumby, 2005; Jermier, Slocum, Fry, and Gaines, 1991; Collinson, 1994).

Big Bank: conflicting histories:

A very noticeable trend amongst my interviewees was the different views they took of history, and how they constructed themselves within this. The narratives they called upon and what memories they considered salient were noticeably different, along age, race, gender, and hierarchical position lines.

One needs to understand that in the late 1990s the bank had been split into two sections, Urban and Non-urban, which, as far as the support office, operated independently but within the same building. In 1999 the bank was acquired by Bigger Big Bank, which formed a pivotal "critical situation" (Giddens, 1984: 61) in the minds of the staff, and had devastating emotional and material implications, particularly for many of those in the 'Urban' section.

As one older female employee, Noleen, who had held a position in the Non-urban section, describes it:

[The new management said to them] "*As of tomorrow you are not employed by* [Big Bank]. *You have to reapply for your jobs. Most of them were told to go.* [Head office] *was like a ghost town. Those people got a survival complex. They were very bitter because they were told to go and* [Non-urban] *stayed. It was a nightmare…the desks were empty. It was wrong…Then they realised that they didn't have skills* [i.e. they had gotten rid of the skilled workers]".

Firstly, we need to recognize that this statement is itself a "rhetorical assertion" (Kondo, 1991: 307), advancing a particular view, which was by no means shared by all. This view was held, for the most part, by older style bank employees, who had risen up through the branches over a period of between twenty and thirty five years! This narrative included a variety of memories of abuse, such as of some employees arriving and finding an envelope on their desk, informing them of their retrenchment. The central theme was a description of their stigma, in Goffman's terms (1963), as "non-persons" (Goffman, 1959: 132) in an environment that was fast becoming professionalized. This was very identity specific. Jane's friendship network embodied this, with deep trust and intimacy, and often shared opinions, between a certain set of likewise older white female friends:

"*The bank doesn't care anymore. I started when it was still* [older name for bank]*. Even when it became Big Bank they cared about their people. The change happened about six years ago… there is no loyalty anymore by the bank or the staff. Everyone is just trying to protect their jobs. The people at the top give a hard time to people below, because they are also afraid of loosing their jobs*."

Let us compare the stories of Bertie, Yvonne and Vincent in this regard. Bertie had worked at the bank for 32 years, working his way through the branches. Since the inception of Bigger Big Bank he had been through numerous restructures, had been made to reapply for his job several times, and had been retrenched, but taken back in a temporary position. As he described it:

"*It was a big shock. The bank had trained me, but then I wasn't wanted anymore. The third time I got the attitude that I'll be guided to find somewhere else… I've come this far. I'll stick it out*."

He described the way he seeks support outside of the bank through his church and community at home, and clearly gave a sense of this 'survivor' mentality Jane referred to. It is essential to note that his strategy for coping at Big Bank was fundamentally informed by the narrative of his past. He framed his story as one of exclusion through status between old and new employees, but held a sort of optimistic acceptance in this regard. He gave the example of a particularly exuberant and out-going friend, who is liked as a warm, playful male character in the department, who had decided, as had Bertie, to make do with the situation as it stood[97]. Thus Bertie's network in terms of informal power was fundamentally influenced by the bank's history. Firstly, his friendships with older (white) "guys" in the bank, their connections through humour, and shared history, and the access to information such networks afforded him. Within this is also a positioning between "us", people whose identities are deeply wound up in the organization and in being "bankers"[98], and the newer, more corporate, specialized and educated type non-bankers. In fact he admits that it was with some satisfaction that he saw the newer "CAs" (chartered accountants), who had been brought in to handle many of the senior positions after the merger, struggling to manage in a 'banking' environment.

In the micropolitics of the interview environment Bertie certainly demonstrated this more resigned position – he neither took a status level as teacher with me, explaining how the organization works, nor expressed a desire to directly elevate his station professionally. Lionel, who was about ten years younger than Bertie,

[97] "Ja, we rag each other. John is a jovial guy. From when he arrives in the morning he will greet everyone at the top of his voice... He and I have made the same decision. While we are needed here we will make the best of it."

[98] This idea of being a "banker" was an important narrative in both research sites. The personal traits that are required to operate in the highly financial, but relatively law and process bound banking world are an important discourse used by older bankers in identity and social group formation.

had a very similar, ‘make it work while I am still here’ approach, but also drove towards professionalized expertise, in his career and his manner. In fact, he is furthering his studies in the face of numerous contradictions and conflicts with regard to his value in the bank:

"*I came out of the army and learned in the bank. For me it was a 'join the bank and see the world’ kind of situation. The bank has been the foundation of everything that I have gotten. See how it compares to* [another bank]*. The corporate world is ruthless… I am forty, and it is a very challenging time because with BEE anyone can be disposed of tomorrow. As I get older pay gets higher… We look at it very shallowly. I can replace you with a young graduate tomorrow. It is ruthless, absolutely ruthless*."

Lionel’s story was one of taking himself out of the danger of such competitive “ruthlessness” through professionalism – he has studied further. Of course, the contradiction here was that he remained, in my observation, exceptionally loyal to a bank, which he did not see as having been all that loyal to him. Within this, we need to realize that for older bankers the bank had been a central element of their adult life. They were distinct from a variety of other employees in this. They had formed friendships in the bank, generally had some sort of network of other older colleagues, and had more loyalty to the institution than the newer managers. However, as always, there were contradictions[99].

Consider the position expressed by Ronald, an older, black middle manager:

[99] James, an older, white ‘banker’ who works in the same department as Lionel, expresses tremendous, although ambivalent, loyalty to the larger ideals of the Bigger Big Bank’s chief executive. In fact, this was the irony for many of the more ambivalent employees. They would often critique the politics and contradictions of Big Bank’s retail division, in which they worked, but accord tremendous support to Bigger Big Bank, and the larger Big Bank. Importantly, this seemed to happen, for the most part, across racial, gender, age, and on occasion class lines. People seemed to really like the ideals espoused through the culture change initiatives, but saw numerous inconsistencies in local application of these.

"*People don't use the official platform. They rather use the unofficial. The restructure* [after the merger between Bigger Big Bank and Big Bank] *helped maintain this deeper scar that never healed. This will be the route cause, but you will see it in minor incidents… People either bad mouth the company... in the passages, saying that the people who run the company don't know their business. They shoot from the hip. A strategy is non-existent*."

One sees then, a mass of resistant identity, in terms of the literature cited above, based on age dynamics. For numerous interviewees the central line of conflict in Big Bank was the tension was between younger people waiting for older, often white and male, employees to retire. It should be noted, however, that in recent years many of these older workers had embraced the discourse of 'change'.

Several young black professionals shared stories of confidential information about them being spread through the older white managerial networks, and often complained that they fealt "that they are just seen as window dressing". However, in spite of this they too generally referred back to the age issue. There were exceptions, as will be discussed, however, this age issue needs to be seen in association with class, race and gender, consider Ronald again:

"I *have noticed with the leadership, with regards to trying to get people to mix. I have noticed that people group themselves. Firstly, because they feel comfortable with the level of intellect. Sometimes it is also with colour. The same thing happens when someone from another culture or group tries to connect. The problem is creating trust and 'an invite' into that group… They are here because of their qualifications - it is paper. They are parroting knowledge. They don't actually know what they are doing. That is why the business is not doing well*."

We can see, then, through the dynamics around age that the conflict of different habitus positions is fundamentally historical – as per Sahlins (1985) and Comaroff and Comaroff's (1992) use of the term. On occasions this had some

entertaining results – new ideas of business came with new ideas of society, such as a group of older men sitting around discussing bikini waxes, as if for the first time[100].

A noticeable absence in this regard was a historical opinion on gender in the minds of my informants. Gender, which will be examined in coming chapters, was often an unconscious, but very influential position in historical terms.

Consider the position of MaVivienne, an older 'Zulu' woman[101], who had held a professional position in the bank for three years. MaVivienne complained to me specifically about how older black woman are perceived in general, and how she kept needing to prove herself (in fact she has just finished her PhD). She both expressed this directly, and in terms of her lack of connections to a race and age exclusive 'grapevine': "*I find that very unusual. It links to suspicion. How do I know who I am talking to... I have to go through a number of layers to get to where I want to go. I have to read and put on a show, and keep proving myself*."[102]

In this regard she explains the social distances in terms of 'layers': "*Colour, background, class, assumed position in the company. There are not really people I can talk with. I am very lonely. I have to go outside of work… I have to talk outside, at* [an outside coffee shop]*… The common ground is age. What I find difficult is that they are happy to be where they are, but I am not happy to stay put*."

[100] Consider how relevant such issues are to the changes in culture and identity for staff in terms of Giddens' (1984) view of agents as social theorists, who learn and expand their bounded knowledge through social interaction and experience. Often mundane changes can have profound unintended consequences.

[101] There were extraordinarily few older black women in both banks. This would seem to be a direct manifestation of such factors as the hiring practices required by law of South African corporations during the 1980s, and a lack of skills in that age group due to Bantu education practices, as well as perhaps the social dynamics of a history of naturalized white, male workplace cultures?

[102] This issue of 'suspicion' relates to trust, which, next to age, was seen as by far the most salient issue in the bank's cultural dynamics, and was a frequent discourse of dissent. We will examine it in due course.

Paradoxically, she described the way key joking relationships in the bank for her were with older white men, and an older Indian woman who sat near her. She anecdotally gave an example of how personal relationships had shown her the other side of race: "Vivienne, you have to forgive me. Before I met you I did not know that there were black woman your age who were educated and who I could relate to at this level". She found a source of pleasure in this immediate work environment to be that "The whole group of us in this cubicle laugh about sexist, racist jokes" – she explained that she gives it back as much as she gets it. The relationship was such that, while in other circumstances, particularly with her managers, she cites racial discrimination as a line of protest, the racial jokes in their intimate setting were somehow acceptable.

Her friendships with female workers went largely unmentioned. About her older female 'Indian' friend she said: "We do lunch, tea and we just natter… She tells me how her own boss behaves". That MaVivienne formed opinions about managers and work circumstances in these talks with her friend, or the lack of 'significant' content (this is 'just natter') speaks of the value placed on such informal, easy talk in corporate spheres[103]. Note that MaVivienne was not employed by the bank when the most significant restructures and changes occurred, but their impact, with regards to age and educational status were strongly in line with the narratives offered by longer serving employees. Of course, the larger South African historical implications of racial discrimination are also very apparent. In relation to class in these dynamics, let us turn to the finance department:

[103] If one considers this entire set of interactions with people around her desk, we can see that lines of race, gender and perhaps even the stringency of socially required political correctness become less in the "backstage" space espoused by Goffman (1959). Certainly her story demonstrates the manner in which the intimacy and dropped guards of backstage interaction have important implications within racialised South African workplaces. An example that shows this is Ronald above, who's older white male friend, Graham, frequently shares racial jokes with him. I remember talking to a distraught Graham after one such joke backfired in a meeting, and he was publicly chastised – one can say such things informally, but not in meetings.

The Big Bank finance example:

I had been warned, by specific informants, that the Big Bank finance department was a place of professionalized and unfriendly corporate instrumentalism and politics. Let us start with Krishni, a young PA, studying towards her law degree who said of the department: "People greet each other around here. Usually they are understanding. There is nothing wrong with this department. There is no internal politics". The less "professional" departments "downstairs", however, she described as "short, dark and ugly".

The sentiment of satisfaction in the department was expressed by many of the employees, in extreme contradiction to what I had expected. One needs to understand that the room was split in two, with junior staff on one side, and professional staff on the other. These younger professionals were relatively well educated and very mixed in terms of race and gender. Both managers and staff in this section gave me numerous examples of enjoyable work interactions, with younger staff going to lunch, joking around and sharing tremendous amount of camaraderie[104]. The humour and talk included subjects such as race, gender, current events, and several examples of teasing for linguistic *faux pas* and ridiculing of colleagues attempting to 'suck up' to Naisha, the extraordinarily professional, highly educated department director[105]. An example of the degree of collegiality expresses by these staff is that of Charlie and Loyiso, two young men, friends in their common Xhosa language, and enjoyment of "partying", would make an effort not to exclude themselves from the social dynamics by using too much Xhosa in social situations. This awareness of the exclusionary act of speaking one's home language in an English medium corporation was very rare in this research. For the most part language politics were a significant line of

[104] With some important exceptions, which will be looked at later.

[105] Naisha's reputation as a difficult boss was in many ways organization wide. People from other departments purportedly frequently asked what it was like to work with her, and (white male) informants in the HR department attributed massive managerial inconsistencies, favouritism and turnover to her excessive focus on performance. This dynamic of the perceived incapability's of female senior management will be examined later.

racial and cultural conflict and dissent[106]. That these were missing here is no small matter, although several black staff in this section certainly questioned the lack of specifically 'black' management in the department[107].

The most startling attribute of these employees was their lack of awareness of any corporate politics and history of the bank itself, particularly in the light of the significant turnover the department had experienced over the preceding year or two. The topic of turnover is massively relevant to informal communication strategies[108] (Krackhardt and Porter, 1985; Shulman, 2007). There is little that shows an employee's dissatisfaction more starkly than them resigning, and the politics of how previous resignations are framed by managers and colleagues has impact upon how the social situation in a department will be perceived (Shulman, 2007). In this case knowledgeably placed (older white) informants in HR asserted the political dynamics, and particularly those around Naisha, as the reason most of the top (older white) management in Finance decided to leave, while within the mostly new, and mostly 'of colour', Finance department managers generally held a 'for career opportunities' line. The mostly new younger staff had no explanation, and seldom an opinion on the matter.

On the other side of the room, although they were separated by less than a meter of floor space, one finds an entirely different Finance department. These predominantly older female 'junior staff', as they were described, held a racialised (they often defining themselves as 'coloured') and gendered position

[106] Goffman connects using another language in a social situation as breaking with the "requirements of decorum" (1959: 94), which one is only likely to do if one has higher status or as an act of distancing (ibid.). Handelman (1973) extensively demonstrates this in his analysis of an Izraeli workplace, demonstrating how workers would politically exclude or include each other by changing from Arabic to Hebrew or *visa versa* in conversation.

[107] The discrepancies between local and on the ground applications of black identity invariably contradicted the values espoused through the Freedom Charter and the Employment Equity Act, as predicted by Jansen (2004 in Urban, 2006) and hinted at with regards to blackness and ethnicity by Hall (1988 in Morley and Chen, 1996) above. I directly, and from a second hand source, observed the Employment Equity officials in both banks researched here question the inclusion of 'Indian' within the 'black' fold.

[108] Shulman (2007) notes that when employees leave the knowledge of resistance and of organizational history leaves with them, whilst Bussing, Bissels, Fuchs, and Perrar (1999) note that it can contradictorily increase satisfaction – all the unhappy people have left.

