

**Centralising a counter public: An ethnographic study of the interpretation  
of mainstream news media by young adults in Joza**

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## Abstract

The 2014 national general elections were characterised by a cloud of scandal hanging over the ANC, and the ANC president Jacob Zuma. The biggest and darkest cloud was the Nkandla scandal. Owing to a reported R246 million spent by the state to refurbish his private home, the president stood accused of wasteful expenditure and financial irregularity. In a country reeling from the continued effects of apartheid, which include high unemployment and poverty, the scandal was a bombshell. According to a vocal and often adversarial mainstream media sphere, the ANC went into those elections with an albatross around its neck. The dominant thought was that the ruling party would suffer a heavy loss of votes. This outcome did not materialise. The ANC lost a marginal share of its previous vote. Mainstream media and civil society were confounded. What had happened? Why had poor black South Africans continued to vote for a party that was obviously in breach of the constitutional order?

Against the mismatch between what was predicted or purported and the outcome, this study investigates how young people in the township of Joza, Grahamstown, interpreted one of the biggest political scandals in South Africa's fledgling democracy. Using a combination of subaltern studies, counter public sphere and audience study, the research looks into the interpretation of a mainstream media scandal that was supposed to diminish the chances of the ANC retaining power, but, instead, barely dented its majority.

Through a combination of interviews and participant observation, the study found that young people in the township of Joza demonstrated that they chose to ignore the messages about the corruption of the ANC. The data suggests that they did so, not because of overt racial solidarity, but due to the fact that in a context of high inequality, and continued limitations on economic emancipation, the party shone brightly as a vehicle for economic development. Overall, the study argues that the seemingly dubious undertaking to continue with the ANC is a calculated decision that makes sense when viewed within a given socio-economic context.

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## Chapter 1

### Situating the study: Research overview

This was the story of the election, and it is the story of this political moment. When Big Ben called time on Thursday night, we saw clear evidence of a political realignment that the media and the political establishment had dismissed with hostility, and now regarded with confusion. We saw a polity that has lost touch with its people; a political culture unmoored from the electorate, and a mainstream media that drifted along with it. The election did not create that dislocation; it was merely the clearest and least deniable manifestation of it so far. We are in new territory. And we don't know where we're going (Younge, 2017).

#### 1.1. Introduction

The following study investigates how young people in the township of Joza, Grahamstown, interpreted one of the biggest political scandals in South Africa's fledgling democracy, the Nkandla scandal. As an exploratory research project, the study attempts to understand the scandal and its influence on the political choices of those concerned. The researcher chose to investigate the interpretation of the Nkandla scandal by a young township audience because the voting patterns of this group (and the broader black majority) baffled mainstream media when they opted to keep the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in government. This is despite overwhelming media reports that pointed to widespread corruption by the ruling party. The research, thus, looks into the meaning that young people in the township made of a scandal that was supposed to diminish the chances of ANC retaining power, but, instead, barely dented its majority.

This chapter's structure will reflect the outline of the thesis. Following a brief background to the research, the first section will present the context of the study, which will be the discussion conducted in **Chapter Two and Chapter Three**. The next section in this chapter outlines the theoretical framework, which will be the literature reviewed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. A brief discussion of the methodology and data gathering process will draw this chapter to a close, and serve as a precursor to the discussion regarding ethnography carried out in Chapter Six. The chapters that conclude the thesis, Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight, the analysis of

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findings, and Chapter Nine, the conclusion, will not form part of this introduction, but follow in the end pages of the work.

## 1.2. Background

Media commentators across the globe have recently been confounded by the outcome of popular elections. In 2016, the world media and various punters failed to predict, or accurately depict, what majority populations had to say about the running of their respective democracies. Van Zyl (2017) writes observantly that for all its power and influence, the media suffers from a tendency to act as an 'echo chamber', which is to say that media punditry can exist in a bubble. This affliction has most notably been characterised by Britain voting to leave the European Union and Donald Trump's shock election as the President of the United States of America. The latest case of this trend was Jeremy Corbyn's remarkable electoral gains. Corbyn and the Labour Party astonished the British political establishment by winning a sizeable margin of the electorate against the prediction to lose by a landslide (Younge, 2017).

This study centres on a similar occurrence in South Africa, when, in 2014, pundits failed to discern the outcome an election, and were astounded by the direction taken by a majority. In the run-up to the 2014 general elections, mainstream media outlets and commentators were convinced that the numerous political scandals, Nkandla being the worst of them, that beset the ruling ANC would threaten its majority (Calland, 2014; Holmes, 2013). The research is, therefore, prompted by the fact that, despite the negative coverage, the ANC ended up with a healthy, 63.2% of the vote, losing only three percent of ballots from the previous election five years prior. The above figure inspired the researcher to conduct an enquiry into the reception of media coverage because of the disparity between what was expected to happen and what actually occurred.

Although resigned to the fact that the ANC would win the election, a great deal of the coverage maintained more than a modicum of hope that the party would flounder (on South Africa's mainstream media bias see Jacobs, 1999, Comey, (2014 and Grootes, 2014). According to the popular media narrative, the multitude of scandals, Nkandla being the worst of them, were an albatross that would lead to the ANC's unravelling at the polls (Munasamy, 2014). There was a sense that there would be a significant backlash from voters, who were regularly taking to the streets to demand the delivery of basic services (Alexander, 2012). Grahamstown, for example, where the study was conducted, presents a good case study. The city was awash with

protest action, with organisations such as the Unemployed People's Movement keeping the local ANC run Municipality busy (Mngxitama-Diko and Roux, 2013).

The sentiment expressed in media discourse was that the ANC was running the country to the ground and the party would be made to pay by the electorate (Munasamy, 2014). However convincing this argument was, the elections disproved the sentiment. The ANC retained its majority in parliament, and suffered a less than expected decrease at the polls. Despite the Nkandla scandal's centrality to the election news coverage, when the final results were tallied, the ruling party suffered less than four percentage point decrease from 65.9% in 2009 to 62.1% in 2014 (IEC, 2014). Interestingly, in the Eastern Cape, despite the much-publicised scandals, the ruling party improved their margin from 68% in 2009 to 70% in 2014 (IEC, 2014). In Makana Municipality, the focus of the proposed research, and despite many service delivery problems, the ANC improved its tally from 65% in 2009 to 68% (IEC, 2014).

The 2014 election results, therefore, contradicted the expectation that the multiple scandals facing the ANC would lead to the party being abandoned by the black majority. The mismatch between what was predicted or purported and the outcome launched this enquiry. It set up the primary question: why had the mainstream media gotten the 2014 election so wrong? To answer, the research drew inspiration from Robins, Cornwall and Von Lieres's (2008: 1069) insistence that an analysis of post-apartheid society should centre on the "perspectives of citizens themselves". It is in this respect that the researcher decided to focus on the perspective of the majority black voters in South Africa's townships who had apparently been misjudged. This line of enquiry led to the more pointed research question: if the group in question did not follow the mainstream media prescription, how did they interpret events as reported by the media? Therefore, coverage of the 2014 elections begged the question, if mainstream media was disappointed because a large majority had not done as expected, not swayed by the coverage of a multitude of scandals to vote against the ANC, then how was this silent majority interpreting dominant messages?

Guided by the overarching goal to explore the meanings made by young people in the township, a group largely denied a voice in mainstream media (Malila, 2013), the aim of the research was to examine the interpretation of media messages by young people living in Joza. Joza was chosen as the locus of the study in an attempt to explore the everyday reality (which includes media usage) of one of the township groups that is often marginalised and, in this specific case, gravely misjudged by mainstream media. Furthermore, Joza was thus identified as the location

of the study because it gave the researcher an opportunity to produce academic work focussed not only on the Eastern Cape and Grahamstown, where Rhodes University is situated, but on a historically marginalised community that seldom receives sustained academic preoccupation in the area of Media Studies.