(specifically as mothers). They opened up to me noticeably more than the senior management in the department, who maintained a strong line of support for the dominant culture[109]. Consider the position of Verna, an older woman who has worked in the bank for some time:

"*In the old Big Bank people were more compassionate, caring… It is the them and us. They are the CAs, the guys with the degrees. I teach respect to my kids... They* (managers) *focus on them and us. We have the experience. You don't get that in one year. They don't care if you are sick.... We were a great team. In the past two years things have changed… What counts more, experience or learning? Someone will get a job because he has paper. The kippies* [young people] *have to come to us and we have to help them. Is that fair? I do understand these young people. I mean, I do have children… If there is a vacancy, then groom someone for that position... Give us a chance… You know, in the olden days you were rewarded for faith and service... I only come here for the bread and butter. Before, it wasn't for the salary*."

While Verna herself noted her contradictory position in being a mother, and wanting to support these young people, the women in this area contrasted their personal experiences, citing loss of loyalty from their employer, being undervalued, giving several examples of colleagues attempting to study, and still not gaining headway in a system they seemed to see as functioning fundamentally against their interests. In this light they used the corporate

[109] Three matters in this regard, one, the lack of issues is analytically acceptable. However, these need to be taken in the light of large, rapid turnover, and numerous claims to the contrary, both within and without the department. Two, the younger, less senior professionals also seemed to let their guards down more than management, but, as just discussed, had very few 'secrets' to reveal. Three, the senior management, the majority of whom were middle class males (of colour), held a political line in the larger organization regarding old school white males: ""There is an older crow in other units. That's where the culture to me becomes an issue… I see guys sitting in the break areas - all older guys who don't want to leave. I feel that that is wrong because they are preventing the training and development of someone else. I am saying train up the younger guys as part of what you do. Don't think that 'my job is at threat', if we are going to live the Big Bank values... That person is responsible for two or three people leaving the company". This political stance, although very valid, needs to be seen within the context of the larger contradictions of the Finance department.

discourse, particularly corporate claims of ‘ubuntu’ and ‘Care and Support’ to demonstrate, in their life narratives their perception of the falsity behind these claims.

From their perspective the bank’s history included a strong, and, for me extremely moving, story of day to day struggles, of raising children, of illness, and maintaining personal value and identity in the face of overbearing commodity capitalism. Their bearing was intimate, less focused on describing overarching “Great Tradition” (Sahlins, 1985: 49), although including the stories of the changes of structure and CEOs. Their memories offered perspectives that were not available elsewhere. As one woman, Maureen, explained to me:

For people of colour: "*There were separate entrances and toilets. We were not allowed to work in the front line. We had to work in the back office… It was the best thing ever. Because we ran the thing… Also, before we were 1B, then you had to do two or three or four jobs to be 1A. We had to go through the process. Whites just walked into the 1A position. It was good, because we got all the experience. It was before 1989*”.

Or as Valerie puts it:

"Back then with the racist issues we could do more. They weren't petty. They cared about people. They weren't petty, as long as the work gets done… We talk about how the bank was then. Even though they were Afrikaners, things were better than they are now.”

Conrad: “*Are there people who are friends?*”

"*Yes, people of the past, people in the project team. I do enjoy good repartee. I speak to anybody, man… We talk about how it was in the past, how restricted it was. We were not allowed to use computers*."

Note, firstly how this mirrors Van Dongen's (2005) findings regarding age, class and race in terms of memory and *apartheid* contradictions. The structural racism of that era both subjected these women, and gave them opportunity for positive identity constructions, which they call upon today in a discourse of caring, whilst maintaining their subordination. Consider the daily reference to age, the history in present structure, as expressed by another older mother in this section:

"*It is the way they do things... They will say, 'Oooo, I am not going to sit on the job for five years'. It is not the work, it is the way they say things. They will say it in front of you! To me it was all about my children, nothing else....*"

Anita's argument, of course draws on a discourse of family versus corporate interests, education versus experience, and exposes the daily loss of status[110], unconsciously affirmed by their younger colleagues. This transience, the ability of highly qualified younger professionals to 'job hop', as it is often described, created lines of status, and was a common topic in smoke rooms and coffee areas in Big Bank[111]. It also follows the arguments offered by Gordon (1995) regarding liberal racism, or in this case a mix of age, gender and classism. That the identity of the "professional", as an element of larger corporate culturalism initiatives, seemed in this department to naturalise a set of values and lifestyle, so as to make the older, less professional, genderised Other[112] invisible, and the realm of truth restricted by this, in terms of Foucault (1980):

[110] And in some ways of her value as a youthful woman: "I started when I was about twenty three. The vibe was good then, but like I say, as you grow you get more mature.. *you are not like vibrant anymore*. They are looking after the young ones."

[111] A commonly held workplace theory was that each time one jumped jobs one would pick up a raise. This was a perception held in both banks, with the view that their employers valued outside recruits more than internal staff. In fact I observed several younger staff stating to each other, in easy earshot of older employees, that "if one has been working at the bank for twenty years one has failed in life".

[112] Note that race, here, was not the main line of argument although there was a slight tendency towards young 'Indian' / older 'coloured', which several interviewees noted.

"*If we are all sitting around a table and someone high up comes, they* [the younger managers] *change… Status. It's all about status… We already spoke about it being them and us, but they said that it is not so. We had a Lekgotla. You hear things in the corridors, but in the Lekgotla people won't say anything because they are scared of victimization. Naisha wants her own clique. They have a lot to learn. We show them stuff. The people that left had been there a long time*."

A younger, slightly wealthier women, who did not form part of the main clique, observed the political struggles between them with regards to class assertions, such as being mothers, requesting that younger staff call them “Auntie” and so forth. This, my younger informant observed, resulted in these older women struggling to assert managerial power over their fellows in the face of historical and cultural intimacy. They could not simultaneously be friendly confidant and disciplining boss, and attempts at such were undermined by lack of authoritative distance.

History from above: the senior managerial perspective:
While we have seen politicized historical perceptions, and to some degree their use in talk, with rifts on age, race, class and gender fronts, we need to consider the position of those at, or near, the top of the corporate hierarchy.

Firstly, academically the position of middle management is seen as often politically unstable (Izraeli, 1975), as demonstrated through the amount of information they offered me, and in line with theorizing that these managers have reason to frame social dynamics towards their interests (O’day, 1974; Smith, 1996; .Thompson, 1983). In comparison the historical narratives of disenfranchisement through age, with their race, class and gender layering were almost entirely absent from my interactions with their seniors, who almost unanimously created a frame of organizational unity.

In the actual interviews there was a tendency amongst very senior people to define the realm of acceptable discourse, of what I could legitimately ask or discuss. The social situation of the interview was clearly demarcated by them with regards to professionalized language, tonality, terms of address[113] and often a lack of humour. I was under pressure to perform, and backstage intimacy was often not possible. Take the position of Wikus, a very senior director:

"*We talk about Lekgotlas, but yet when it comes to this level I can just decide to change things. We brought a lot of new leaders into the organization. They are well educated, but have less people skills… It is hard for people to manage managers. But we have taken people who can hardly manage themselves. People used to go through the ranks. The average manager used to take fifteen years to reach that position… With the introduction of broad banding and getting rid of layers in the reporting line older people are kind of in the 'danger category'.”* He spoke about older people's fear of loosing out: *"The idea that 'we know it all'. It is not a new thing for young people to think that they know a lot*."

Thus, while he acknowledges many of the issues we touched upon earlier, they were generally accorded less political and historical significance than what other interviewees seemed to assert (as per Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). That some managers demonstrated an attempt to reframe their workplace cultures as generalized societal problems, as Wikus does with the age issue in particular, rather than as a result of historically, politically and contextually specific structuring dynamics, is strongly in line with post-structural feminist critiques of 'corporate culture' (e.g. Gordon, 1995; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Collinson,

[113] The dynamics of this are complex. On the one hand these senior managers were demonstrating precisely the professional identities whose constructed image of unity has been so critiqued by post-structural feminism (Fournier, 1999; Gordon, 1995; Hodgson, 2005), but simultaneously, for the many of the older senior managers and directors we should see this distance through professionalized knowledge as co-created in the view of humour and play as contrary to the "Protestant work ethic" (Weber, 1930 in Collinson, 2002: 276). The contradictions in these masculine identity constructions (Collinson, 2003) were numerous. Family problems, personal conflicts, illness, as well as stories showing how the system had disenfranchised these senior managers as much as their subordinates formed an important topic in informal office gossip and were often used to reconstruct the image of managerial and professional power.

2005a)[114] and the pressure to create idealized impressions of the companies they run (Pfeffer, 1981; Shulman, 2007). One generally did not hear these people's politics from themselves, but rather heard through numerous well placed alternative sources.

This often had a note of being 'positive', as one highly educated manager said of his mostly male 'team':

"*In my environment there is total transparency, total honesty, lots of humour. We are absolutely genuine with each other. We treat each other like family. I have given them a vision, created an environment, and look for improvement and innovation, and I provide coordination… We are a bunch of professionals together, like a professional sportsman. They know they must pitch for practice. I treat them as professional, so they know they must not let down the team*".[115]

The totalizing masculinity, driven by managerial discourse, did not seem to allow for the troubles of hegemonically disenfranchised 'Others'.

The Ubuntu programme:

One other aspect of historical significance for Big Bank is how corporate ideology constructs itself and its subjects in relation to larger South African history. At Big Bank the primary vehicle for this was a two day facilitated session at a conference centre, which in theory all staff would go through. The main drive in this was the idea of South African unity, or as they phrased it, 'ubuntu'[116], which Van den Heuvel (2008) argues is part of a historically based larger drive towards African management in South African business discourse[117]. While these

[114] To reiterate Gordon (1995: 7) in this regard: "corporate culture represents a kind of localism, wherein culture's powers are severed from history".
[115] This would seem to be an example of "Instrumental intimacy" (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004: 437)?
[116] Ubuntu: "essentially, an ethos of reciprocity and mutual aid…" (Van den Heuvel, 2008: 50)
[117] In the late eighties and nineties a number of business leaders met with political representatives to discuss business' role in change in the South Africa. Following this, "Several authors utilised an inspirational, high-energy type of 'transformation language', propagating new

programmes do bring to light previously unheard voices, and in many ways expose white hegemony, Van den Heuvel also warns of the danger of creating an essentialised idea of 'African' identity[118].

In Big Bank's version of this, the underlying narrative connected the individual with Big Bank, with being South African, and one's success was framed as connected with the profitable success of the bank and of the country. In this process, although various historical positions were touched upon, the tendency, seemed to be a polarity between 'black' and 'white'[119], where the participants are split into white, and non-white (labelled as 'black') and encouraged to share emotionally charged experiences of past racism, a drive a cathartic group healing[120]. We were shown pictures of Zanele Mbeki in a Voortrekker outfit, and had a Muslim woman from Cape Town teach us how to do African dance.

While a certain group of young white men at the actual seminar I attended did express radical dissent, mainly challenging whether examining South Africa's past was necessary, and pointing out that their managers were not actually supporting the programme: "They are not buying into it, but they are making other people buy into it". As was often the case, this opinion was expressed in the lunch break, to a small group, outside of the front stage spotlight.

While the nationalist performance of South African identity was most certainly supported by many, the symbolic aspect of the workshops for Big Bank, and its

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approaches to business and management... 'African management' was part of this flow of optimistic and refreshing management visions and new buzzwords." (Van den Heuvel, 2008: 43)

[118] "Does the 'African management' approach reveal an indigenous 'high performance' business model? Or, is it merely a bizarre folkloristic notion of Africa's 'cultural heritage', based on a largely imaginative, romanticised past?" (Van den Heuvel, 2008: 42)

[119] Or as one informant suggested, specifically between Afrikaans and Zulu, the essentialised versions of the 'white' and 'black' subject positions.

[120] Note Kondo's (1990: 114) comments on the Ethics Retreat, a similar training programme, where she describes the manner in which: "this discourse of self-transformation must be placed within a larger historical and political context. Ideologies of the self are not innocent with respect to power relationships... Selves are produced through specific disciplines and transgressions elicit particular punishments, just as the ethics doctrines offer particular, compelling, and satisfying pathways to self-fulfilment."

reputation in society should not be ignored. The stories of exclusion, both in past discriminatory practices in the bank, and in current actual day to day lines of power and status, were utterly absent. The politics of ethnicity, race, gender and identity here too took a larger, pan-South African image, rather than a local discussion of daily lines of discrimination. However, contradictorily, I also had many informants thoroughly praise these processes, claiming that the ideas therein finally brought their African heritage to light, or, for the wealthier and more westernised participants, gave them perspective on how 'the Other half' had lived. That many people, from a variety of identity positions also utterly rejected the usefulness and sincerity of these programmes, is entirely a result of local political and identity based subjective experiences, as this thesis is endeavouring to show.

Gossip and humour in Big Bank:

Example 1:

Within one of the departments studied here there was a particularly strong alliance of older white men, originally from the Non-urban sector of the bank. These 'guys' were extraordinarily well connected in the bank, and were often a very fruitful source of information and insight. In fact it was precisely their masculinity, particularly in humour, that enabled me to establish the relationships that would allow such sharing, as well as them simply being supportive nice people. On one occasion I was walking through a passage on my way to a meeting when onw of these 'guys', Randall, called out to two women who were going on to a meeting ahead of him:

Randall: "*You* ouks [people] *are abandoning me*."
Cara: "*You are the one who arrived late*."
Randall: "*Conrad, are you going to support me?... It's the abuse of the male species*."

(Alwyn walks past and comments)
Alwyn: "*I always thought it was females who were abusive*."

The genderised positioning of the statement is historically and politically placed. Firstly, all of those present were junior to Alwyn, the man making the final comment. Secondly, Alwyn's relationship with Randall was quite long and very close. Alwyn in particular, as the more senior, and more specialized of the two, would seem to be connected at extremely high levels in the organization. The camaraderie of male circles of humour and sharing salient workplace information were the source of his power. In interviews these men clearly rejected that they would transfer 'gossip', although what they had to say was involved in forming public opinion, and often judgment about specific employees, managers and directors, and so would seem to be gossip, in a 'professionalized' form.

These networks should be seen as reconfirming masculinity for a number reasons. Firstly, in observation in this department, such as in meetings and informal banter, the majority of the joking, particularly in front-stage, but informal spheres, was provided by male members of staff, as the research would predict (Collinson, 1992; Provine, 2001). That they would often use humour to initiate conversations, and in turn affirm gender power relations, is in line with Goffman's (1959) thoughts on bracketing and gender.

Secondly, these circles seemed to be characterised by a certain type of knowledge, and certain manner of address. One needed to be a credible source of informal information in the eyes of "those men" (as one female informant described them). While "those men" in this instance seemed to be about a specific white male clique, in whom men of colour were occasionally involved, the major line of differentiation seemed to be gender. It appeared that women did not have the same "boyish" type of humour skills to maintain the emotional tone of the talk.

It is important to note play of interests in this scenario. While the women in the department generally seemed to occupy a position contrary to this powerful clique, they did not do so in any unified front, and were split along race and class lines. The stories generally included assertions of favouritism, and of an unspoken gendered racial hierarchy, reconfirmed through the use of Afrikaans in the English medium environment and meetings.