In essentially asking what young people in Joza have to say about themselves and their media use, the research intended to bring the marginalised voices of young people living in the township to the centre by foregrounding the voices of the subaltern (Spivak, 1988; also see Duncan, 2012 and Malila, 2014). The study was, therefore, envisioned to make a contribution to audience studies in South Africa in two ways. Firstly, the research sought to make a contribution to the understanding of power dynamics that characterise modern democracies into which media inserts itself in everyday life. Secondly, it sought to contribute by conducting a focussed examination of the interpretation of mainstream media by township youth because little is known in media and media scholarship of the meanings that marginalised groups make of dominant media messages, and the cultural resources they draw on. Ultimately the research project seeks to make the point that we must pay equal attention to agency and to economic/social circumstances if we want to understand how poor people in South Africa make political decisions and engage with formal political structures. As such it must be noted that the project is thus less about mediation and media and more about countering the dominant assumptions about poverty and the marginalised who appear in those media spaces.

Due to the scarcity of knowledge about the region, and, evidently, the interpretation of mainstream media scandals by people living outside of urban areas, the research opted for an exploratory and inductive approach. Exploratory research is defined as scholarly work that tackles new problems on which little or no previous research has been done, in an attempt to gain further insight and to provide details where a small amount of information exists (Schutt, 1995). The study was, therefore, exploratory because it was conducted to identify key issues and variables in order to understand and improve knowledge in an area that has not been extensively investigated (Babbie, 2007). In addition, as an example of exploratory research, the study did not aim to provide final or conclusive answers, but to merely explore the research question in order to determine the nature of the problem (Babbie, 2007).

The study, therefore, aimed to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to acquire new insight in order to develop a hypothesis. As an exploratory research project, the study was designed to investigate the social phenomena of interpretation of the Nkandla scandal within a township

setting, and was an attempt to unearth understanding from the data itself rather than from a predisposed hypothesis (Babbie, 2007). Due to the fact that the study was designed not to be conclusive or to test a hypothesis, but rather to help better the understanding of a problem, it gave the researcher the freedom to tap into all available secondary data needed to help analyse the emerging primary data. For this reason, the findings could not be anticipated, and, therefore, an exploratory approach gave the study the flexibility needed to explore new data using all available resources.

### 1.3. Context

As an examination of the responses of marginalised township dwellers to a scandal and a detailed exploration of the everyday practice that influences those decisions, the context of the research focusses on insights that maintain that mainstream media has been accused of a narrow focus on a select group (Friedman, 2012). Chapters two and three argue that the urban poor, living in South African townships, are marginalised as a target public from mainstream media because the industry targets an elite audience for the purpose of securing revenue from advertisers (Barnett, 1999; Jacobs, 2002; Duncan, 2000, 2003; Hadland, 2007; Wasserman, 2011; Glenn and Mattes, 2011; Garman, 2014). Critics contend that the commercial logic of mainstream news production marginalises the poor in two respects: through institutional operations that privilege the views of the powerful (Hall et al., 1978), and a market orientation that sells the audience as a commodity (Ang, 1991; Duncan, 2003).

Such a configuration of big organisations producing media focused on an elite audience creates an elite bias, or a media that functions for the interest of the middle class (Friedman, 2011; Wasserman and Jacobs, 2012). Glenn and Mattes (2011) maintain that in a society with a commercial media system that maintains and reinforces an elite national discourse, certain sections of the South African population are often omitted as participants from the media sphere due to any combination of education, income, language and place of residence (Christians et al., 2009). Due to the above, two decades into democracy, the South African media still constitute an elite public sphere. The unemployed have little voice in the media, except as social problems (such as violent protestors) or as victims (Msimang, 2017). Women and young people continue to be marginalised, and the overall effect is that media discourses can be inherently unbalanced or skewed to favour particular worldviews (Msimang, 2017).

This points to the fact that mainstream media groups take little account of the meanings marginalised groups make of dominant news messages that circulate in the mediated public sphere (Jacobs, 2002; Wasserman, 2011, Duncan 2012). In recent times, mainstream media producers' prioritisation of middle class stories, evidenced recently by the coverage of the Reeva Steenkamp and Jayde Panayiotou murder cases (Duncan, 2012; Allison, 2015; Davies, 2015), over working-class issues has been critiqued as a "crisis of voice" (Couldry, 2010: 13). It must be noted that the exclusion of marginalised groups from participating in the mainstream media system also encompasses the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which working-class groups have access to. Therefore, it has been convincingly argued that the public broadcaster also offers limited political participation (Jacobs, 2002; Duncan, 2003; Glenn and Mattes, 2011; Oelofsen, 2015).

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Added to the exclusion in coverage and participation, critical writers such as Sisonke Msimang (2017) have argued that the gap between mainstream media and consumers is exacerbated by the fact that mainstream media lack input from ordinary people (Jacobs, 2002). Scholars of agenda-setting, argue that influential players in agenda-setting media operate in a special kind of environment, which often does not have much contact with their audience members (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). Mainstream media discourse is, therefore, a one-way conversation in the sense that it operates in a professional world (or 'bubble' as earlier referred to) inhabited mainly by news sources, public-relations specialists, and other journalists (Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Neuman et al., 1992). As such, mainstream media (or commercial media) in this study will refer specifically to media owned by South Africa's major commercial media organisations which have the resources to set the agenda for other media outlets (Chomsky, 1997). Agenda-setting theory describes such a configuration as the "ability [of the news media] to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda" (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002: 5).

Critical voices have made the point that the South African media discourse is often swamped by elite players whose antics dominate headlines, while the destitute remain ignored (Maughan, 2017). It has been noted that the trend of stories involving the misdoings of the political elites receiving the greater share of media attention reproduces and reinforces broader media and social inequalities. For example, Maughan (2017) writes that there was little coverage of the momentous land rights victory for 11000 labour tenants – who, for generations, exchanged their labour for grazing rights on white-owned farms. Msimang (2017) argues that many other stories involving ordinary and poorer South Africans have been overshadowed by the rigid focus on politics or the inability to bring the poor into the conversation. Furthermore, Msimang

(2017) points out that whilst there was plenty of news coverage of Zuma and those who defended him, the fact that there was less attention to social issues that affect the poor more acutely, such as high crime statistics (daily averages of 51 for murder, 452 for assault, and 142.2 rapes reported), says a great deal about the slant of mainstream media discourse.

In light of the elite media discourse discussed above, Chapter Two pursues the notion that the gap in coverage made it possible for those backing the South African President, Jacob Zuma, to make the argument that the media is only interested in the corruption of the incumbent government. In the context of an unequal country, still reeling from a history of racially based oppression, the inordinate attention dedicated to Nkandla stood conspicuously next to the disparate coverage of ordinary people who are mostly black (Hlongwane, 2017). Msimang (2017) points out that one of the failures of the South African mainstream media sphere has been the inability to link its coverage of the ongoing political drama, in which Zuma was a central character, to the fortunes of South Africans who deal with limited opportunities, poor education, ill health and violence on a daily basis.