Example 2:

This was a significant, and incredibly complex example of gendered, racialised South African identity politics in action.

"*Because they want to be included and they are not. That's why* skinner [gossip] *would start. It is a bit healthy because they show an* ***interest*** *in the work place… When a restructure happens they feel disempowered, which is why they skinner. They want to* ***influence the process***." (Rene, middle manager, Big Bank marketing)[121]

This department had been through a number of restructures, and was strongly influenced by the performance focus of Big Bank's strategy. The dynamics are easiest understood in terms of several cliques, the most powerful being what some called the "Tennis Club" (because of a cultural trait for wearing their jerseys over their shoulders[122]). The "Tennis Club" was a group of young, but extremely careerist white women who held strong informal connections with more senior executives. This power was not without its responding resistance: as with allegations of favouritism in the 'boy's club' mentioned in the previous example,

[121] While Tucker (1993: 43) notes that "Voice, one the other hand, represents an attempt to improve the organization...", the troubles she is referring to are in line with Rothschild's (2004: 6) findings that managerial infighting and incompetence can lead to "the highest levels of sexual harassment, subordinate ingratiation behaviour, and infighting", as will be seen shortly.
[122] Note Kondo (1997) as far as taste and clothing, and the humorous reference to a particular style of dress in this case. The 'tennis club' refers to their wealth, and their similar world views, the affirmation of which could certainly be seen in a particular stance to ways of doing business and assumed cultural norms.

these women were under pressure to distance themselves from Suzette, the department head and a member of this clique, and had taken jobs which attempted to demonstrate this distance.

"*I was nominated from* [a big award]*, so I felt uncomfortable... I feel that I need to live up to what you guys have done. I also felt my age was... not a barrier, but if definitely gets brought up a lot... I am sensitive in terms of people liking you a lot*."

In the light of her consciously attempting to display distance from Suzette, there can be no doubt that the gossip, jokes about the 'tennis club', and so forth have had an impact here. Suzette herself had inherited a very tense political history.

Suzette explained the incredible pressure in the department:

"*Because of the constant pressure on results people started leaving. All the people issues were taken out of the equation. Anyone can get the results, but what about the consequences*?"

The major consequence of this, in the minds of almost all her subordinates interviewed here was that this, together with the restructures, had created a massive lack of trust at all levels. This lack of trust was pointed out over and over to me by employees right across the spectrum of Big Bank's head office.

In this department this inherited history was part of, but more department specific than the histories narrated earlier. Suzette, however, did assert that this department had:

"*Good people, good intentions. The biggest feedback is that 'this is a* lekker [nice] *place to work*.'"

While there was some agreement on this, there was a far stronger sentiment that at various levels, and across racial, gender, and ethnic boundaries, people were dissatisfied, and expressed this dissatisfaction in talk about favouritism, lack of opportunity for growth, and, with a few important exceptions, a continuous derogation of the 'Care and Support' and 'Ubuntu' programmes.

Regarding a localized example, lets us take a particular group of middle aged women, who drew strongly upon their identities as 'Indian', and were frequently referred to by their white colleagues and management as "the Indian clique":

"*Currently in our area there were huge politics. It was a female cat fight… The people that are loyal and dedicated are often overlooked. It is all about favouritism. It is all about who licks who's backside*."

The above was told to me by Krijay about her white female management. While being very open about her frustrations, she by no means rejected the organization as a whole:

"*There is politics across all companies… In most cases it is not the organization. It's the management of the organization. Big Bank as a whole is fantastic. I look forward to coming to work in the morning*."

The contradictory nature of her position was such that she would frequently start her sentences with "I don't mean to be negative", and on several occasions went to great lengths to assure me that she is a "positive" person. In this organization her caution of being framed as 'negative', should be seen as a response to a stigma placed on behaviour which does not take up a 'positive' position with regards to managerial culture[123], and the status quo (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Gordon, 1995; Shulman, 2007).

[123] Generally those with power in this organization framed 'negative' commentary as individual personality problems, rather than social structural phenomena.

This clique's interactions involved both gossip and humour as strategies to develop agency in their environment. Thus, while waiting for their manager to speak at a baby shower for a fellow staff member, one of these women leant over to me and said, in a humorous tone, "There is the falseness. Let's go participate in the falseness" (The comment implying that manager about to speak was false in her interactions). In fact, my inclusion in their fold exemplifies the manner in which they would attempt to create feasible alliances against perceived injustice. They even made comments about directly engineering my influence on the situation, suggesting I attend one of their Lekgotla sessions, which were commonly agreed to be dysfunctional, and too riddled with distrust to be effective:

"*She will be all nice because you will be there. I would love to see that, because of how funny it will be when they are under surveillance… You will see: us and them*."

Their humour was culturally very specific. They would engage in stories about religious injustices, and had a mode of teasing and play that commonly drew on both cultural and racialised heritage. New employees of colour were drawn into their circles. As one new young employee, who was enthusiastic and rated her level of fulfilment at 8/10 (but added: "It might change, I have been told it will."), told me:

"*Mostly corridor talk. Things like that are never told to people who can make a difference… I don't understand the history. I haven't been exposed. There is distrust because of the changes… When you hear things it makes you question stuff… As people become more comfortable with you, you get more honest opinions… People say they like their career. Then they say that they are thinking of resigning, which makes her ask whether this place is for you… People who*

don't speak up are in the majority… But it is a two way process. People need to speak up."

Thus, rather than critiquing them from within the mainstream, she seems to be reconstructing her own subjectivity – 'people should speak up' – in order to maintain her own identity position in relation to the larger clique's homogenizing cultural affirmations.

However, the reins of power applied by the white female managers particularly maligned by this group, and, from my and several other significant observers' perspectives, not unfairly so, need to be acknowledged. When approaching their immediate boss, many of these slightly older Indian women felt their attempts at play and humour were directly rejected and scrutinized:

"*I am very cautious when I approach Celeste.* ***My approach and tone will change****. With Celeste there is always high business jargon*."

Or:

" ***You don't feel like you can be yourself****… Sometimes you get carried away. Always a comment we make - it's too much now…* ***They'll give you funny looks***."

Note, then the way that social control, in terms of Foucault (1979) above is reinforced in surveillance. Their local strategy of humour was undermined in the face of managerial and professionalized power - their social space was necessarily always front stage in her presence, in spite of their back stage survival strategies of intimacy, humour and gossip. Attempts to crack through this by inviting these white women to lunch, and other cultural spaces defined as 'Indian' by both sides, were rejected.

In fact, the lack of humour in this group when in the presence of this manager was itself an object of surveillance:

"*If you look at the two teams, there was very little laughter and joking around. In the small team there was. Other people started picking it up. Even Suzette saw that there was the side that was working and the side that wasn't. The side that wasn't having fun*."

The example that in particular demonstrates the cultural specificity of these identity positions, is that of the men in the department, who were seen as neutral in relation to the feminine politics. In fact they were strategically used as communication avenues, as trusted ‘middlemen’, and moderators. Gender itself was seldom a direct topic of resistance, with the exception of the narrative of overbearing women bosses by some subordinates, and as more classic feminism from a specifically culturally placed professionalized type of white women. This is in line with comments in this regard by McNay (2000) and Moahloli (1997), and again shows the complexity of identity politics in South Africa.

With regards to how these women used identity positioning, gossip, the grapevine and humour to impact on their local setting towards their interests, by the time I left the department had gone through some radical changes. Both disliked managers resigned and a small restructure took place, which my ‘Indian’ friends framed this as directly a result of their persistence, and utilization of white male networks to deliver their opinions to senior management. The managers themselves remained ambiguous as to the truth of these claims.

On a final note, we need to realize that this situation created a clear ‘us’ and ‘them’ scenario in the minds of these informants. In other settings in this same department we have immensely more complicated examples of where excluded

black female[124] staff observed and struggled against white, Afrikaans, networks of power, whilst the Afrikaans speaking colleagues themselves struggled individually along lines of fracture that they only shared with a very few trusted friends[125]. Lack of trust and perceptions of favouritism were the main discourses of dissent, and often attributed to excessive internal competition and workloads. The officially sanctioned cultural measurements were themselves rejected:

"*In Suzette's defence, she didn't know. All the staff satisfaction indexes were positive. The reason was that they were scared to tell the truth*".

"*All organizations focus on teams,* ubuntu*, blah, blah, blah, but they don't live it… They bring all these other fancy companies in to assess us… You should read the answers. It is that Big Bank is not at fault. It is always blamed at employees*."

On a historical note, the last I heard, Suzette had resigned from the company (as she had later informally told me she was going to do[126]). This was in no small part because of a further political coup in the department, in which a white male director was placed in a new level above her, and a team of almost exclusively white male older bankers was brought into the team at her level, in line with a change of CEO. That one of these powerful senior managers used to start each

[124] With a 2/10 fulfilment level one woman said to me: "It is like you are in the team, and that is why they talk to you. In a meeting it is very business like. But, it stops there. We are saying you will walk here, and you will never see your top managers greeting. Can't you be decent enough to say hallo? Maybe it is culture, because in our black culture you will never do it. When you need something, you will start greeting me then."

[125] As one Afrikaans woman in the same area said it: "they have this whole Care and Support thing... and?... and?... I don't see anything. Maybe I am looking too close.... They never get rid of a bad manager. It's always a bad staff member. They resign. Then we go, shouldn't we be leaving also. Do they know something that we don't. I think that that is generally how we find out - they don't tell us."

[126] Note, yet again the tendency for me to be offered more confidential information by informants when it became in their interests to do so, indicating a connection between the allowance of back stage status (and the subsequent intimate alliances) with one's interests in a particular historical moment.

day by walking around the office kissing all the women 'hello', demonstrates the masculine networks of power she was up against[127].

Example 3:

In one of the departments studied here was another particularly powerful group of highly qualified middle aged managers, who had a habit of sitting in an office talking and sharing humour. Participation in this, as observed by other members of the department, was decided upon in part by lines of masculinity and in part by seniority. Thus, one female informant suggested to me that she could participate because of her proximity in her job to the head of the department, while her more junior male friend could not.

The most influential member of this boy's club was a particularly flamboyant manager whose humorous style of control was frequently a point of contention in the department. In this he would hide strong managerial power behind a not-so-subtle joking frame, and on occasions radically shift to strong, and emotionalized outbursts. He demonstrated this on several occasions in front of me, and even interceded in an interview with a subordinate to do so. The subordinate's reaction demonstrated a rejection of this managerial control. She simply did not laugh. As she said afterwards:

"*That was really rude. He came way off the topic and came to make a joke. He had no respect, but he needed to butt in. He knows that I am not happy with it, but he is just thick skinned*."

In this dynamic we need to see several issues. Firstly, the use of humour to deliver control, particularly in masculine humour forms as used here, can be argued to follow the same lines as those of joking as in resistance. His framing of

[127] In fact, I was employed by Suzette to give a comedy performance at this new 'team's' first function, and had this kissing story given to me by a female audience member as a topic for ridicule and humour. Resistance in participant observation!

control as humour, or in this case merely the social normative control of making people laugh, creating a social atmosphere where people felt obliged to laugh, was directly rejected. In this case it is not humour as resistance, but rather not laughing as resistance. Consider how this contrasts with the scenario in the section above where the manager rejected attempts at humour with a serious tone, as this middle manager did for her senior here. Politics of laughter are fundamentally genderised and hierarchical, and, in the light of humour's status as a means to say without offence, entirely a matter of framing. In line with the Foucaultian view of power and resistance operating within the same space, humour in socially asymmetrical situations is effectively a contest of whose social definition will hold.

Big Bank concluding remarks:

While the critique above has been at times harsh, and may create the impression of an overwhelming negativity, these people seemed to maintain some degree of daily 'happiness':

" *Pleasure, aesthetics, and popular culture can all motivate a cultural politics that makes a difference. They can be part of what gets you through the day, what my mother calls 'gives you a lift'… fun*." (Kondo, 1997: 13)

Thus, the 'Indian clique' took great pleasure in organizing a male manager's baby shower, providing food and drink, and generally applying their communitarian strategy to the entire department. The intimacy created through alliances and political manoeuvring also provided the relationships through which to develop friendships, share humour, stories and create lasting connections. In terms of post-structural feminism, these practices need to be seen as creative attempts to creating workable identities (McNay, 2000), the "arts of existence" (McNay, 1992: 52).

Chapter 9: Boodle Bank findings:

Boodle Bank overview:

In Big Bank a structuring historical factor was that the organization, as with Big Bank, had had another institution attempt to take over around the turn of the century. While in Big Bank this had been successful, as has been seen, in Boodle Bank a particular network of highly competent (white male) executives managed to avert the merger. The degree of networked mobilization that this created is directly the source of their current networking operating model[128], and also the source of some significant lines of power, or perceived lines of power, in the bank.

Boodle Bank, as at Big Bank, had gone through a radical shift from old style banking to professionalized expertise, particularly in its head office:

"*It was the best thing in the world for me, but it was the worst thing for most of the employees... Performance management hit this organization in six weeks*."

The process of how this performance based culture was taken on by employees was markedly different from that within Big Bank. That there had been no outside infusion means that at the time of study the idea of "us" and "them" was far less pronounced – political gaming and cultural reconstruction thus similarly took on significantly different forms.

Alliances, corridor talk and joking were more about hierarchy, favouritism and at times gender and ethnicity than about than race and age, as we saw at Big Bank. Non-white managers and employees generally seemed to forgive the slowness of change with historical explanations of lack of available talent, and allowing the

[128] Boodle Bank follows a system using cross functional teams. One networks with relevant "stakeholders", as they termed it, to achieve results in one's career, and for "the business". Thus making friends informally across the organisation was essential to one's job and career.

few female and black executive examples to nullify resistance (as per Pfeffer's (1981) description of this symbolic dynamic).

To typify interview answers, therefore, one culturally specific trait stood out head and shoulders amongst others. In my interview schedule I asked a question along the lines of "Is there an official culture in this bank, a culture that managers claim is there?", which is followed by the question of "If there is a discrepancy, what is the difference between the official culture and the 'real' one?"[129]. In Big Bank this invariably incited a response depicting the main managerial culture change initiatives, and occasionally reference to the corporate values, while at Boodle Bank people often had no concept of an 'official culture'. Indeed, the bank's HR department did not seem to be driving any, other than the usual statement of values. In fact, people would usually assert general ideas put out at different times by their various management, having an 'open door' policy (ironic in that Boodle Bank has very few doors, even for CEO offices), being 'collegiate', 'professional', 'conservative', and so forth.

As far as cultural descriptions, in excess of fifty percent of my interviewees referred to their experiences with a certain three very senior executives to describe and exemplify what things were like in the bank. The behaviour of these three executives held huge symbolic significance to junior/middle management and staff, although not nearly as much for very senior staff - they invariably had the same opinions of each of these three men, two as fairly approachable and the other as extremely unapproachable.

I am sharing this here primarily because the people I interviewed made a tremedous fuss over how the most senior two or three executives behaved and because the stories demonstrate very clearly how Boodle Bank hierarchy and culture occured in microsocial situations. Two stories, which exemplify this most

[129] This question is in line with a line of questioning suggested by Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines (1991), and is designed to draw out people's opinions of the company and its dynamics.

aptly are those of Lucy and Rita. Both younger educated women, who had for long periods, in completely separate situations, occupied work stations in proximity to the 'non-greeting' CEO. Both tell of how, in spite of the claims of openness and accessibility, and the open plan office spaces designed to represent this, this executive had seen them on a daily basis, in the one case for over two years, and still did not known their names[130].

When I asked Gerhard, a very senior director about this director, the response was:

"*There is a huge acknowledgement, and he has done it publicly, 'those are the things that I am not good at, that's what you ouks are telling me'. Now that's a massive shift in any leader's thinking, and being as blatant and honest about it. You don't put it up there… Because if you don't act on it people will call you on it. I thought it was quite courageous and quite brave*."

Conrad: "Does he greet you?"

"*You know what? You can sometimes greet him first*."

Firstly, this very public story was only related to me by this director. None of the other 49 people interviewed, including the CEO in question, had mentioned it. Thus, while the fact that he felt compelled to give a public acknowledgement of his inaccessibility, that it was seen by such a select group of people would indicate the symbolic nature of the act.

Furthermore, the discussion with Gerhard demonstrates the type of reframing management often put forward – problems were seen as the failings of individuals, not a structuring system. Indeed Gerhard's statement that "You can

[130] In fact they had both expressed their dislike for this through small acts of resistance to this individual, firstly by relating this story, and secondly by deliberately withholding support for this man – in the one case simply by lying to him that she did not have the stationary he sought.

sometimes greet him first" ignores the real micro level power relations that require such a greeting. Surveillance by employees and other staff is a powerful ward against favouritism and 'sucking up' (Shulman, 2007).[131]

The 'Old Boy's Club':

"*There was quite a lot of jobs for friends... The 'Fun Club', well I call them that. It's not a generic name… They've made too much money. Those guys are not hungry any more*."

This was the opinion of a very well placed informant, in close contact with the senior people referred to by the term 'Old Boy's Club', a significant cultural marker in the bank. Stories proposing that many of the senior male executives had attended the same schools, had family connections, and held onto their power in well formed, predefined networks of power were a significant line of dissent. Thus, one would have everyone from demoted managers, sidelined professionals, and mainstream careerists suggest this as an explanation for the power situation in Boodle Bank. This often highlighted gender, race and class contradictions – people would use these discourses to show the corporate bias towards wealthy white male connections as a means to further their own interests. However, as experienced before, many managers, whose interests did not support such dissent, would reject these claims – the Old Boys Club was by no means an undisputed fact. Again, validity is perhaps less important than their

[131] Indeed, this was a common theme in both banks. There was a very high value placed on face time with senior people. Access gave one career contacts, and a chance to build perceptions and identity amongst people with power. The normative controls in this, however, were severe. The problem of making a wrong impression, and the costs of this, meant that in the presence of senior people the performance nature of interactions was significantly pronounced. This was particularly the case in Boodle Bank. For example, in one case I observed Dumisane, the friendly CEO, greet a more junior male employee, who proceeded to unravel plans for a new project. In observation it appeared that the act of greeting by Dumisane had been all this employee had needed to by pass the normative distance between him and this executive, in order to informally explain his plans, to the degree that as they separated this employee was still loudly explaining his plans across the coffee area, in violation of several other rules of social noise and decorum. In an interview with a black female more senior middle manager she explained to me that she felt compelled to keep her distance from Dumisane, exactly because of the normative surveillance of others. The danger that people may perceive her to be attempting to engage in racial alliances meant that demonstrating that this was not the case was socially important.

occurrence, from whom and at what time. Thus, the fact that very junior people were usually unaware of this 'Old Boy's Club' theory, suggests the lines of information flow, and how, while the company is "collegiate", this happens through fairly clear hierarchical lines[132]. In fact, this was a major complaint of less senior staff – their access to power was limited by relative status. Consider the experience of a particularly loquacious and outspoken personal assistant (PA)[133] in this regard, who outside of work often bumps into a director, whose children attend the same school as hers:

"*There's one director I actually go out of my way to meet... and he just looks, and goes... 'Oh, the tea girl.' It makes me laugh to go: 'don't ever judge a book by the cover'... You go to any of these private schools... you get put in a box… People in South Africa are so obsessed with class... and that's where the humour is*."

Firstly, see how the Old Boy's Club is not a clandestine group or conspiracy, but is more a status driven micropolitically enforced in-group. Leanne's often used humour to undermine power asymmetries, referring to herself as not a PA, but rather a "keyboard technician"[134].

This, however, was not without its unintended consequences. I had it explained to me, in a department with slightly more conservative habitus positioning, that an individual there who has to interact with Leanne, through this network style of

[132] A very noticeable trait was the way in which, in both sites, friendship groups would give fairly similar perceptions of dynamics, and hold fairly similar stocks of knowledge, in line with the information based research technique suggested by Moore (1954) and the concept of gossip creating areas of shared social and practical knowledge: "in which mutual concerns lead to the development of shared knowledge about not only everyday and esoteric interests but also evaluative categories concerning ways of acting and interacting" (Yerkovitch, 1977:194). One could say that values, therefore, do not simply dictate who one will interact with, but are also constituted in the social interaction itself. That social interaction not only interpolates (McNay, 2000), but also changes one's identity are an important element of this argument.

[133] A dynamic which we have not had space to touch on thus far is the ambiguous status of PAs in these companies, with their direct access to power, but lack of status hierarchically relative to those with whom they work, often with strong gender slants.

[134] Similar to Goffman's (1959: 181) description of aggression which creates a joking frame that eventually makes a person's position "ludicrously untenable". In this case, she exemplifies the subordination to show that subordination as arrogant and subjugating.

business, really struggled to deal with her humour and strongly liberal positioning. The coping strategy of one woman was the subjugation of another.

Boodle Bank historical points:

A fascinating trend in the bank was the lack of reference to more long term historical narratives[135]. Older employees did not seem at all allied in any deeply political sense – their connections were seen as being part of what they could use to do their job. While certain more recent restructures, organization wide, and department specific, held strong narrative places in discussions, longer term changes were for the most part naturalized in identity. Claims to power and experience lay in taken for granted identity positions, rather than explicitly stated discourse. Consider the quote below. Note particularly this (white, older, male) senior manager's sense of authority – he presented himself as an expert, with a strong certainty of his own authority. On an experiential level I often found it quite difficult to get below the surface of the totalising discourse offered by the 'expert' managers I often met at Boodle Bank. This is directly in line with Foucault's (1980) description of how the use of power creates a terrain of truth in which alternative views struggle to gain credibility.

"*I've seen lots of change. The leadership style has changed. In the old days the leader used to say* [what should be done], *and the lower people used to do it... No, we have really really highly intellectual people, and changes in the world of banking. You no longer just cash a cheque... Pre-95 it was very much an incremental type of change, globally and locally*."

The cultural significations in this interview, and generally in Boodle Bank, lay mainly in subtle micropolitical dynamics. That the staff at Boodle Bank had not had a massive take-over by younger, more educated wheeler dealers was

[135] In fact older employees, over and above the industry wide change to more performance based business, more often than not merely cited the change to less bureaucratized business practices, in particular the change from extremely formal business dress (while many staff seemed to wear ties, this was not obligatory, and many did not), and the use of first names across the hierarchical board

evident in the confidence of their positioning, and the approach taken with me – as is demonstrated by the social theorist (Giddens, 1979) angle in the quote above. For example, that this manager was the only person in all my interviews to have a tea lady bring us tea at a prespecified time exuded, in the emotional and social space I experienced there, his comfort with and knowledge of the system. He clearly handled my rather digging queries with calm, and performed knowledgeability[136], rather than asserting a distinctly politicized discourse. He gave off a feeling of what the Comaroff's (1992) see in the difference between hegemony and ideology[137]. That particular views and presentations of hierarchy, age, and class were deeply engrained in the minds and identities of these employees, and many of the senior people, demonstrated a hegemony against which ideologies in contradiction made very little sense.

Consider some examples here. In one case I arrived at an HR manager's desk for an interview, and found her to be on the phone, advising one of her "business partners", as the jargon went, on how to get rid of a difficult employee: "With this we just have to negotiate this. We need to negotiate this with the facts... Make him feel a bit uncomfortable"[138]. As to the culture, she later responded that:

"*It's a very conservative culture. Its very outcome focused. You want to be seen doing stuff… This is a very young culture, hey. Probably the average age in the bank is early forties. A lot of my directors here are in their late thirties. In the old*

[136] In fact, we spent a significant chunk of the interview discussing how a key factor in his success has been consciously going about establishing credibility with colleagues, subordinates and superiors, on a continual basis. Stories from his subordinates validated this, on occasions with some resentment – after all credibility is itself a battle of credit (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2007).
[137] In this light, calling on Bourdieu (1977 in Comaroff, 1985: 5), Jean Comaroff describes the "coercive dimension of society and culture" which impacts upon the body, or in Bourdieu's language, the habitus, and through an "order of signs" invests "it with a pre-existing repertoire of meanings and "presuppositions". Thus for Comaroff it is through the body that reality appears "objective" and naturalized. Thus, "Hegemony, at its most effective, is mute; ideology invites argument" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992:29).
[138] Note that this type of interaction was very unlikely to occur in Big Bank. Firstly, I would never have been allowed to see it, and secondly, the networking nature of Boodle Bank created strong ambiguity, particularly for HR functions, as to how they constructed professional distance in their identities.

days, before instant messaging you would come in and have coffee, read your newspaper. He [the older employee being encouraged to leave] *still does that*."

Consider Lydia, a young woman in a junior job, who had enormous satisfaction in her employers:

"*It feels like home to me, coming here every day... I don't jump straight to work. I have a little tea. Boodle Bank is the only one that trusts in their people... They do want the business to go on, but with caring about the person.*"

Lydia also held a position in HR, her line of reporting having the same director, but for her group having tea (with a particular older supporter and work friend) was somehow acceptable. The culture, for her, was one of general warmth, and kindness – she noted in particular that this was in spite of the high average education of her fellows[139]. Historically, therefore, we can see that there is a challenge between an older habitus of the workplace, with its more relaxed but contradictorily formal and bureaucratic style, and the newer, less bureaucratic and formal, but seemingly less relaxed style[140]. It would seem also that the higher up the hierarchy one goes the more professional it became:

As one manager explained it:

"*Lower level staff generally have faith in the bank... the system will work for them... But, if you go higher up in the organisation then you are exposed to individuals... You are not seen as a number, you are seen as a threat*."

[139] That the idea that people who are educated would usually be expected to be a bit arrogant and uncaring shows something about status and hierarchy in general. This arrogance of the educated was a taken for granted fact for her, and the kindness of her fellows was in contrast to this 'fact'.

[140] Interviewees at Big Bank who had come over from Boodle Bank noted that a distinct difference between the two institutions is that Big Bank is more relaxed – in social dynamics, but not in pressure to perform - , which may have something to do with the larger amount of older employees, and degree of historical memory in terms of habitus demonstrated by Big Bank's staff.

Historically, the change, then, has been stark, but more gradual than Big Bank:

"*There was a real* esprit de corps*. We don't have much of that nowadays, because if it is not in the job description then they don't do it… They promised me a kind of 'sperm to worm' existence. They promised a job for life, and it was actually a lie… Even woman were considered non-existent… I have never worked so hard, and had so much fun... I was the Father Christmas at the Christmas party. People didn't mind volunteering. We had the Friday Club*."

This man described his identity, as so often the case at Big Bank, as fundamentally involved in the Boodle Bank. He even admits that when he once applied for a job at another bank, he changed his mind about it, and felt very guilty for his betrayal. The change in sentiment, from loyal family to professional capitalist, is well expressed in relation to laughter:

"*That was a hallmark many years ago. And we have lost that... we say we have lost a bit of our soul*."

This was the opinion of another older banker, a woman, who had very high levels of fulfilment, and saw herself as very much a part of the bank, as with the man above. As he described it:

"*I think we are just too busy. For me it is important to never stop having fun... For me we have become too mechanical. To know when enough is enough, and how to have fun... And it is coming back*."

If we contrast this with the opinion of Lolly, a more junior, non-white, female HR employee:

"*I think the culture varies from department to department... Very professional, stern, serious... Ja, that's the type of culture HR is, I think*."

Conrad: Why stern?

"*I don't know, probably the type of work.... And also the kind of people you have. They are getting degrees. They are career orientated*."

The history of the bank regarding people of colour was surprisingly absent from gossip, talk, humour and alliances[141]. In this one scenario I found Lolly amazingly hard to interview. She simply did not trust me, while her good friend, Anneline, with whom I had scheduled interviews, cancelled and never returned my calls. Anneline's subordinate, however, gave insights into this, describing the way the two are the best of friends, and that, although Lolly had claimed otherwise, they gossip and talk a tremendous amount. This young woman explained how people seeking information would usually ask to speak to Anneline, rather than the better educated, younger and more senior woman who sits with them, mainly because of Anneline's older connections in the bank.

Thus, the history of the institution was not expressed to me very much in actual discourse, but rather in systems of relations, friendships, and at senior levels in the demonstration of certain types of professionalized networked identities. An important note, in this regard, was their style of talk. For the older bankers, the terms used, the rhythm, and manner of relationship they took up with me had qualities that I had not experienced in younger, or less educated, or very senior staff. It was warm, yet formalized, and made prolific use of jargon very specific to Boodle Bank.

Gossip and humour in Boodle Bank: [142]

[141] In hindsight, I wonder where they have put the 'Aunties', whose presence was such a feature for me at Big Bank, but who were, apart from the one above example, just not there. That the bank's majority staff contingent is women of colour of all ages is surprisingly absent in the demographics of their head office – which speaks of the class dynamics in the place.
[142] On a research note, I had, similarly to Big Bank, intended to conduct this research in the marketing, finance and HR departments, and had gained permission from two CEOs in Boodle

Example 1:
The Finance department in Boodle Bank is unique in this study in that there seemed, at least in the performances of those interviewed, to be almost no politics within the department itself.

Two situations in this department are of particular interest. In the one circumstance a woman manager had a smallish section in which she often used humour as a means to make comments about what time her employees arrived and left. One of her staff, who had specifically come to Boodle Bank because she had been led to believe she could achieve a “work-life balance” there, says that she often arrived as early as 6am, and when trying to leave at 5:30pm, her manager often joked:

"*She will say, 'oh, it's a half day today'. So at first it was a bit of a joke, but it's not funny any more*."

This was a frustration she shared with her fellows, and is something they themselves talked about, as my interviews with them showed me, although this had not resulted in any direct resistance towards the manager herself, mainly because the manager also had good connections with the staff, her caring support contradicting her controlling humour, as well as schisms between the staff themselves regarding language alliances, particularly the common use of Zulu in social settings.