Hlongwane (2017) argues that instead of the news media shining a light on the continued deprivation afflicting the poor, the assumption that has underscored news coverage is that the sector is protecting democracy and the economy. In doing so, mainstream media is often perceived to be guarding the institutions set up to safeguard the savings of the rich and middle class that are under threat (Hlongwane, 2017). In such a scenario, some of Zuma's antics, which have had a negative effect on the South African economy, such as firing the country's Finance Minister, have been reported, in many instances, as tied to the fortunes of businesses and the middle class (Msimang, 2017). Little of the same concern is extended to the strain placed on the poor. Therefore, the fact that South African media and political outrage are channelled towards the protection of key democratic institutions but are not as vocal about defending the rights and lives of the people at the bottom is a point of contention that is further explored in this context. Chapter Two, especially, set itself the task of considering whether the lack of coverage of the everyday concerns of marginalised groups possibly leads to a disavowal of the mainstream media issue of removing the ANC and Zuma from power.

#### 1.4. Theory

In essence, this research centres on the inability of agenda set by mainstream media to persuade the majority to abandon the ANC. By focussing on everyday practice, which is intended to

enable readers to obtain a better insight into the reasoning of the marginalised, the study seeks to figure out why the majority continues to support the ANC, an action that is oftentimes thought by mainstream media to be stupidity rather than a rational and reasoned position. In so doing, the theoretical starting point of this research is subaltern scholarship, which takes from Orientalism the insight that the Oriental, or other is never a free subject of thought or action, but contained and represented by dominating frameworks. In applying this understanding to the interpretation of mainstream media, Chapter Four makes the argument that subalterns, to the detriment of rounded analysis, have long been considered passive or un-savvy political actors (Guha, 1984).

The chapter discusses the dual issue of subaltern actors being afforded little space to self-signify, and the power of civic institutions such as the media to use historical and racial bias to negatively represent the subaltern groups involved (Said, 1978). This is to say that subalterns lack the means to speak for themselves, and the void created in the public sphere is, therefore, filled by elite groups (former colonial masters or the nationalist officials) who hold the power of representation (Spivak, 1988). In all, the section argues that the motivation behind the large-scale marginalisation of the township people in coverage of the 2014 general elections (and their subsequent misreading) is due to the fact that their inferior rank puts them in a position where they are scarcely considered or, if they are, they are given pre-existing roles as dupes and voting fodder.

Furthermore, what is also reflected upon in the context is the fact that subaltern scholars sought to upend this thinking by arguing that it is a grave limitation not to adequately consider the active role subalterns play in social action (Guha, 1982). Scholars note that, contrary to views of passivity, subalterns are active participants in a parallel domain of politics, which exists alongside the mainstream (Chatterjee, 2003). This is a central concern pondered in Chapter Four, as it enabled the study to forward the working idea that the mainstream media might have predicted the elections incorrectly because they occupy an ideological space wholly different from the township people. As such, the mainstream media's pre elections coverage miscued when it betted on the possibility that the ANC's share of the vote might drastically fall from the margins of the previous elections in 2009. The research thus ponders the possibility that these mainstream media prescriptions might have been inconsequential, especially when one considers the fact that the urban poor might have been voting to retain a black government, which they thought 'understands' their everyday reality (by virtue of a shared history of struggle), more than a historically privileged mainstream media sphere.

The postcolonial ideas proffered by subaltern studies are paired with subaltern counter-publics theory which emphasises the plurality of publics and voice (see also Butsch, 2007). Subaltern counter-publics take into account that marginalised groups, who are ostracised from the mainstream, will always form their own counter-public spheres. The theory was central to the study because it allowed the understanding that in stratified societies the assertion of a “harmonious, socially cohesive public sphere” (Ndlovu, 2010: 46) is disingenuous because it further marginalises disenfranchised views (Fraser, 1992). Critical South African scholars have made a similar critique of the mainstream media, arguing that public discourse, in both print and broadcast, has failed to accommodate the important notion of multiple public spheres, and adheres to a flawed concept of a single and elite public (see Jacobs, 2002; Duncan, 2003; Strelitz, 2004; Wasserman and de Beer, 2005; Wasserman, 2006 and 2013; Wasserman and Jacobs, 2012). The problem created by the adherence to the notion of a single public sphere is that it conceals the differences between unequal groups, it ignores the agency of the marginalised to interpret messages variously, and, consequently, allows a misreading of the meanings made by those excluded from the hegemonic public sphere (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005; Robins, 1993; Fraser, 1992).

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To further our understanding of the behaviour of marginalised people, and their understanding of mainstream media messages, Chapter Four also engages with audience theory and interpretation. The study employed qualitative audience reception theory, which emphasises individual agency, and the ability to independently make sense of messages in “determinate conditions of invisibility” (Fiske, 1991; Morley, 1991; Alasuutari, 1999). This section of the theory followed the discussion on subalternity by pointing out that, despite the marginality, when considered in their own right, audiences are active and measured in their everyday decision making. The point made by this section of the work is that when audience groups are ascribed value and seen as active participants, it is clear that messages are not linear but subject to variant interpretation. Such insights enabled the study to contemplate the fact that the subaltern township public under review could have understood mainstream news about a black president in a variety of ways, one of which could have been to keep him in power, if only, for the sake of preserving the ruling party, which is seen by many as a vehicle for social development (Mkhabela, 2016).

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In order to get to the lived experience needed to unearth the data sought, the research used third generation audience research, a wider strand of the approach which allows examination of media use by people “imbedded in cultures and histories” (Bird, 2003: 23). Such a perspective

is broader than previous incarnations because it covers both texts and audiences; two distinct moments in a process of meaning-making, or the 'circuit of culture' (Alasuutari, 1999; du Gay, 1997). This broader perspective, therefore, allowed the study the freedom to examine media texts (the intricacies of the Nkandla scandal) and everyday life because it argued that it is more fruitful to study the combination of text and audience in context (Bird, 2003). The goal of this more holistic approach is to grasp the nuanced and complex structure of contemporary 'media culture' or culture and the media by examining both media and media use in everyday life (Alasuutari, 1999: 6). This approach enabled the research to look at interpretation as well as wider cultural and contextual ramifications of media use.

Following the theoretical third generation audience studies perspective that stresses the "amorphous nature of media experience" (Bird, 2003: 3), the focus of this research was centred around the story of Nkandla, but was more broadly on the meaning that people make of mainstream media messages across various platforms. Preliminary research conducted in Joza supported such an approach and demonstrated that, although young people obtain their news mostly from television (88%), social media (87%), radio (60%) and mainstream newspapers (15%) cannot be discounted as sources (Ponono, 2014). Figures garnered in national research of young people reflected these numbers, with a majority of young people from working-class environments consuming news media via television (82%), and also high percentages of them via radio and internet use, as well as newspaper reading (Malila et al., 2013). These preliminary insights revealed enough to suggest that a focus on a single medium would be limiting considering the fluid way in which different media are used.

It is to this end, because of the necessity to look beyond a single programme or medium, and the perspectives capacity to "evoke the broader cultural context" that the study used third generation audience studies as a broad frame (Bird, 2003: 8). The research thus considered the importance of 'intertextuality', which is the concept that texts are mediated by other texts in the interpretation of media messages (Morley, 1991). Moreover, when intertextuality is paired with the fact that people bring cultural resources to the act of interpretation, Tomlinson (1991: 61) argues that what emerges is "a subtle interplay of mediations". This means that in the act of media consumption there is a "constant mediation of cultural experiences by another" – what people make of media messages is "constantly influenced and shaped by whatever else is going on in our lives" (Tomlinson, 1991: 61).

Continuing in this vein, Chapter Five considered the thinking that people use the media or cultural resources available to them to construct their social realities (Lull (1990)). This points to the fact that media consumption is a dialectical process where media culture mediates and articulates personal experience, but at the same time interpretations and uses of the media are constructed by individuals in real-life situations (Kellner, 2003). This is to say that the social construction of reality is generated in part through ‘symbolic interaction’ between life experience, and in the appropriation of an array of media materials (Kellner, 2003). Therefore, one of the key pillars of the research, discussed in Chapter Five, is that as much as audiences construct their reality through media representations, the meanings that audiences make and how they use media material is dependent on gender, race, class, and ideological perspectives.