Note the sharp distinction, primarily through gender, between this scenario and the joking manager example at Big Bank. See how acts of caring (such as

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Bank to do this. That the HR director, to all intents and purposes junior to these two men, had altered this, preferring that I do this research in the finance, and two sections of the HR department, speak to the situatedness of power. Seniority in actual situations is more relevant than the power of removed and distant executives (in turn I was offered routes into marketing by more junior managers, but turned these down). Thus in reading these findings one needs to bears in mind that different jobs create different “occupational cultures” (Lewis, Brazil, Kueger, Lohfeld, and Tjam, 2001: 9).

remembering birthdays and supporting in illness), as well as a shared female gender complicate any unified resistance.

Across the cubicle divide from this we find an entirely different set of interactions. Here a particular group of young, up coming professionals had formed a strong friendship group around their common age and, in some cases, around a common 'Indian' identity. A key binding force in this group was that of humour. Here, in particular, we have Ryan, Parvati and Jaya.

Conrad: What do you talk about with your friends?

Jaya: "*Anything and everything. Sometimes Partvati and I will be talking about work, then we'll be totally off… Ryan will tell me funny stories. Parvati and I, we gossip more. As girls we gossip more… She has loosened up. She never used to give me back sarcasm. So Ryan and I are, you could say, schooling her in our type of humour*."

The stereotyping of gossip as a female trait was a frequent act, and, in this research, was put forward most frequently by women themselves – men, and very professionalized and senior women, generally rejected the idea of 'gossip' (although often admitted to it, and almost always demonstrated it, in other forms). Part of the reason for this lay in how the presentation of male identity was conducted in these cliques. The men, in this particular example, seemed to seek identity more along professional than ethnic lines. If we look at the identity position of another man in this section regarding his social relations, he says of his male friends, of several ethnicities:

"*With guys you can be open, you can talk shit. With the guys you can swear, you can perform*."

Conrad: Do you gossip?

"*Occasionally. I think it's like in general conversation. We go, maybe to lunch*."

Conrad: Who do you joke with?

"*There's Govender, there's Van Eck, even the girls can crack a joke sometimes*."

Conrad: Do you joke less with the girls?

"*I wouldn't say it's less with the girls. Especially with the girls… All of a sudden you'll be there and the* ouk [Afrikaans: man/'guy'] *just cracks one… Well, the team is mostly my age, and then Jack is much older than us*."

Firstly, it needs to be understood that in this context "the girls" refers to Parvati and Jaya. Secondly, note how "With guys you can be open, you can talk shit. With the guys you can swear, you can perform", clearly delineates the boundaries of humour, and the back stage space along gender lines. This is not to say that cross gender humour did not happen, as he emphasizes, but rather that this was bound by certain constraints[143].

Another important aspect in this is that the women above included more examples of gossip in their discourse than the men, which is certainly not to say the men did not gossip – just that the gossip stories themselves, which also included humour in practice and the formation of connections, had a genderised component.

In line with the above was a tendency for the women to be more open about gossip than the men – the denial of gossip had a gendered bearing. Thus, for

[143] Importantly, over and above the gender dynamic, the style of humour in this section had a distinctly 'young' feeling about it. Indeed, in the light of Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) assertion that people of different ages have different styles of coping with stress, a fruitful area of research would seem to be how humour and play, particularly in late capitalism, are an aspect of youth culture and coping.

example, I was given a story of how a woman in another department had spread a rumour that Parvati was having an affair with Ryan, a scandalous story, which both demonstrated the existence of a sort of ‘Indian’ network amongst some junior staff, and also the scandal that helped in the formation and continuation of such a network:

"*He's engaged and he is my boss... My Indian reputation is at stake... With an Indian family, you have your reputation and you have your virtue. To get engaged your virtue must not be sullied in any way... What will people think of me? I mean he's my boss. They shouldn't even be thinking that."*

The men in this group were certainly part of this ‘Indian’ network, but seemed more naturalized in professional identity and credibility, and in turn put far less emphasis on ethnicity. While the women did draw more on ethic positioning as “Indian”, they also often seemed to have experienced strong shifts in identity around friendships and ethnicity while in the bank, with several key friendships involving young women sharing cultural understandings with each other.

Consider Arya, a young woman in the HR department. Most of Arya’s interview involved a description of her identity transformation in the bank, in spite of her conservative Hindu upbringing. She told me of the sense of scandal she experienced in joining colleagues of hers in a basketball team called “Porn Stars”, and of the impact a particular director had had on her perceptions:

"*He used to joke around what is going to make you famous... We found that there was a lot in common… He would start asking me questions, interesting questions. He also has a psychology background... You see, that was Steve. We would talk about something and he would throw in that... We never discussed religion... Steve gave me the space to do that... I started to question, is there a god, isn't there a god?*"

She told me that her family, traditionally Hindu, had been uncomfortable with her changes in behaviour and identity, but explained with some degree of humour how eventually even a particularly conservative uncle had gone so far as offer her a beer, in spite of social constraints regarding women and alcohol in her family and religion.

This theme: at times ignoring[144], at times reconstructing and at times essentialising Indian identity was a common topic in this bank – indeed, that well over 30% of my interviewees were of Indian decent is a marked difference from both Big Bank, and in regards to South African demographics. Most importantly, as had been argued by the likes of Said (1985) and Comaroff (1985), the process of capitalist assimilation was certainly not one sided – styles of networking and humour certainly took on slightly altered gender, age, and value assumptions under influence by younger, newer, non-white employees.

Example 2:

Boodle Bank's HR staff were unique in their pronounced application of "social theorist" (Giddens, 1984) identities and awareness of 'grapevine' information. While this is similar to Big Bank, and can be explained in terms of occupational identity and culture – their power lying in their right to explain and understand the organization as HR specialists (Fournier, 1999; Pfeffer, 1981) – the degree of networking it inspired was quite distinctive:

Neela [senior manager]: "*Yes, one of the key success factors in my career is that I have formed a network, private and otherwise... If you are a key stakeholder you know who I am, and know what I do… This environment encourages you to blow your trumpet... A lot of decisions are made on anecdotal evidence*."

[144] Consider the story a white manager imparted to me about an 'Indian' (although in this case it is not his ethnicity, but more his race, as 'not-white' that seems relevant) senior director, who used the established white networks of his subordinates to gain political control of his section from the larger bank.

Thus, while the sensitivity of information about pay and employment which they handled meant that not being seen as someone who gives gossip was an important aspect of identity performance, so too was being up to date on gossip, so as to handle social dynamics as they arose. In other words, the network organization gave them, both for their own career contacts, and in terms of their job perception, an official license to 'gossip' / network through the 'grapevine'[145]. In fact one individual explained to me that:

"*I don't know. I haven't got it right. There was a performance review yesterday. That was an issue. I was told that I am not managing my brand. I need to learn how to do that. Your personal brand is your marketing... So then you learn, this is how you get ahead. You say the right thing at the right time. You don't challenge. You don't make mistakes*."

In terms of Foucault (1980), this is a startling statement. In this organization, not only was visibility a mechanism of control, but is also an official means of career growth. The politics of popularity were strongly integrated in this, as one HR professional explained to me:

"*I have to deal with a group that is ninety percent white male... most of those white men see me as a challenge… I was told the other day, if you are going to make a change you have got to be well liked… How can I make a change by being well liked?... If you are going to do well you need to be someone who is well liked*."

The contradiction, socially and structurally, lay in the fact that, while the network style of organization was ideally available to insubordination from below, which is

[145] In this regard the gossip usually involved work related issues such as restructures and opinions about managerial competence. Stories that too strongly denigrated a specific manager, in proximity to them hierarchically offered the most valued, but also the most risky gossip. Many interviewees had stories of where even just listening to gossip backfired, and incited punishment.

part what legitimizes it as a 'democratic' style of management, the actual, often older, hierarchical truths of daily micropolitics often spoke another story. Thus several interviewees gave examples of having trouble getting actions processed in their areas because of interactions between their HR seniors and the directors of the departments concerned. A common narrative in resistant talk, therefore, was that of a 'director network'. Access to this network, in all the departments spoken to here, would give one power and the socialization required to fit in amongst these people[146]. While these claims were denied outright by the directors interviewed in this research, these stories were certainly relevant social myth for more junior professionals. The professional networks of HR had far less of the politics of pleasure, through laughter and play[147], demonstrated in Finance, and far more of the political manoeuvring of performed "credibility" (as they frequently described it)[148].

Example 3:

In 2005 the company engaged in a fairly large scale lay-off and restructure, which had prominent impact in the minds of many of my informants, in the HR department at least. Below are some of the subject positions from which people viewed and framed this event in discourse and conversation.

Faye, a professional woman in her fifties, with many years in the bank, explained:

"*And the sad thing is a number of people who were close top retirement were asked to leave... I felt it was a negation of all they had done… We were told that it was not a performance thing… The productivity was shocking because*

[146] One interviewee even describing the more articulate language and terminology learned through such access.
[147] Although, at the time of my study there seemed to be a few changes, with several employees who had been on the point of resigning changing their minds, mainly because of direct acts of caring by a senior manager and her director.
[148] Alvesson's (1994) assertions regarding jobs which lean on social perception of one's skills, and based on talk, rather than more practical work (such as doing finances) being more prone to insecurities of identity, would seem pertinent here.

everyone was sitting talking. We didn't really achieve the kind of benefits we had wanted.“

The emotional impact for this woman was strongly involved in the history and value she saw in colleagues she had known for some time. In the light of the repeated lay offs and restructures of Big Bank, her sentiment and sense of scandal, seem, not exactly naïve, but certainly not versed in the world of corporate lay offs.

Take another, more cynical opinion:

"*I came into the department and three other people got retrenched in the next level... Only when I got to the next level...* [I was told] *the entire exercise was run to get rid of targeted dead wood... that was organization wide... You know how many good people they lost*."

Conrad: “*Did this get shared with you officially?*”

"*No, it's coffee talk, its coffee talk... They realize, oh, you were on a different level, let me share with you what actually happened”.*

As well as merely being different personalities, the discrepency between these two perspectives is deeply hierarchical, with an age dimension – the cynical view is junior managerial, along newer networks, the former is more professional than managerial, along older networks.

A senior director described it as follows:

"*It was a stuff up. It was the wrong thing at the wrong time, and they stuffed it up… Someone sees the gap* [and uses the process to get rid of someone they don't like]. *It creates inconsistency, which drives distrust*."

Noting here the typical senior habit of isolating mistakes as the faults of a few bad apples, rather than a result of larger structuring cultural dynamics, we can see, then, how different subject positions create decidedly different interpretations of organization events, usually towards their interests. However, in specifically Boodle Bank terms, the main line of dissent was about secrecy – the validity of managerial claims was in question. While this was also a dynamic at Big Bank, the control of information for power was an important aspect of the Boodle Bank hierarchy:

"*I would say the biggest problem in the bank is the lack of open communication. Be transparent. If we need to downsize* [then tell us so]."

This idea of secrecy was attributed by the staff to hierarchical attempts at maintaining power, which in turn led to a variety of dynamics between staff at equal rank, and between staff and their superiors. Staff would withhold information from each other and offer it further up the line, informally using hierarchical power against each other, and ironically reconfirming their manager's power over them. Simultaneously, I had a several cases where staff revealed to me that managers had attempted to take credit, indirectly (such as, as at Big Bank, the problem of who actually gets to email the report to the CEO), and in resistance had directly decided to withhold informally gleaned information from these ungrateful superiors.

Example 4:

In this bank the overwhelming sense of liberal tolerance, and the implications of this for diversity, as espoused by Gordon (1995), meant that, in general, as seen above, positions of race were usually nullified in the light of dominant professionalism.

In this regard, let us take two examples:

Starting with Lulu, a middle aged HR professional with several years in the bank, who explained to me that her work friendships were predominantly based on common interests, and only occasionally on her Xhosa ethnicity:

"*The close people, who are close to my heart, tend to be introverts, because they are trying to get peace and calmness within themselves... It's my free spirited side*."

She emphasized, for example, the fact that her Buddhist friend, as well as similarly valuing this 'calmness', was also highly educated and had an interest in "giving back to the community", which suggested both a class position in her identity construction re education and subsequent relationships, and a certain appreciation for subaltern struggles. However, this was the closest she directly came to any form of minority discourse[149].

When asked, at risk of forcing outside racial moulds on her subjective positioning, she responded regarding race and ethnicity that, while there was some pressure to prove ones' self, which she admitted to occasionally have discussed with black colleagues, this had been almost entirely resolved in her particular HR environment.

"*Because these people tend to start low down there has not been a backlash, because it has been very incremental. People haven't just become managers… With black senior managers, they tend to leave... I don't know why. Those people who have developed through the ranks are less likely to leave*."

[149] In this example I certainly do not wish to subjugate Lulu by infering that her not applying ethnic identity constructions was out of character, but more to show how she appealed more to her middle classness than I had experienced amongst black women at Big Bank.

In this regard, the problem of lack of representivity in senior levels of the bank was written off as a relatively minor issue by most of my non-white interviewees[150]. On ethnicity she said:

"*The Xhosa friends that I have in the bank are people that I know because we were friends* together [i.e. she knew them from the Eastern Cape, where she grew up]*… I don't feel us being associated because of race or culture. The affiliation is an attraction to that person's soul*."

While, in spite of the above she did take some ethnic and race position[151], her position is better understood in terms of Bourdieu's views on taste.

Her inclination towards Buddhist serenity and intellectual stimulation as a determinant of friendship alliances would seem to indicate an identity more influenced by class than race or ethnicity. Certainly, this has implications regarding how class and taste, sometimes even more than race and ethnicity, are pivotal constructs in how hybridity and creolisation occur in actual South African identities.

Consider in comparison, Zinhle, a graduate, and energetic young employee whose stories were predominantly about being young, "partying", and her frustrations with the hierarchy[152], and who expressed a strong awareness of her

[150] But, in extreme irony, this critique that Boodle Bank had few black executives was often drawn on by the few disgruntled white managers I interviewed. Senior management usually cited the lack of representivity in senior levels in passing, as if this issue was one which would inevitably be solved. Thus the homogenizing (white, western, male) status quo was very seldom the topic of discussion.

[151] Explaining that her friendships with Xhosa colleagues were usually decided on by age: "The older ones are from the Eastern Cape varsities, so they come here to make money. They say: 'I am not interested in making friends. I am just interested in making money'… People who grew up in the townships are not maybe as hard working as people who grew up in the city... People had a sense of entitlement. They had all these affiliations." In the last sentence she was insinuating a difference between more urban Sotho staff, and her Xhosa colleagues. "Life in the homelands was more hard... your parents would say you need to work hard. Predominantly the Sotho speaking people grew up in townships."

[152] She explained that she sees a "CYA" ("Cover Your Ass") culture, in which people take extreme precautions at hierarchical control.

rights. When I asked whether she socializes with people from work she responded:

"*No, because we are all from different cultures, and we should keep those boundaries out of respect… When I am social, I am social. I'm wild and crazy*."

In her style of humour, and position taken up with regards to her colleagues was a very specific politicised view of blackness:

"*And one of the other things is that if they get coffee and they exclude me, I say it's not because I am black, it's because I am cute*".

When I asked if people separate themselves by racial cliques she said that this only happens "in social events, the darkies all hang out together", and that for the most part "We all click because we are all young". Her willingness defend her political rights was demonstrated again by a story of a white male colleague joking that "You can apply for that [position] because you are black", to which she responded, "It's not acceptable. Are you implying that I am incompetent to get the job?", and tells me her friends had to intercede to calm her down.

Her final story would seem to demonstrate the subtle pressures applied on black employees, intentionally and otherwise, with regards to needing to prove one 's self, as had been suggested many times in both banks. However, Zinhle's position is unique in that her style of humour, and appropriation of a (urban?) view of blackness as essentialised identity resistance (as per Hall's discussions (1996)) was seldom demonstrated to me by older black staff[153].

[153] If one recalls the middle class nature of 'youth culture' (Nisbett, 2007; Rizzo, 2005; Young, 2007), one can certainly argue that this was a particularly middle class construction of blackness. Indeed her humour and assertive position of black identity were very familiar terrain for me with regards to comedy amongst young urban black South Africans, which I see as in line with Masilela's (1996) point connecting South African political 'black' identity with US black consciousness. Indeed, her style was not unlike the approach taken by comedians of the likes of Tumi Morake and David Kau, strongly influenced by US voices such as Chris Rock and David Chapelle.

Final notes on Boodle Bank:

Two issues need to be born in mind regarding Boodle Bank: one, the incessant reference to the type of people in its head office as "intellectual" (and the specific use of this word), involving the marker of education as a form of social capital, and two, the scarcity of race and class politics in a direct manner. These two dynamics should really be seen as part of a similar totalizing process of professionalization, in fairly bureaucratic and hierarchical forms. Thus, people demonstrated their "intellect" along specific lines of thought, most noticeable in large amounts of jargon. To my dismay, there were times where I felt like shaking these interviewees, and demand that they use simple English[154], to the point that the deeply complex, embedded political and historical nuances of race and class in South Africa were glibly summed up by my informants in the term "AIC", which stands for "African, Indian, Coloured". That these employees widely used a corporate acronym[155] summing up such complex subject positions would suggest a naturalized and depoliticized view of the topics, and brings to mind the pre-cited statement:

"*There is a pattern here: the more distant you are from western culture, the less you are likely to be heard*." (Jimmy Manyi, quoted in Russel, 2007)

Indeed, whereas Big Bank is decentralizing and sending educated staff back to the branches, a common view in Boodle Bank is of the branches as a sort of shell, through which central office expertise and products are processed. That these branches are where the majority of the female, non-white, working class staff are employed would suggest something about the credibility these people are given by the "ivory-tower" (as the CEO describes it) of head office "intellect".

[154] A ridiculous request in the light of the cacophony of anthropological 'jargon' engaged here, I realize!

[155] While I have subsequently heard 'AIC' being used sporadically outside of Boodle Bank, I had gone through several months at Big Bank and not heard it once.

Chapter 10: Discussion and conclusion:

Discussion:

"*Organizations have emerged from the '90s with the bitter understanding that the 'leaning and meaning' process of the past decade has had many* [negative] *consequences… stagnant or declining productivity levels, plunging morale and soaring levels of work-related anxiety and stress*." (Remmel, 2002: 6)[156]

The 'critical situations' in the late nineties, in which one organization was taken over (or "mergered", as the political discourse would have it), and the other managed to evade this have in both cases created series of unintended consequences. On the one hand largely naturalizing professional identity, and on the other creating resistance and reinvention of this at every turn, both points with numerous contradictions in between. This not only affected what employees saw as being politically relevant (i.e. where they saw their interests as lying) , but also the degree to which various narratives gained dominance (i.e. whose interests, in terms of their perceptions thereof, were most fulfilled), often to be naturalized in a professional banker habitus.

Simultaneously the organizations have some pertinent similarities – both experienced a change to performance management at around the same time, in line with the increased competition predicted by Jones (1992), both saw an influx of younger, often non-white, educated staff, who brought with them a range of opinions and views which the world of banking would have to acknowledge. In both scenarios the appropriation of new ways of being, and a shift in habitus for the original banking staff, as well as for the newer employees, of all ages, have set in progress a reinvention of the idea of what it means to be a banker along specific lines, accompanied by a drive towards consumer capitalism, as well as a

[156] "In the contemporary environment of strong national and international competition… the outcome is that virtually every growth strategy for firms involves a bias against community and employment stability." (Thompson, 2003 in Hodson and Roscigno, 2004: 675)

contradictory partial opening of the semantic space to ‘non-western’ and feminine identities and political discourses.

"*To date, integration and assimilation have never taken place on equal terms, but always as assimilation by the dominant culture. In relations with the dominant culture, the syncretic movement is always asymmetrical: although members of the dominant culture rarely feel obliged to comprehend various ethnic cultures, minorities are always obliged, in order to survive, to master the hegemonic culture (without necessarily gaining access to the power that circulates within the dominant sector)*." (JanMohammed and Lloyd, 1987: 7)

The difficulty with these research sites is that the assimilation, in terms of ‘dominant’ and ‘minority’ was not at all clear. With employees at all levels split along age, class, race, and gender lines, at times claiming minority status, which in term frequently created dominating alliances, having unintended consequences in a multiplicity of dimensions. In this context the politics of change become decidedly obscure. Legitimacy was claimed through a reframing of historical ‘truths’ in daily conversation, sometimes naturalized to the semi-conscious level of habitus, sometimes consciously and strategically engaged. If we consider Kondo’s (1991: 230) point regarding the senior artisan in the sweet factory in which she worked:

"*He created himself through narrative, in his very selective life history, and he asserted a similar work identity on the shop floor, enacting himself in everyday acts and gestures, in everyday situations*."

This research has sought, above all, to show how identity and cultural assertion (often, but not always, towards certain interests (Foucault, 1980)[157]), have occurred in the actual micropolitics of face to face interaction. Thus, for ‘the

[157] As Foucault (1980) has asserted, the social channels through which power moves cannot necessarily always be connected with specific interests.

Indian clique' of Big Bank, facial expressions, not laughing at an intended joke, who would or would not be invited, or agree to come, to the Halaal cafeteria, and so forth were the actual terrain of 'larger' political and structural aspects[158]. Most emphatically, the implications of the above dynamics for these bank workers were far from merely social – the spheres of influence available had direct bearing on their perceived value to the organization (and to themselves), their credibility as competent workers, and their material chances in both the short and long term[159].

The critical situation:

Giddens defines a critical situation as

"…*circumstances of radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which effect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutional routines*." (1984: 61)

Integral to this is that these situations destroy certainty in the future, and break down trust[160]. It is no surprise, therefore, that a commonly held opinion in Big Bank was that trust had been lost.

"*As far as Bigger Big Bank culture, and Arnold Lewis* [the banking group's penultimate executive] *has said this several times, as far as Bigger Big Bank they*

[158] Similarly, a telling point in Big Bank was the CEO's bar, positioned right next to his office. Asking random people whether they had ever been invited, or would feel comfortable going there quickly revealed a range of political and hierarchical divisions. When Krijay, as an example, responded that she would not go, because she would just not know what to say (which I myself struggled with in that location – I didn't have the necessary knowledge as far as which director had purchased which SLK Mercedes, and other such culturally valued 'gossip' (Gluckman, 1963)), it shows in actual terms how certain 'Others' struggle to find entry to groups, exclusive through informal talk, in spite of formal claims of openness.

[159] "organizational life depends on 'people-processing encounters...in which 'impressions' subjects make during the interaction affects their life chances'."(Goffman, 1983 in Branaman, 1997: lxxxi)

[160] Small wonder then, in that "communication and information processing is needed for building trust between partners" (Tuomela, Heimburger, Nummi, and Toivonen, 2005: 375) gossip has been associated with social break down as well as social cohesion (Gluckman, 1963).

said 'stuff trust and loyalty. They are old fashioned ideas and you must come to work and do your job'."

Consider that a middle manager had this to say in 2007:

"*I think that there is a sense of distrust. I mean, even at the level that I am at it is there still... I have sensed it since I started here. It is not new… You see how people are in front of each other. Then you see how you act in a meeting... I am not sure whether people are always honest. You act professionally, and then see someone getting promoted over others*."

In line with this, a very senior executive at Big Bank admitted to me during the study that at times they had hired "trust-breakers" in senior positions, demonstrating the tension between underlying values of monetarism (Jones, 1992) and profit (as opposed to the claimed and competing values of ubuntu, respect, etc.), and also demonstrating how a structuring change in values has set out the series of unintended consequences to influence current environments.

Concurrently and contradictorily, there were also examples of very high levels of trust in Big Bank. The distinction that these generally occurred in specific friendship groups, often allied through age, education, race, ethnicity and gender subject positions is a marked difference from Boodle Bank, where the trust had more hierarchical and class nuances. That these alliances were context specific, and demonstrated numerous inversions, such as where the Big Bank finance 'Aunties' both attempted to be professional and to be mothers, were united against management, but also attempted to move into management, or where the female managers in marketing were both subjugated by gender, and in turn subjugated other women, demonstrates the incredible complexity of identity in this institution:

"*conflicts, ambiguities, and multiplicities in interpretation, are not simply associated with different positionings in society - though of course this is a critically important factor - but exist* within *a 'single' self…*" (Kondo, 1991: 45)

I will argue that the western drive towards ontological security in a fixed view of identity, demonstrated here so strongly in the discourse of professionalism, was often at odds with the actual complexity in the lives of these workers, across the hierarchical spectrum.

"*the 'biographical illusion', Bourdieu (1987) calls it, a modernist fantasy about society and selfhood according to which everyone is, potentially, in control of his or her destiny in a world made by the actions of autonomous 'agents'*." (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 26)

The connection between this and the concept of 'trust' is simple, although seemingly seldom emphasized in post-structural literature. The anthropological acknowledgement that the western (white, male) sense of self has attempted to establish its sense of security through a disavowal of contradictory Others is a well agreed upon position (Dolby, 2001; Fabian, 1983; Morley and Chen, 1996; Said, 1985). I am arguing here that this historically embedded (Foucault, 1980; Fabian, 1983) subjugation of disparate subaltern voices, *both* within society and "*within* a 'single' self" (Kondo above) is a driving element of how many (western[161]) people attempt to create trust, survival, security and hegemony (Collinson, 2003; Knights and Wilmott, 1989) and is ever more relevant in late capitalist workplaces (Mumby, 2005).

In our final analysis, therefore, we need to consider the incredible relevance of trust as a keystone of social interaction, as has been suggested by Giddens

[161] I find a clear view of 'western' highly problematic in a creolised South African context, as will be discussed shortly.

(1984; also Dirks and Ferrin (2001) and Renzl (2005)). Consider the point below, drawing on Goffman (1972 in Hatzakis and Searle, 2006):

"*situational risks are bounded by the level of discretion open to individuals that determine the risks inherent in the situation. Seen from a trust perspective, the higher the discretion levels, the more open a situation is to agency and volunteerism, the more the pertinence of trust*."

In an organization specifically based on discretion, as Big Bank's "independent leader" style is, the above statement is highly relevant, and is in line with the relevance of trust for 'flat' organizations in general (Remmel, 2002). On an individual level, we can see that the insecurity created by the continual restructures and loss of face for older bankers from a system based on experience and loyalty to one based on success and credentialism as a highly significant factor in the trust dynamic, over and above having many of ones colleagues laid off *en masse*:

"*Such 'trust in identity' is essential for communication and is a constitutive bond of society.*" (Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 974)

Giddens (1984: 86) suggested that micro-social power dynamics are fundamentally driven by the search for "ontological security", which, as above, is strongly mediated by a trust in society, and in its institutions[162]. If we consider the alliances and friendship groups of Big Bank we can see that they generally formed between individuals with perceived similar identities, opinions about the world, and interests, in line with this sense of 'ontological security' and the necessity for trust in such alliances (Izraeli, 1975; Krackhardt, 1990) – maintained and negotiated through informal talk and humour. Thus, while trust in aspects of the organization had been lost, "the bank" (as interviewees referred to

[162] As Lewis and Weigert (1985: 974) note, Durkeim argued that "institutional trust underwrites interpersonal trust".

it) was much more than merely its profits, branding or supervisors. It was embodied in social relations and ways of being, from which people developed trust and security in self.

The major lines of tension, however, were driven by the problem that in actual settings people demonstrated a multiplicity of subject positions, which frequently contradicted and undermined their own interests, and those of others. Thus when young, non-white professionals promoted a discourse of change, flexibility and youthful thinking, seemingly arguing against oppression, this in turn just furthered the oppression of the mothers of Big Bank finance and the 'Indian' women of Big Bank marketing. Indeed, that certain clothes, certain bodily presences, and certain cultural capital in language and humour styles unconsciously went with these 'young' subject positions was usually ignored by the young themselves, but strongly felt by these women, shows how subtle actual lines of discrimination are. The official discourse, that education and professionalism would allow access to power and material privilege, similarly seemed to establish a "regime of truth" in which the history of apartheid discrimination, unfair employment practices, struggles as mothers and workers, whose experience and years of service had lost value in the face of globalized professionalism struggled to be heard. The 'Ubuntu' programme, which helped to naturalize a version of history which polarized black and white, for the most part excluding class, age, and gender privilege in real life banking situations, seemed to aid this totalizing 'ideology'. Simultaneously, however, these women themselves created identity improvisations, at times focusing on motherhood and ethnicity for political leverage and self worth, and at times using the exact discourses used to subjugate them to resist and deny this subjugation. Their politics certainly did not go entirely unheard[163] - indeed the perceived problems in the finance department reached me before I even arrived there, and in the marketing department seemed to have direct impact on the organizational structure itself.

[163] Their mere willingness to share their stories in a thesis they know their superiors might read demonstrates this!

Laughter, shared stories of daily struggles and joys, and surveillance of these young people and managers created a space for pleasure and fulfilment on a daily basis. That the junior women in marketing in turn used trusted white male networks to express their dissent, validating these networks, and further subjugating their dominating white female managers themselves shows how ludicrous any simplification of South African workplace dynamics into the tropes of black/white, old/young, male/female, manager/employee actually is. Thus, I argue here that while western popular thought sees identity as independent from society (Kondo, 1990; McCracken, 2008), the dynamics of Big Bank fundamentally show the inconsistencies, and the destructiveness of this "biographical illusion" (Bourdieu, 1987 in Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 26).