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## 1.5. Methodology

Morley (1992) has argued that media consumption is an intricate process, and cannot be reduced to isolated units that can be measured by quantitative analysis. To further the point, his contemporaries have pointed out that due to its inherently complex nature – its intrinsic link to a range of other domestic practices – media consumption can only be properly understood within context (Silverstone, 1990). In this regard, the argument proffered by the study is that the necessary requirement of analysing the imbedded complexities of media consumption is to use anthropological and broadly ethnographic approaches (Ang, 1996). These methods are best because they provide the adequately ‘thick’ description (Geertz, 1973) needed to carry out the necessary contextualisation that makes such multifarious study of everyday life possible (Ang, 1996). To this end, Morley (1992) has argued that the interview and participant observation are fundamentally appropriate ways to understand the relation of audiences to media that is consumed in context-specific environments.

As such, the methods chosen to conduct the data collection for the research were interviews and observations informed by ethnography. The specifics of the methods are shared in this introductory chapter. The methodology (Chapter Six) is thus left to discuss the fit between the philosophy of the methods chosen and the research underway. It is important that the discussion of the implementation of the methods be separated from the methodology chapter in order for that section to have the space to explore the methodological assumptions that directed the data collection. This development implies that the methodology was treated as more of an exploration of the methods used than an explanation of how they were used. The methodology chapter was thus used to cohesively discuss the steps taken to arrive at the suitability of

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ethnography as a method. Therefore, Chapter Six is approached, not to detail the number of days spent in the field (see Bird, 2003), but to discuss why the philosophy of the methods selected was best suited to the exposition.

As an exploratory project that delves into an area of study that is grossly under-researched in South African scholarship, Chapter Six invested time in critically appraising the philosophy of the methods applied. This was done because insights from audience and postcolonial study, which depart from a 'history from below' or 'bottom up' perspective, pointed out that analysis of subalternity needs to be cognisant of the fact that the lived reality and methods of expression of people outside mainstream might differ from the elite (Ludden, 2001). This view, as will be cultivated in Chapter Four, argues that even if subordinate groups are marginalised, they can still form their own parallel social units. The methodology adhered to and built on this understanding and further established that it was important to understand that people can create from limitation (Willis, 1977). As such, Chapter Six paid close attention to the philosophical orientation of the British cultural studies and the Chicago School strands of ethnography that make the point that outsider groups develop unique cultural traits that correspond with their particular situation.

This is important to highlight because it is the link that holds the thesis together – the understanding that when understood on their own terms, people display that they are creative and make out of limitation whatever they can. The approach or methodology was, therefore, a significant part of the research because, in order to adequately collect data, the researcher had to be sensitive to the marginal status of the people examined, and to the fact they might have social systems that are vastly different from what mainstream society expects. A critical engagement with the methodology was important to the overall scope of the project because it was due to the approaches that advocate for sensitivity to unique cultural traits (Willis, 1977; Wilson, 1987) that the researcher entered the field with the appropriate philosophical orientation that could guide data collection amongst people in marginal society.

Furthermore, one can argue that this approach enabled the researcher to better understand the participants. This is because the point made by the methodology is that conditions of deprivation often lead to the development of unique cultural traits, which necessitates that people be understood in relation to their circumstance (Crichter, 1975). This is a crucial understanding that was carried into the findings because it allowed the analytical foundation: the lack of opportunity is often the basis for differences between mainstream social life and

subaltern groups (Wilson, 1987). It is in this regard that the focus of the research (how a subaltern group experienced the coverage of the Nkandla scandal) necessitated that the researcher take a closer look at the lives of young township people from a lens outside the mainstream media perspective. To achieve this objective, the researcher chose to use ethnography, an interpretative methodological approach with the capacity to centre marginalised experiences by expounding on their broader cultural, political and social context (Bird, 2003).

#### 1.5.1. Ethics and sampling

#### 1.5.2. Neets

The sample group identified for the study was a cohort that has come under scrutiny by researchers concerned with a population of young people termed Neets: ‘not in education, employment or training’ (StatsSA, 2013; Cloete and Butler-Adam, 2012). This study focused on this group for two reasons. Firstly, despite international reports citing young populations as a potential for economic growth, young people in South Africa have been labelled with contradictory potentialities (Mattes and Richmond, 2014; Das Gupta et al., 2014; Lefko-Everett, 2012). They are described both as a possible societal menace or a ‘ticking time bomb’, and optimistically as ‘born frees’; who are better off than the previous struggle generation “despite the fact that this generation suffers as much from low levels of education, schooling completion and unemployment” (Malila et al., 2013: 16). Statistics provide evidence that it might be more difficult to realise the more optimistic prospects, with only 33% of 17 million young people aged 18-35 having obtained a matric certificate (StatsSA, 2013). Furthermore, youth unemployment at 45% is 20% higher than the adult rate (StatsSA, 2014). Secondly, and importantly, this group has demonstrated relatively high levels of trust in the media, yet continue to feel alienated by mainstream media and express the view that the information they receive is not relevant to their lives (Malila et al., 2013; Lefko-Everett, 2012).

#### 1.5.3. Ethics

The participants sought for this study were both male and female youths between the ages 18 – 24 who reside in Joza. It has to be noted that in conducting the research ‘youth’ and ‘young adults’ are used in the study in the broadest sense. This is because it was difficult for the researcher to isolate the target group from their friendship circles in an ethnographic research project. Thus, although the focus and core concern is youth between the ages of 18 – 24, the

research also considered insights from 25 – 35 year olds, as permitted by the South African definition of youth.

Due to the relative youthfulness of some of the respondents, the first step taken in terms of ethical considerations was to address the ethical issues in the proposal submitted to and approved by Rhodes University in October 2014. The proposal was accepted without concern, largely because the young people sought were all over 18 years of age, not school going, and therefore parental consent was not needed. Furthermore, although political, the material that was going to be covered with participants was not of a sensitive nature. The researcher thus focused on the two main aspects that underline ethical issues in research, i.e. protecting respondents and ensuring the standards of the researcher's behaviour. In protecting participants, the researcher made sure that all participants were made aware of the fact that they were participating in a study and thus the purpose of the research was clearly explained to them beforehand. This measure ensured that all participants were empowered to consent to be part of the study.

In terms of content, the approved proposal assured the Research Committee that the questions asked did not have any potential to cause harm. Regardless, in the case of unforeseen circumstances, the participants were made aware that they were free to leave if they felt uncomfortable. None of the participants reported being offended by the questions and none walked out during interviews. In follow up conversations the researcher had with participants after the interviews were concluded, none of the participants expressed concern and instead offered contacts for further engagement. The researcher also stipulated that participants would be granted confidentiality, and permission to record the interviews was sought from respondents before the start of each interview. The same principle was applied during observations; the people who the respondent interacted with were informed of the study and permission to allow the researcher to sit in on discussions was sought.

#### 1.5.4. Maximum variation sampling

Coyne (1997: 29) argues that within any one qualitative research project there exists selective sampling, which “refers to the decision that can be made by researchers to study and sample subjects according to a preconceived set of criteria”. As a version of selective sampling, the participants in question were sought using maximum variation sampling. This technique seeks to include “people who represent the widest variety of perspectives possible within the range specified” (Koerber and McMichael, 2008: 464). This technique was useful for this exploratory

study because the basic principle behind maximum variation sampling is to gain greater insights into a phenomenon by looking at it from different angles. This is a valued technique in qualitative research because it can often help the researcher identify common themes that are evident across the sample. When using a maximum variation sampling method, the researcher selects a small number of units or cases that maximise the diversity of the group that is relevant to the research question.

Therefore, for maximum variation, 15 respondents were sought from different areas in Joza. As a first step, this measure worked well for the interviews because it allowed the researcher to search wide for respondents in different parts of the township. To ensure variation, only five respondents were followed or earmarked for interview and observation per network of people. The thinking was that three groups of five would allow comparison. Therefore, a single respondent was approached in one area of Joza, and this was the connection that was used to source the next four people. This method was repeated in sourcing the next two groups of five. In doing so, the study thus combined maximum variation sampling with snowball sampling, which is to use the connection made with the first respondent to gather more people (Deacon et al., 2007).

Both sampling techniques have disadvantages: snowball sampling singles out respondents who share similar networks, and maximum variation, as with all purposive samples, is prone to researcher bias (Hardon et al., 2004). Thus the two techniques were merged to offset the disadvantages, because maximum variation ensures that the people interviewed came from varied groups. After at least five people were interviewed in every group, the researcher moved to another area of the township for respondents to ensure variation. Snowball sampling, on the other hand, allowed for a non-purposive element to come into the study because the people suggested by respondents were not preselected by the researcher.

#### 1.5.5. Triangulation

In addition, in an effort to stem the bias that accompanies purposive sampling and qualitative methodology, the researcher found it useful to triangulate. In the social sciences, triangulation is often used whereby two (or more) methods are used in a study in order to check the results of one and the same subject (Rothbauer, 2008). The idea is that one can be more confident with a result if different methods lead to the same result. Triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In particular, it refers to the application

and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006). The conventional wisdom is that, by combining multiple methods and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weaknesses or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from a single method, single-observer and single-theory studies (Bryman, 1988). This is the reason that, after the interviews were concluded, the researcher found a good fit with one group and stayed with the group for three months and thus followed up the interviews with observational work.

Excluding the preparatory work before going to the field, the data was collected in a four-month period (one month for acclimatisation and interviews, and three months for observation). This length of time was, arguably, sufficient time to find and observe respondents. In this period, the researcher rented a room and was based in the township for the duration of the four-month period. Nevertheless, Bird (2003) points out that the methods used to collect data in ethnography are of more importance than extended periods of time in the field. The appropriate method for this analysis on interpretation, as stated by Morley, (1991) is the combination of observation and interviews as both have blind spots that can be counteracted by the other. The combination of the two methods worked well with the narrative enquiry, an offshoot of ethnography, which prizes the process of gathering information through story-telling (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

All things considered, the narrative technique was a good fit for the study because it entails understanding the world through the eyes of those studied, providing a description of contextualised observation and interview responses (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2008). The narrative interview is concerned with reconstructing social events from the perspective of informants (Bauer, 1996), and how events, actions and happenings in the surrounding are woven into the narrated story (Trahar, 2009). The method was also useful for this research because of its ability to understand everyday communicative interaction, namely storytelling and listening, as 'sense-making mechanisms' used by people to make sense of the world (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Since the researcher was looking to spend a number of days with each participant in order to observe and interview them in their natural space, narrative enquiry offered a tool to grapple with contextualised individual interpretation (Vincent and Amner, 2014). The interview questions were structured in such a way as to allow respondents to narrate their life history and interaction with media materials. The data collected was also collated into narrative interviews, which are presented in Chapter Seven.

The research was initially designed so that the researcher would spend seven days with each respondent to write a detailed narrative. The strategy was to spend a week-long period with each participant in order to interview them about their understanding of the Nkandla scandal, and to observe their day-to-day interactions. Nonetheless, the researcher bore in mind that the field is a fluid space and that events might not be the ideal imagined in the proposal (hence the broadening of the age group). It was thus considered that there might have to be alterations that had to be made to the research design in the field. One of the advantages of ethnographic study is that researchers can adapt to what is happening around them.

When in the field it happened that the researcher was not able to spend a week with a single participant. Most of the young people identified did not have properties of their own and were uncomfortable having a researcher following them for an elongated period. The change of plan amounted to the researcher conducting shorter interviews (two hours each at the flat I was renting in the township) with each person. Due to the restrictions on the time available for observing each participant, the option pursued was to conduct hour-long narrative interviews with participants to get their views on their understanding of the Nkandla scandal. Instead of the three-month period initially envisioned to conduct the interviews, they were concluded in eight days.

The short stay in the community for acclimatisation and interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity for daily encounters with the participants, which facilitated the building of a greater rapport and contextualisation. Critics argue that researchers can gain trust with respondents by living the life lived by the inhabitants, and by establishing common points of interest with the people (Nyathi, 2012). Since there was a fair amount of time left over to conduct observation due to the shortened interview time, as stated above, the researcher decided to follow up the conversations with participant observation. Due to the fact that the interview responses had already provided direct answers from participants regarding the Nkandla coverage, the researcher was free during the observation to be a 'fly on the wall'. The familiarity and relationship built in the interview stage facilitated contact with respondents for the purpose of observation. When the 15 interviews were concluded, the researcher asked one of the participants, who had mentioned a daily gathering to play dominoes, if he could join to observe. This request was granted and I was allowed entry into a daily gathering of unemployed youths who came together to pass time. The meeting point of those individuals became the bulk of the observation conducted in the field. The analysis of the observation forms part of the discussion conducted in Chapter Eight.

## 1.6. Conclusion

This chapter laid out the concerns that will be addressed in the study. It started off by explaining that the study will investigate how young people in the township of Joza in Grahamstown interpreted the Nkandla scandal. As an exploratory research project, the study attempts to understand the Nkandla scandal from the perspective of marginalised township community members whose voting behaviour baffled mainstream media. The research thus looks into the meaning that young people in the township make of a scandal that was supposed to be the undoing of the governing ANC, but hardly dented the prospects of the party. The research departs from this media studies angle, and seeks to understand whether the interpretation of the Nkandla scandal by young people in the township can help media scholars formulate better understandings of the importance of the socio-economic environments in which messages are taken up.

## Chapter Two: Context (Scandal)

And so off I trotted, through an eerily silent no-man's-land strewn with bullet shells, chunks of pavement and other war flotsam, looking for somewhere to wash up. I crested the Jan Smuts hill, and despite a longstanding rule to stay away from any entity that helped fuck the global financial system, made my way towards KPMG's offices. Inside the dimly lit atrium, I met the benevolent face of Kamikaze Capitalism: a receptionist nodded with studied acquiescence, showed me to the bathroom, and called me a cab.

No question, it's fab being white (Poplak, 2017).

For many whites, black and white South Africans aren't the same when it comes to a person's worth and contribution. Whites "built this country," they like to say; they ran the country "well" before 1994, when "everything worked," and they were safe on their farms and in their suburbs. They still work hard and pay taxes. They are special, superior, God's people. Blacks, on the other hand, are lazy, entitled, unruly, corrupt, violent, criminal, uncivilized; they have ruined everything since 1994 (Heleta, 2017).

### 2.1. Introduction: misreading the national mood

The study investigates the interpretation of media messages emanating from the elite, agenda-setting mainstream media by young people living in the township of Joza, Grahamstown. The interpretation made by this group has come under scrutiny because of the discrepancy between the pre-elections media coverage that predicted that the many scandals that dogged the African National Congress (ANC) would result in a substantial loss of votes (Wilkinson, 2014; Comey, 2014). Despite the negative publicity, when the results of the fifth democratic elections of May 2014 were tallied, the electoral loss suffered by the ANC was much slimmer than expected. The ruling party incurred a 2.5 percentage point decrease from 65.7 in 2009 to 63.2. Furthermore, in many ANC strongholds, which have historically been rural and township areas, the ANC gained votes. Makana Municipality, which Joza falls under, improved its tally of ANC votes from 65% in 2009 to 68% in 2014, despite the fact that the local ANC government was mired in scandal (Mngxitama-Diko and Roux, 2013).