Most importantly, as far as informal talk, joking and interests, we need to see how the introduction of an outsider provokes people to form teams to protect perceived shared interests, maintaining a front in spite of actual in-team discrepancies (Goffman, 1959). Firstly, as per Goffman's (ibid.) view of framing, the situational definition requires tact, and an acceptance of certain available identity positions, and in turn some denial of the nuances of agents' interests. While this process itself is also constitutive of an agent's perception of her/his interests (Bourdieu, 1977), the social performance necessarily requires people to present alliances, in denial of certain subaltern parts of themselves and others (Goffman, 1959). In Big Bank the available paths to fulfilment were significantly influenced by the introduction of an outsider, whose 'outsider' status had become distinctly ambiguous by 2007, while in Boodle Bank the social field, and the humour and gossip which created it, had experienced the cohesiveness, but not the long term assimililatory effects of an outsider. For this reason, the 'dominant' and the 'minority' in employee discourse was decidedly less pronounced.

Professional identities:

"*If there is one thing corporate culture is trying to accomplish through diversity management it is to use diversity to create a long-lasting cross-racial class alliance…* [to create a] *professional middle class*."

The most remarkable aspect of this “cross-racial class alliance”, as was in many ways evidenced in Boodle Bank, is that it gives the overwhelming impression that nothing is happening:

"*Maintaining credibility involves the use of various kinds of resources and a willingness to abide by rules of conduct. When the social world is credible it is ‘convincingly real’, which, in the context of everyday behaviour, often means that participants often have a sense that ‘nothing’ is particular is going on*." (Manning, 2000: 293)

It makes sense that several senior managers at Boodle Bank strongly emphasized the need for credibility, which Manning, using Goffman, sees as “the quality of being believable and this quality is integral to both trust and deception" (Manning, 2000: 283). It also makes sense, therefore, that the more professional the identity, the less likely they will be to “entertain” gossip (as they so often described it). Indeed, an important aspect of Kurland and Pelled’s (2000) view on gossip was exactly its ability to build credibility when accurate, and decrease it when slanderous. A subtle observation in this regard is the distaste with which these people often seemed to view gossip, the stigma associated with it being noted before (Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Spacks, 1982’; Yerkovitch, 1977). They seemed to not merely reject that they gossip, they seemed to despise those that do.

Let us keep in mind an important point in my larger argument: if we are examining how people influenced culture towards their interests a vital aspect of that would be the “information game” (Goffman, 1987 in Collinson, 1999: 593), in that it is in actual everyday conversation and joking that “selective history” and

identity is confirmed. While many of my professional informants disapproved of 'gossip', and particularly the men, they would often advertise they're credentials as prominent 'networkers', and would often admit, cautiously, to listening (but never contributing!) to the 'grapevine'.

Firstly, as to the gender dimension here:

"*If two people engage in the same behaviour, talking too much, the woman is likely to be called a gossip, while the man will not*." (Rysman, 1977 in Noon and Delbridge, 1993: 24)[164]

As per Goffman (1959), ethnographically an important line of hierarchy in the micropolitics of social identity formation is how one frames the information ones gives and receives. This is part and parcel of a bundle of behaviours, or styles of "presencing", in the "spatiality of situation", and facial control (Giddens, 1984: 45-67), and in how a proposition will be performed - historical "citations" (Butler, 1995: 203) of particular identities. Thus nodding authoritatively, standing firmly up straight, and not making odd noises were all demonstrated by observed 'networkers' in these sites, but with men, in a particular confident (strident?) way[165]. The scandalous point of view, that gossip is bad, but networking in a particular way is not merely acceptable, but is expected (such as in the 'visibility' requirement of Boodle Bank) indicates themes of cultural power, and almost arrogance towards the 'unprofessional' identities. Fournier's (1999: 287) insight on this, that we should see the identity claims of professionals as "technologies of the self", in which, as Goffman (1959) has suggested, professionals use certain discourses and in-group exclusivity to gain access to resources and reinforce certain types of social capital is highly relevant here. Thus employees who merely want to work, rather than take on the discourse of the destabilized,

[164] Also, consider Highfield's (2007) report of research with US university finding equal amounts of talk between genders, with slight differences in how this talk is framed.
[165] If one considers the "guys" of Boodle Bank finance, or male experts of Big Bank marketing, who placed themselves outside of both the 'Indian' clique and the female managerial alliances one can see this gender position often occurred across race, ethnic and age boundaries.

continuously developing identity of professionals, are stigmatized as "unprofessional" (Fournier, 1999: 301). A vital aspect for social survival for most of the employees in Boodle Bank was gathering information which critiqued managers and departments, and helped form social theories (in terms of Giddens, 1984) by which people determined what course of action would most suite their interests. Thus, the presence of certain ethnicities and commonly agreed upon values amongst certain groups (such as the laughter culture amongst 'Indian' and other youth in Boodle Bank finance) were in part affected by moral opinions about which departments, and which managers would most suite their interests, often based on information gleaned through the 'network'. People moved where they heard the going was good, and left when the social opinion decided it was not good[166]. In terms of Sahlin's (1985: 52) view, these stories and jokes about colleagues, managers, departments, and even companies, form a "folklore" which is passed around in the marketplace, "the political order of the economy" arising out of whose version will prevail. This, as cited before, "social process is *experienced* by the participants as the maximization of their personal satisfactions".

While the claims to not gossip were spread across the hierarchical spectrum, in spite of observed and reported gossip from these same individuals, the nature in which masculinised professional identities, in both genders, went about actually gossiping took on highly performed nuances. Let us bear in mind that gossip is identified both by its moral judgment and its transfer of information (Eder and Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963; Handelman, 1973; Hodson, 1991; Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Noon and Delbridge, 1993; Paine, 1967; Shulman, 2007; Spacks, 1982; Yerkovitch, 1977). Whether a piece of information conveys perceptions about someone's inept management practices or about who has slept with who seems arbitrary in the light of both involving judgment and the citation of moral

[166] Spacks (1982) pointed out how people use gossip to establish consensus in ambiguous situations, in line with Pfeffer's conceptualization of "informational social influence" which "will inevitably lead to their being influenced by emerging social consensus they experience" (1981: 15).

norms. What is imperative, however, is how informal communication is framed (as gossip, rumour, humour, 'the grapevine' or networking), through verbal cues and "microecological" (Goffman, 1977: 207) positioning and would therefore seem to be an important aspect of how gender, ethnicity, class and professionalized identity are constructed.

Let us bear in mind that both Goffman (1959) and Gluckman (1963) assert that more exclusive, and more senior people usually do talk informally in moral terms (gossip), often to control those subordinate to them (ibid.)[167], although such interviewees usually denied it outright. Concurrently 'gossip' (as opposed to its professional versions – networking, the 'grapevine') has been seen as a strategy for the lower end of the social hierarchy (e.g. Scott, 1985; Spivak, 1988; Said, 1988; Sahlins, 1985), a "subaltern means of communication" (Spivak, 1988: 21). The difference, in the professional circles of South African banking, would seem to be that being seen not to gossip is far more important to those with power, in spite of evidence that they both needed to and did gossip. That these managers and expert staff seemed to go to great lengths to cover the subaltern, politically unstable aspects of their own selves would appear to demonstrate the instability inherent in professionalised aspects of their identities (Fournier, 1999). The cues, and claims one makes about oneself in the smallest of ways, after all, are the basis for enduring societal structures (Boudieu, 1977; Butler, 1997 in McNay, 2000; Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1959).

With regards to professional identity two major lines of cultural reconstruction were how humour and gossip were used in line with certain positions of ethnicity and age. For example, the gossip in Boodle Bank seemed to take on more ethnic positioning, with a self essentialisation of 'Indian' identity[168], while the male

[167] In fact Morrill (1989) explains how such informal talking is an important aspect of managerial social influence and information seeking.
[168] Thus, for example, one very professional middle aged networker said of her chats with the woman in the next cubicle: "We sit and talk across the fence [the cubicle wall], the way my mother used to talk across the fence. We became like my mother [laughs]…They took the girl out of Chatsworth [a suburb in Durban/Etekwini known for it's large Indian population], but you can't take the Chatsworth out the girl". Noting here my own ethnicity's possible impact on this

managers, of all ethnicities, seemed to rather emphasise professionalism. Similarly, younger managers, in both banks and of both genders, seemed more inclined to create humour which reduced hierarchical distance and asymmetry in staff relations, which was a marked difference, from, for example, how Wikus, the older director from Big Bank, would engage. Indeed, it would seem that for young professionals the "force of normalization" (Hodgson, 2005: 65) inherent in seriousness of the "Protestant work ethic" (Weber,1930 in Collinson, 2002: 276) were directly and consciously reconstructed through play and humour[169].

In spite of all of the above, we should bear in mind the critique of meritocracy, equality and professionalism, which were strongly part of the normalizing assumptions of both banks, as often biased and discriminatory (Collinson, 2003; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Gordon, 1995).

Identity politics: age, class, race and gender:

It has been noted that a fundamental area of tension between the old and young is over opportunity and the rate at which the old retire (Turner, 1998). That the old frequently rely on values such as reliability and loyalty, while the young accuse them of being behind the times and unable to keep up with change (Dennis and Thomas, 2007) were both highly prevalent in the research sites studied here, most pronouncedly so in Big Bank. We need to reflexively acknowledge that being 'old' or 'young' is more a matter of asserted and projected identity position than one's actual age, the difference between what Irwin terms the "old-old" and "a youthful outlook" (1998: 310). One can argue that the dilemma of young seeing the old as out of date is certainly not a new

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discussion. A concern is that my 'whiteness' may have created a polarity, an outside eye, which provoked an ethnically based description. The complexity of Indian identity should not be simplified, but is certainly a theme in Boodle Bank. When I asked another informant about Indian 'culture' and gossip she responded: "It is a bad thing, but it happens. I guess it's the families we come from. We have huge families. There is always something to gossip about... It's also the environment we lived in... If I farted my neighbours would talk about it."

[169] This is in line with Hodgson's (2005) view of humour to resist professional identity, here with an age component, as Ryan at Boodle Bank put it: "So, I create that break down. I don't want them to look at their manager and think that I can't grin and laugh... It is easier to develop the person if disciplining is easier".

phenomenon, we need to recognize that late-capitalism's drive towards "indeterminacy and flexibility" (Fournier, 1999: 281) seems to exacerbate this, notwithstanding a multiplicity of positions within the categories of 'young' and 'old'[170]. Indeed, it would seem, from the above findings that the only older people perceived as capable of keeping up with the "flexible strategies of capitalist accumulation" (Fournier: 1999: 281) were those versed in the discourse and strategies of professionalism. As one younger HR specialist put it:

"*And what about the issue of being outdated, ten* [years] *of which you were in a branch, because we do things differently in the branches now. ARE you relevant, young or old? What are you adding? Don't tell me about length* [of service]."

The class position in this needs to be noted. While the discourse informally put out by younger staff held that being 'positive', 'vibrant' and able to keep up with change were merely about a mindset[171], actual situations, such as Boodle Bank's continual assessment of 'intellect', and the real difficulties of less educated older women, already burdened by the responsibilities of motherhood, and a racist, gender biased political history, utterly deny such simple narratives. If we recall that the idea of being 'youthful' in our current context is historically and socially fairly specific. The cultural capital associated with 'youth' and a 'youthful outlook' are deeply wound up in confirming middle class values (Nisbett, 2007; Rizzo, 2005; Young, 2007), and, I am arguing, with the discriminatory assumptions with which such a class position is associated (Gordon, 1995). Indeed, if we take Fabian's (2002) view of history in western discourse, I would propose that the older and less professionalized employees in these banks are situated at the end of a classist hierarchy in which they are seen as distant, in their lack of social capital, their drawing on histories denied (Turner, 1998), and in turn stigmatized

[170] In fact it is exactly the view of age which denies the historically specific age positions of different gender, race and class life narratives which leads Irwin (1998) to dispute and label Turner's (1998) view of strong cohesion in age cohorts as ageist in itself.
[171] Which is part of why a popular type of story in Big Bank involved persons holding lowly stations (in particular security guards, and in one case a chef), reaching high levels in the bank – informal folklore denying the actual requisites of education and cultural capital that such a move requires.

as the historical Other. In comparison, older white men, also stigmatized (in Big Bank at least), still had access to opportunities to participate in professional successes, or at least the historical and hierarchically necessary contacts to maintain a valued identity position.

Let us start with gender. As seen in the above text, women's response to oppression is generally "a variable and piecemeal affair" (Cameron, 1984 in McNay, 1992: 66), split along age, class, race and ethnic lines. A particularly prevalent discourse offered by men and women alike was that of the difficult, careerist female 'monstrous managers'[172] – particularly Naisha and Suzette at Big Bank and another senior HR manager at Boodle Bank. These accusations, often not without merit, need to be seen reflexively. A current cultural trope is of the "the tough corporate woman executive", who is expected to "beat men at their own game" (Moahloli, 1997: 31). What counts is not so much specifically the truth of the claims of discrimination, but rather, that the critique of their managerial skills usually cited gender, where with problematic male managers this was far less often the case, demonstrates the ambiguous status of female managers. Indeed, the use of gender myths and stereotypes to resist, and reconstruct these women as bad (as opposed to exposing the structuring system of events which would both create the space for and offer a socially 'workable' sexist explanation for the acts of these feminized managers) demonstrates the gender bias in these institutions in general.

Comparatively, consider that the discourses that the 'mothers' in Big Bank finance and the 'Indian clique' in Big Bank marketing put forward, were almost completely absent in Boodle Bank. For example, in Boodle Bank only one interviewee commented on maternity leave, an important issue for parents in

[172] Referring to Marina Warner's "Monstrous Mothers" (1994: 1-16), in which she describes the repeated current myth of the female as uncontrollable and dangerous, "cunning, voracious, nippy and female."

business[173]. That she was a junior, older non-white woman is in line with the positions often taken up by similar informants in Big Bank. Consider Asch's (1958 in Pfeffer, 1981) findings that even one alternative voice can reduce conformity regarding a common opinion. A difference, therefore, between the two banks is that in Big Bank subaltern and feminist issues had far more political influence on the culture than had been the case in Boodle Bank – they simply had more voice and publicity in informal interactions.

We should bear in mind the critique of meritocracy, equality and professionalism, which were strongly part of the normalizing assumptions of both banks, as often biased and discriminatory (Collinson, 2003; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Gordon, 1995):

"*large numbers* [of poor, non-white South Africans] *would nonetheless feel betrayed by their poverty and by the insistence that they act as individuals in a society where whites, by having used state power, now speak of the privatization of power*." (Macdonald and James, 1993 in Abdi, 1999: 159)

The complexity, in these contexts, is that the polarity between black and white was immensely complicated in actual creolized South African situations. In this there are certain key dynamics.