A casual analysis of the election figures in historically disadvantaged areas (where the ANC yielded the highest votes) such as Joza, therefore, suggests that black residents did not make the readings of the scandal as preferred by mainstream media. This gap is further evidenced by sentiments uttered by members of the ruling party post the elections. At a victory rally

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immediately after the results were announced, President Zuma accused the mainstream media of campaigning against the ANC. Relieved to have defied expectations, Zuma berated mainstream media for the perceived bias saying: “We beat you. You stuck your necks out asking people not to vote for the party, but we defeated you. The people were not listening” (Grootes, 2014). The unwillingness of voters to part with the ANC, despite an overwhelming amount of negative coverage, coupled with a comfortable election win, demonstrated the gap between mainstream media coverage and members of the audience from the lower classes.

Furthermore, the failure of the negative coverage to sway large enough numbers of the voting public, especially those residing in historically disadvantaged areas, prompted a period of self-reflection from the media sphere. Prominent columnist Van Onselen (2014) characterised this introspection when he asked if the mainstream media sector displayed a propensity to “misread the national mood”. It is, therefore, in this regard that this research grapples with the disparity between mainstream media’s colossal effort to offer an oppositional narrative to the ANC, and the final election figures. The Nkandla scandal’s minimal impact on the overall voting margins showed that there is a large divide between what mainstream messages intend to convey to a socio-economic grouping distinct from the producers of the message, and the way in which members of this racially and economically distinct group interpret these messages.

Given the apparent inability of the negative coverage to result in a significant loss of votes, which spoke to a distance between mainstream media and sections of the South African population, the question the study asks is: what meanings do young people in historically marginalised communities make of messages emanating from mainstream media, and do these meanings vary from those expected or preferred by the media producers? The aim of this context chapter is to investigate the broad social factors that could be responsible for causing the difference noted. Specifically, the task of this chapter is to consider whether the political, cultural and racial differences in South African society potentially make young people in Joza a counter public, who coalesce as such because the mainstream public sphere offers them no mechanisms to participate in public dialogue (see Fraser, 1992 and Jacobs, 1999).

The discussion will explore the bearing class and race differences have on the interpretation of media messages between a majority black marginalised grouping and a mainstream media system that is perceived to be historically white (Jacobs, 1999). This chapter will, therefore, consider whether the reason the coverage of the Nkandla scandal failed to have a significant sway on the 2014 elections was because the scandal was significant only in the minds and

political imaginary of one group of people, whilst others viewed it as a tactic to further oppress them.

## 2.2. Nkandla: anatomy of a South African scandal

On February 9, 2016, Jacob Zuma's legal representatives argued in the Constitutional Court, the highest court in the country, that the president was willing to reimburse the state for non-security features installed at his Nkandla home (Eliseev, 2016). Thus, after two years of dodging demands to pay back a portion of the money spent on his homestead, and having exhausted all the political manoeuvring available to him to avoid the matter, going as far as commissioning two reports to exonerate him, President Zuma contradicted his efforts in the constitutional court, arguing that the remedial action recommended or "ordered by the Public Protector, were binding and that the other reports were unlawful" (Eliseev, 2016).

The decision to finally relent, after years of legal wrangle, was a surprise to many, and was seen as a victory by those, including opposition parties, who had been calling for the president to take responsibility. Faced with mounting political and public pressure due to Nkandla and other scandals, the decision by Zuma to accede was described as the moment he had "nowhere else to hide", and when the president fell on his sword "because what had become the Nkandla scandal, or the defining moment of his presidency, had threatened his power so much that the President faced the possibility of impeachment if the case went against him" (Eliseev, 2016).

The saga began several years earlier with inquiries by the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper into state expenditure on President Zuma's homestead in Nkandla in 2009 (Prinsloo, 2014). The news story, however, was first properly exposed in 2012 by the *City Press* newspaper, which reported that Zuma had splurged 'R200m on homestead' (Prinsloo, 2014). After endless headlines, the issue of the upgrades to the president's private residence in his hometown of Nkandla, in KwaZulu-Natal, was given legal emphasis in 2013. This is when, urged by growing outrage, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the biggest opposition party in South Africa, approached the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, to investigate (Prinsloo, 2014). After a two-year investigation, Madonsela adjudged in April 2014, a month before the national general elections, that there were non-security features included in the hefty R246 million spent on the upgrades, and Zuma was liable to pay back a reasonable portion (de Wet, 2014).

### 2.2.1. Scandal defined

As has been the case with Zuma, in defining scandal, Lull and Hinerman (1997) argue that individuals who contravene social norms must be shown to have acted intentionally or recklessly and must be held responsible for their actions. Expanding on the idea, Thompson (2000) argues that it is of greater use, when defining a political scandal, to consider that the accountability demanded rests largely with social institutions than individuals. This is because liberal democratic formations place "particular emphasis on a formal system of laws and other procedures which are intended to apply equally and in principle to all individuals" (Thompson, 2000: 40). Due to the stated stress on constitutionality, liberal democracies invest great institutional power to resolve the tension between individual freedom and the power of the state to intervene in social life. It is in this regard that adherence to formal procedures and to the rule of law is valued above all else, because these procedures enable liberal democracies to curtail abuses of power.

Thompson (2000: 93) writes that the tension between process and power, which lies at the heart of liberal democratic states, is "the same tension which underlies the phenomenon of political scandal". Therefore, due to the rules and conventions that are put in place to govern the pursuit and exercise of political power, liberal democracies are extremely sensitive and susceptible to scandal. This is because the rules and procedures in place define the political game in a way that is open and accessible, and is therefore expected to be public, inclusive, and accountable to the people (Thompson, 2000: 91). The stress on due process means that strict rules must be followed by individuals (Thompson, 2000). As such, a political scandal involves "a violation of the expectation of due processes" or the legally binding rules and procedures which govern the exercise of political power (Thompson, 2000: 92). In the case of Nkandla, the due process violated was the rules governing public finance, and the undue benefit of home improvements received by the President.

Although contextualised within institutions, Thompson (2000) argues that a political scandal qualifies as such when its central figure is recognised as a political leader (inspiring, elected or appointed). In as much as the Nkandla scandal involved the head of the South African state, it qualified as such. In simple terms, Lull and Hinerman (1997) state that individuals must be identified as perpetrators of an act(s), and the transgressions must be performed by specific persons who carry out actions that reflect an exercise of their desires or interests. In all, real persons must do (not just think about) something, where their selfish interests override social

norms and dominant moralities. Thompson (1997) concurs by tying together individual action and social consequence, arguing that scandals have to do with utterances that are grossly discreditable or conduct which offend moral sentiment or the sense of decency.

### 2.2.2. Media scandal – imagined dominant morality

The sentiment behind scandal “assumes a relation between, on the one hand, an individual or humanly created event or circumstance and, on the other hand, a social collective whose moral sentiments are offended” (Thompson, 1997: 39). Lull and Hinerman (1997: 3) stress the point arguing that “scandal serves as a term to delineate a breach in moral conduct and authority”. In this regard, Lull and Hinerman (1997) argue that scandals are events that transgress the social norms reflected by the dominant morality. As a breach of the moral order, Prinsloo (2014) points out that part of the process of interpreting a story like Nkandla is determining guilt. The people exposed are typically judged against some “expressed values and the investigations expose the transgressions of these moral visions” (Prinsloo, 2014: 5). The invocation of moral indignation invites the reader to participate in that moral order and the result is public disapproval (Prinsloo, 2014: 5).