First, we need to bear in mind the manner in which whiteness maintains its position by remaining invisible, shifting and drawing on ideas of global western culture to hide its hegemonic bias (Dolby, 2001; Kondo, 1997; Moahloli, 1997; Morley and Chen, 1996). In Big Bank this had an age and professional component, with old white men resisting in a discourse of age, which, although at

[173] This is in line with Mathur-Helm's (2006) claims that while many SA banks provide maternity leave to their staff, those who use it are often seen as "having a lack of commitment which reduce promotional chances. Thus, organizations install contradicting systems working parallel to one another, configuring the workforce further". A note on this is that this is certainly not only a female issue. Several cultural acts, such as baby showers for fathers, new fathers writing into Big Bank's monthly newsletter about work versus father pressures, and corridor discussions of the 'joys of fatherhood' were observed – although far more so in Big than Boodle Bank.

first glance similar to older female and non-white staff, had lines of power, reinforced through informal talk, and strongly through masculine humour, which complicated their subaltern claims. Simultaneously, we have a competing version of whiteness, demonstrated in both banks, through globalized professional identity. However, this was by no means merely a 'white' phenomenon – it was drawn on by 'non-white' staff in resistance to white hegemony as frequently as it maintained that hegemony.

Secondly, there seems to be a tendency to identify those who are 'westernised' as 'assimilated': "To date, integration and assimilation have never taken place on equal terms, but always as assimilation by the dominant culture."
(JanMohammed and Lloyd, 1987: 7)

While the negotiations here were certainly not symmetrical, we need to be cautious of seeing a purist, essentialised ethnic culture from which perceived Others must reconstitute themselves, and also avoid in turn a perceived essential dominant culture unaffected by these Others. Indeed, the problem in these organizations is that it was often educated non-white 'Others' who brought in the assimilating professionalism. In this lies the value of this thesis regarding South African culture, in which creolisation has in truth left us with commonalities that popular race and ethnic binaries often seem to ignore (Nuttal and Michael, 2000), and in denial of the politicized claims of difference in current South African discourse, in terms of Comaroff and Comaroff's (2004: 190) "ID-ology". To relegate the 'Indian', 'Xhosa', 'coloured', etc, men and women studied here to prescribed ethnic essentialisms, and to see their professionalism as a mere "assimilation" denies the actual manners in which they would reinvent these professionalisms through humour and gossip in a creolized South African fashion. In fact this is exactly the critique of hybridity, that it assumes essential prior cultures, abominated by culture mixing (Nuttal and Michael, 2000).

"*You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject*." (Hall, 1996: 444)

In line with the critique of Kondo (1991) for creating a unified, western (or in her case 'American') 'strawperson' (Robertson, 1991: 156), in the South African case in particular, I argue here that it is inaccurate to see any of the agents in the banks studied here as 'western', when, as seen in these chapters the negotiation of identity was in fact immensely more creolized and discursive than any 'side' would seem to admit. While, deconstructing the position of subaltern discourses is in danger of undermining the "communitas" (Chaterjee, 1988 quoting Victor Turner in Spivak, 1988: 30) such discourses engage[174], the homogenizing effects of these discourses *within* 'minority' groups were often similarly destructive:

"*caring for the self necessarily involves a struggle to delegitimize, overpower and silence the other*." (McNay, 1992: 174)

Dualisms:

An important note in terms of theory is the questioning of simple dualistic ideas of power/resistance (Kondo, 1991; McNay, 2000; Mumby, 2005), leader/follower (Collinson, 2005a; McNay, 1992), male/female (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), black/white (Kondo, 1997), formal/informal (Goffman, 1959) and so forth[175]. As has been seen above, agents in these sites at times directly resisted and at times

[174] I am extremely conscious of this in regards to deconstructing politically motivated subaltern identity – after all it is precisely this aspect of 'depoliticized' deconstruction in post-modern and post-structural writing that minority (JanMohammed and Lloyd, 1987; Morley and Chen, 1996; Spivak, 1988) and feminist (Kirby, 1993; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; McNay, 2000) authors have so questioned.

[175] Another aspect, thoroughly underemphasized in this thesis is that of sexual identity. In the entire process of this research I only encountered one reference to homosexuality amongst my interviewees (and a very third hand one at that), which would perhaps be in line with conservative nature of banking in itself. Whether this scarcity in sexuality related discourse was because gay and lesbian employees simply did not reveal their sexual status to me, or that the status quo simply does not support such narratives, or merely that I never interviewed the right people is beyond the bounds of what this information can reveal.

directly colluded with power, ambiguously drawing on the very discourses which subjugated them to express their dissent.

"*People mobilize and employ the idiom, but their acts are shaded by ironies and unintended consequences*." (Kondo, 1990: 306)

In these two banks above we need to recognize the manner in which managers, professionals and staff alike were both constrained and created avenues to fulfilment, at times altering culture, in teams and individually, towards cultural practices in their interests. At times these practices themselves created further subjugation, or subjugated others, and often in the process creating creolized reinventions of South African cultural identities, usually outside of prefabricated socially perceived dualisms.

"*Even those who have power are themselves working at cross-purposes to their own interests, that they, too, are caught in power relations and in their own ways are dominated by those relations even as they can dominate others*." (Kondo, 1991: 45)

Conclusion: the corporate imaginary:

As to gossip, rumour, the grapevine and humour specifically, we need to realize this study has engaged in an examination of allegations, hearsay, and often unsubstantiated creations. These allegations can never gain legitimacy, as subaltern knowledge's they can never be fully recovered in the domains of truth prescribed by corporate hierarchy (Foucault, 1980). They usually went unheard, or even on occasion were deliberately covered up by those with power[176]. In spite of this, as has been seen above, the opinions of all subjects, whether

[176] Consider the remarkable revelation by a well placed informant in one of the companies studied here in which they specifically removed themselves from the 'Best Companies to Work For Survey' – they were not coming in high enough, and did not want dissatisfaction be publicly noted.

managerial or otherwise, can and often do have an impact on the regimes of power, which, while often delineating interests and identity, themselves provided the means for individuals to reconstruct their selves and in turn the cultures through which they live.

In this light, while what people said to each other in informal communication in the corridors, board rooms and eating areas has serious material implications for themselves and their families[177], the process of culture practice and citation was profoundly creative: “popular attitudes and points of view influence this gossip, so that ‘fantasy supplements or even supplants fact in order to weave more closely a new motif into the old pattern of grievance against discrimination’” (Herskovits, 1947 in Gluckman, 1963: 307). Thus, it is the role of anthropologist to “work both in and outside of the official written record, both within and beyond the guardians of memory… to reconstruct the annals of cultural imagination” (Comaroff and Comaroff’s, 1992: 34).

The concluding remarks of this study need to start with a realization that the processes studied here were fundamentally about interests, and whose version of the social reality would hold forth, both between people, and within their own identities:

"*Normality involves the attempted foreclosure of alternative possibilities of subjectivity… Individuals seek both to expunge 'the other' in themselves and criminalize or treat it when manifested in others as irrationality, criminality or perversion*." (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 185)

The starting point in an analysis of South African organizations needs, therefore, to be micro-political. As has been seen above, socially powerful formations, structure, race, ethnicity, gender, class, age and so forth, are not mere

[177] "organizational life depends on 'people-processing encounters...in which 'impressions' subjects make during the interaction affects their life chances'."(Goffman, 1983 in Branaman, 1997: lxxxi)

theoretical entities, but are rather rhetorical assertions (Kondo, 1990), which are created in actual face-to-face identity performances. It is within the talking, joking and friendships in the above banks that political power was created and maintained. That these rhetorical assertions had deep political implications, which directly influence the life chances of oneself and one's co-workers is pivotal to the achievement of one's interests. In South Africa, with it's history of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1988 in Kondo, 1997: 182; Thornton, 2000), and hidden 'whiteness' (Dolby, 2001), these issues are at the very cutting edge of what South African companies are struggling with today.

This study has uncovered the manner in which middle class professional identity would seem to have create some degree of "cross-racial class alliance" (Gordon, 1995: 22), which has severely obscured claims of simple black/white, dominant/minority narratives, and indeed, that the class issue has created contexts in which:

"*the ability of these groups to collectively institute new forms of identity suggests that their social location is not unambiguously marginal*." (McNay, 2000: 60)

However, there certainly were many subaltern others, who were subjugated by logocentric attempts at identity closure, particularly here through a discourse of professionalism, and the "idealized fiction" (Silverman, 1992 in McNay, 2000: 55) of masculinity, shutting off particular types of talk. In turn particular claims of identity that their subaltern status necessarily engaged, has provided the marginal voice which could expose the political specificity of these professional identities.

This study has brought to light reinventions of 'global' culture, through the interpolation of gender and ethnicity, through communitarian styles of gossip, and gender, age and class specific styles of laughter, and how this global culture is in fact locally and situationally reinvented towards specific purposes. One wonders,

in this regard, whether this imagined global culture exists at all, but should rather be seen as a always locally perceived view of a global imaginary – an international “working misunderstanding” (Bohannan, 1964 in Wyllie, 1976: 198)? Regarding corporations, and particularly in South Africa, we need to acknowledge the manner in which organizations use politically desirable discourses, in these banks ‘ubuntu, ‘respect’, ‘empowerment’, and so forth, to create symbolic homage, without dealing with the actual daily nuances and lines of power that influence people’s lives (Pfeffer, 1981). In turn, and in association with this, the political reinvention and imagination of the nature of South Africa’s racist past, as seen here, should not overlook the small workplace discriminations, as spoken of by the mothers of finance, in which a sanitized version of banking history overrides the ‘real’ struggles of individuals:

"*For the truth is that the often hurtful and seemingly trivial encounters of daily existence are in the end what most of life is*." (Cose, 1993 in Gordon, 1995: 15)

In the same breath, however, this research has found that this is by no means a “zero-sum game” (Hall, 1992 in Kondo, 1997: 11). People are extraordinarily resourceful, and the employees studied here, at all levels, engaged a “politics of pleasure” (Kondo, 1997: 10) on a daily basis, reinventing, and reconfirming, their own identities, and those of their co-workers, and in turn their organizational culture through laughter, play and talk.

As to this thesis’ contribution to theorising on resistance – I would hope that it has added to ideas on gossip, humour, performance and post-structuralism in organizations in general, and the meeting between the mircroecological views of Goffman (1959) and micropolitical dimensions of Foucault (1980), as proposed by Giddens (1984). While McNay has noted that:

"*A weakness of certain theories of reflexive transformation is that the emphasis placed upon strategic and conscious processes of self-monitoring overlooks*

certain more enduring, reactive aspects of identity or, as Bourdieu puts it, the extent to which the habitus continues to work long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been dislodged." (Bourdieu, 1990b in McNay, 2000: 42)

We should be cognisant that the "practical mimesis" proposed by Bourdieu (1990a in McNay, 2000: 39) and taken up in Butler's performativity (1993a in McNay, 2000), are very similar to Goffman's ideas on performance. A resolution would seem to be to incorporate the immense, and valuable work of Goffman, and the ideas on talk, gossip and humour which have followed (e.g. Noon and Delbridge, 1993, Shulman, 2007) within the historical and cultural consciousness of post-structural feminism – as has been so successfully done by David Collinson (e.g. 1994, 1999, 2002, 2003)[178].

Regarding post-structural feminism in particular, this research has drawn strongly from the works of Dorinne Kondo (1990, 1997) and Lois McNay (1992, 2000). I believe that the South African situation has much to add to these perspectives, particularly in the examples of how identity is strategically essentialised - that ethnicity was more frequently cited by female workers, while professionalism was complicated by race, age and ethnicity, are dynamics I have not countered in the literature thus far. The mere volume of cultural, gender and age diversity in these banks has given a unique eye on how identity is formed. As McNay and Kondo above have suggested, the very idea of 'resistance', does not always seem to make sense in environments in which competing discourses, within management, between colleagues, and *within* race, gender, ethnic, age and class distinctions shows how employees seem rather to utilize available narratives in dialogue, at times 'dominating' and at times 'resisting', the distinction between these two being obscure at best.

[178] One almost gets the sense that for feminist authors, Goffman's work is seen as shallow, when, on reading, it seems to describe in depth exactly the behaviours that concern them?

Regarding further research, the study of how ordinary South Africans subjugate and create themselves and each other on a daily basis does not seem to make sense without and examination of what they are actually saying! In this the study of gossip, humour and informal talk seems radically understudied in South African organizations, in which, at least in my experience, there is a heavy reliance on 'corporate culturalism'[179]. In addition to this, there appears to be a need for a more current view of identity politics, seen in conjunction with class, and the manner in which middle class youth, of all ethnicities, at times ignoring and at times engaging on essentialised versions of race and ethnicity, seem to subjugate and silence the poor feminised other. For example, as far as popular culture, much of South Africa's stand up comedy cites race, whilst ignoring the historically complex contradictions of class, gender, sex and age assumptions within their claims of 'black', 'white', 'Xhosa', 'Indian', and so forth strongly demonstrates Van Dongen's (2005) assertion that the 'young' want a break with the past, at the expense of the subjective memories and identities of the 'old'. However, most emphatically further examination should be carried out into the political mechanisms by which 'whiteness' in South African workplaces remains obtuse, and attempts to associate itself more with the imagined global culture than its own South African specific mobilized discourse of privilege (Dolby, 2001).

Thus, in conclusion, we need to see the narratives offered through gossip and humour studied here as a "social imaginary" (Castoriadis, 1987 in McNay, 2000: 23), in which my friends[180] and acquaintances in these banks creatively and partially invented themselves and their workplaces, and in turn South African identity itself:

[179] Indeed, I have assisted in the creation of culture change programmes for the likes of Goldfields (the gold mining conglomerate), South African Airways, Sun International, and others. The fact that employees most certainly do not merely imbibe these programmes, and particularly in South Africa (Moahloli, 1997), with our political history, is a point which my clients severely dislike to be reminded of (they often spend millions on these programmes, and in many cases their jobs rely on the belief that managers can mechanistically control their workplace cultures) – a tension between different aspects of organizational interests (Chanlat, 1997).

[180] I am very conscious of Ikeba's (1993) critique of Kondo (1990), that an over focus on discourse can overlook that these people (who kindly helped me do this research!) have very 'human' qualities – I do not wish to loose them behind anthropological deconstruction.

"*Rather, this experience would, I hope, occasion reflection on the ways our institutions, languages, and social formations - schools, corporations, families, and meaningful cleavages such as class, race, gender and age - are vehicles for the disciplinary production of selves*." (Kondo, 1990: 260)

Addendum A:

Semi-structured interview schedule:

Age range:

Demographic:

Position & length & length at company:

Do you like being here, does it fulfil you (out of 10)?

Describe your official corporate culture (what are the values, mission and the way the company portrays the culture as being)?

Do people live up to this? (examples)

Describe your actual corporate culture (thoughts that you had and what did people say to you when you first arrived):

How are people required to interact, protocols?

Rate managerial control? How does management enforce this: officially and unofficial? (examples)

If someone does something that others dislike what do people do about it (e.g. Management, e.g. individual)?

How have things changed over time?

Do people like working here - does this working environment leave them feeling fulfilled?

Nature of work & chance for social connections:

Do you ever gossip/skinner/share rumour at work? With who? Where? When? How much time do you spend doing this? Why do you do it? How is it viewed by management? Have you ever been affected by this? How did you react (believe it / not)?

Do you ever joke around with / engage with people who are joking around? What do you jokes around about? How often do you do this? With who? Where? When? Why? Viewed by management? Have you ever been affected? How did you react?

Are there any internal politics in this organization?

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