Therefore, in many cases, scandals are not only about actions which transgress certain values and norms, they are also about the cultivation or assertion of the values or norms themselves (Thompson, 1997). Scandals can thus be associated with the broader process of moralisation through which certain values or norms are espoused and reaffirmed by those who denounce the actions as scandalous (Thompson, 1997: 41). The discourses of the morality and scandal require that a societal moral baseline is challenged, and the ensuing discussion assures that conventional morality is once again asserted as normal. The media scandal is thus “the most extreme example of how, in practice, individuals are held to an imagined, idealised standard of social conduct (Thompson, 1997). In this way, mass media become reflexive agents, “implicitly representing those whose interests are served by the constant reassertion of dominant modes of thought, driving mainstream values and lifestyles into the assumptive worlds of audience members” (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 5).

Media scandal occurs when private acts that disgrace or offend the idealised, dominant morality are made public, and narrated by the media, “producing a range of effects from ideological and cultural retrenchments to disruption and change” (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 5). Furthermore, Lull and Hinerman (1997: 2) argue such change and disruption is common in the postmodern world; where the accelerated and frantic pace of circulation of symbolic forms and the

construction of cultural identities means that people live in an uncertain world that is 'risk-orientated' and constantly transforming. Amongst the many struggles of postmodern and post-authoritarian societies are contradictions over-representation, signification or how or which imagination should be used to inform the dominant moral code (Thompson, 1997). In such a scenario of ongoing social transformation, people are constantly faced with profound "moral dualism" (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 2). Within the complexities, uncertainties and threats of postmodernity, Lull and Hinerman (1997: 2) argue that the scandal functions simultaneously "as a moral anchor in a sea of conventionality, and as a vigorous challenge to mainstream social values conditioned by the substantial forces of ideological and cultural hegemony".

### 2.3. Social and institutional context

As we have discussed, "all media depend on the pervasiveness and functionality of dominant morality to define or to label, and competing or emergent interpretations of the scandal narrative are negotiated against a backdrop of dominant moral code articulated and reinforced by major social institutions" (Lull and Hinerman, 1997). This means that scandal must be placed in a broader institutional context. Thompson (2000) argues that such a sentiment helps us understand that scandal is not an occurrence on the surface of political life. Rather, it is "linked to and a symptomatic of some of the most important structural features of modern societies" (Thompson, 2000). Prinsloo (2014) concurs and links the Nkandla scandal to deep fissures in South African social and political life, which are manifest in the discursive positions that have competed for legitimacy in the media during the course of the scandal (Prinsloo, 2014: 15).

South African historians have noted that apartheid was the outcome of "colonialism of a special type", where the colonial ruling class, with its white support base on the one hand, and the oppressed colonial majority on the other, fought to control the resources of a single territory (O'Malley, 1990). Due to this history of struggle between different factions of capital, apartheid has been described as in-house 'racial capitalism', which legitimised particular economic, political and social management in racial-ethnic terms (Saul and Gelb, 1981). As a result, two distinct and competing nationalisms developed claiming ownership of land and natural resources. Exclusive Afrikaner nationalism, which worked in tandem with British colonialism to uphold a white supremacy, while African nationalism (as represented by the ANC), on the other hand, was envisioned to be multiracial and inclusive of all races (Muiu, 2008).

Critics have also stated that these two strands of nationalism have been manifest in the clashing discursive positions that have emerged in the major debates concerning post-apartheid South Africa (Prinsloo, 2014). The Nkandla scandal was styled along the same lines, as a tug of war between a media sphere that is still dominated by the values of whiteness, and the ruling ANC who hold the sway of the black majority (Prinsloo, 2014). This is to say that, by and large, where mainstream discourse is concerned, deliberations were bifurcated. Opposition parties, together with the media maintained that the money spent on Nkandla was scandalous, and the expenditure was nonprocedural. This position is in line with South Africa's mainstream media approach to news production, which is grounded in liberal democratic ideas of the Fourth Estate (Wasserman, 2011).

As such, Hadland (2007) argues that the mainstream media holds onto a monitorial role that defines its purpose as to monitor state institutions, and play a watch dog role. One of the central themes of mainstream media, therefore, is a concern with the illicit use of political power, and the sector holds onto the belief that it acts on behalf of innocent citizens who are victims of power (Hadland, 2007). In playing such a role, the mainstream media sphere subscribes to the idea that its mission is to "engage with accounts of victimhood, villainy and non-accountable social institutions, and serves as a call to public moral indignation for any untoward actions by those in power" (Prinsloo, 2014: 5).

The inverse of this mandate, however, is a struggle, by those that might be posed as villains or threats, against the power wielded by the media to define the moral order (Prinsloo, 2014). As such, contrary to the media's opposing stance, the ANC argued that the money spent was necessary for security upgrades required to defend a head of state. Furthermore, the ANC maintained that the media represented views that are out of touch with a great majority of the black population who support the ANC. The ANC's longstanding belief, as evidenced by the election victory speech made by President Zuma, was that black South Africans do not subscribe to what mainstream media say because they know they know the sector to be tied to "unregulated power and unbridled capitalism" (ANC, 2010). In the case of Nkandla and many other instances before, the ANC has accused the media of abusing their "positions of power, authority and public trust to promote narrow, selfish interests and political agendas" (ANC, 2010).

In light of the clashing perspectives, and the position propagated by the ANC that the media supports white and historically colonial capital it was important that the research consider that

the media, as a power broker and actor in political struggles in society, is associated with historic prejudice (Steenveld, 2004). As will be discussed further, the accusation levelled against mainstream media in South Africa has been that the sector harbours a racialised view that purports that blacks are forever the perpetrator of moral wrong and the innocent victims are white or middle class (Schutte, 2015). The consideration made in this chapter is whether a large majority of black people, a large segment of the group that interprets news media, might have failed to make the preferred reading of mainstream media because they prejudged and dismissed the sector as white controlled and unfair towards black people (Jacobs, 2002).

This point leads to the overall study undertaken, which investigates the possibility that the moral order, based on an oppressive set of social relations, might cause some people or groups to be sympathetic to the plight of the president. This consideration is made, not because the researcher assumes that the groups that support Zuma do not believe in corruption, but to explore the possibility that they might support Zuma because they feel he has been unfairly treated by the dominant system. Therefore, making race a factor in our analysis enables this study to attempt to understand the potentially counter-hegemonic interpretations that young people make of mainstream media depictions of contentious issues like Nkandla. In this regard, this chapter grapples with the possibility of the Nkandla scandal not being a clear cut indictment of the actions of Jacob Zuma carried out by a rigorous media system. In some quarters, the scandal might have been seen as overzealous prosecution by a historically biased racial group that has maintained ownership of the economy and media system.

#### 2.4. Mediatized conflict

As expected, the recommendation by the Public Protector, released a month before the 2014 elections, caused a media frenzy. A large majority of coverage was purportedly negative, and expectant that the woes besetting the ruling party would translate into a loss of votes (Van Onselen, 2014). Due to the barrage of media attention, it was difficult to imagine that the scandal would not have a bearing on the elections, (Comey, 2014). Two years since it became front page material, the President's home was one of the biggest political scandals in South Africa's post-apartheid history. The sheer scale and longevity of the scandal was described by Munasamy (2014) as "a big fat Nkandla migraine" for the ruling ANC. The scandal became a sticking point not just between the media and government, but between various opposing political parties, all vying for ascendancy (Prinsloo, 2014). What the exposure of the Nkandla details laid bare was the level of contestation in the South African public sphere, with some

defending the upgrade of the presidential home and others completely opposed to the legitimacy of the idea.

Prinsloo (2014) refers to the Nkandla coverage as a 'mediatised conflict' between two discursive positions that cannot be separated from South Africa's complex social and political life. Kellner (2003: 1) argues that social and political conflicts are increasingly played out in the media, which display spectacles such as sensational murder cases, terrorist bombings, celebrity and political sex scandals, and the explosive violence of everyday life. The word 'mediatised', therefore, emphasises how the interests and identities that contend for political legitimacy and social transformation do so largely through the media (Prinsloo, 2014). In this regard, commentators postulate that the media possesses the capacity to enact or perform conflicts or struggles between opposing interests and outlooks, because in the course of defining reality, they are responsible for actively shaping its constitutive nature (Allan, 2006).

Cottle (2006) contends that the mainstream media often assume that the mediation they provide is a neutral 'middle-ground', but within the concept of mediatised conflict is the explicit notion that the media cannot be mere reflective surfaces or mirrors on the world. Rather, what emerges from this idea is fact that the media "are capable of enacting and performing conflicts as well as reporting and representing them" (Prinsloo, 2014; Cottle, 2006). Emphasis here is on the complex ways in which media are often implicated in the conflicts they disseminate, and thus cannot be considered as neutral middle-grounds (Kellner, 2006). Prinsloo (2014: 3) refers to contentious issues that arise in the media space as a "discursive contestation". This means that the discursive positions offered by various actors are not neutral positions but viewpoints that are underpinned by assumptions of truth and are always contested by other views.

Mediatised conflict, therefore, refers to how the media sphere serves as a contested space, where alternative truths (by those with the means to) can be dispensed (Prinsloo, 2014). Further, Prinsloo (2014) argues that conceptions of democracy and the normative role of journalism in an unequal and changing society fall under such a definition as discursive constructs that remain contested and open to multiple viewpoints. Therefore, sensational media scandals become struggles over symbolic power and the media are a key arena for this struggle. What this chapter aims to add to this discussion is an exploration of the idea of a possibility of push back from different groups against the mediatisation of such a scandal. Any backlash is caused by the fact that the collection of power in favour of a certain order oppresses and marginalises others who then engage in a process of equilibrium (Gray, 1994). This is an

important consideration for this study because it demonstrates that scandals are not universal agreements about wrong-doing, but contested occurrences, with some agreeing with the moral judgements they carry and others not.

## 2.5. Race based mythmaking and deviance

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, why the vilification of President Zuma might inspire backlash against widespread negative coverage from a majority of the marginalised is because of the historical relationship of negative framing of non-white racial groups in media representation (see Bobo, 2004 and Jacobs, 1999). Therefore, the point that is made is that the relationship between races in South Africa is fraught and scandal enters a social life that has a long history of race-based oppression (Prinsloo, 2014). Tomaselli (1997) contextualises the issue. He states that although overt racism disappeared from official discourse in South Africa after 1989, and a modified multi-racialism was ushered in, which was reflected by popular culture where blacks and whites coexisted equally, in the main the racist structure of society remained the same (Tomaselli et al., 1989).

The point made is that despite the existence of ‘equal’ representations, it can be argued that racial supremacy in Western libertarian societies, morphed into ideas about the ‘protection of minorities’ and ‘multiculturalism’ (Tomaselli et al., 1989). Such declarations were linguistic omissions that belied the material reality of ‘white’ political and economic control (Tomaselli et al., 1989). In such a context, critics argue that the mainstream media is able to subscribe to a racial hierarchy in times when people abhor the idea of racism because it justifies the status quo by using narratives that “reconcile the fact of racial inequality with belief in justice and inequality” (Larson, 2006: 2). Larson (2006) argues that the moral guidelines followed by the media may not be explicitly racist, but it can be argued that many media programmes and scandals reinforce anti-black messaging. This is done through denying the extent to which racial inequality is prevalent, and by offering discourses that maintain the inequality of the social structure (Larson, 2006).

Carr (2016: 65) contends that this is a form of democratic racism, in which racist behaviour, actions, and outcomes are codified in society. Carr (2016: 59) explains that this is a reality where laws, courts, judges, institutions, and legislative bodies, among others, “were developed by Whites from a distinctly White vantage-point”. These partisan social institutions create a “normative, hegemonic underpinning of society, which is essentially White-based”, and thus normalises racism (Carr, 2016: 59). Furthermore, critics maintain that in such instances of

institutionalised racism, where race is a central organising principle, its influence is felt in every aspect of a black person's life, including media representation (Hall, 1997). Media scholars qualify the critique by arguing that the problem is not the media system per se, more than it is about the racial structure of the society, which continues to have white people or whiteness at the centre of media attention and blackness relegated to the margins (Schutte, 2015; Duncan, 2013).

It is in this regard that Bobo (2004) argues that although the media cannot be easily charged with conspiracy, the narratives that the media utilise to frame coverage often draw on established racial tropes that unwittingly undermine black people. Gray (1997: 92) adds that anti-black cultural, social, political and moral discourses continue to have “purchase in the collective common sense, because they continue to frame, reiterate, and make available a store house of meanings”. These negative meanings, Gray (1997) continues, are still sharply focused on and animated in popular culture and media around race and sexuality. As such, race-based mythmaking is a major part of a scandal, which must be understood, not just as a logical reporting of damaging facts, no matter how shocking they may be, but as a construction with intended or unintended bias (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 16).

While there has been racial change in staff composition in the media since 1994, South African theorists have argued that white people have retained significant decision-making power in the media and used this power to perpetuate stereotypes (Friedman, 2011). Journalist Gugulethu Mhlungu (2016) maintains that ethical codes do not limit the ability of media outlets and journalists to be ethical and “still perpetuate existing dominant narratives”. Furthermore, Mhlungu (2016) writes that the intersecting issues and challenges brought by oppressive capitalist relations means that it is difficult for journalists to frame and narrate stories without bias. Mhlungu (2016) observes that “media outlets have done themselves and the people who consume them a disservice” by not attending to the fact that the production of media is not objective, as many believe but a “deeply subjective process of power”. Mhlungu's (2016) point is that “the media is created and recreated by humans who bring to their work subtle and overt prejudices, nuances, language, world views and politics which are at play at all times”.

Copious academic research has revealed a consistent media bias against black people, both in the coverage of crime and more generally (Entman and Gross, 2008; Bobo, 2004; Hall et al., 1978). Media representations are thus selected and constructed in ways that consistently promote the racial status quo of inequality and the subsequent injustices are construed as

“common sense” (Larson, 2006: 2). The result of this prejudicial gate-keeping is a systematic bias toward young people, women, minority groups, and all subaltern groupings (Kraft, 1968; Parton, 2016). Furthermore, as Gray (1997) points out, this marginalisation also tends to favour the domination of most organs of media and television by the outlook of the upper-income whites and those who have been assimilated into this ideology.

In the South African case, Schutte (2015) points out that what has been exposed as truth in South African mainstream media is the powerful construct of whiteness as the major player in the construction of a national narrative. Friedman (2011: 107) argues that because of South Africa’s history and “decades of institutionalised racial domination”, the mainstream media reflects concerns tied to white supremacy because the ideology has always been ubiquitous in white society. Schutte (2015) concurs stating that in South Africa a dominant discourse rooted in whiteness is an inevitable outcome of a history of white domination, where anti-black narratives become the normalised standard for all behaviours. South African media scholars have thus argued that the agenda-setting mainstream media sphere is inherently biased and racist because it largely serves a white paying market which holds views that are inherently biased and racist (Jacobs, 1999; Friedman, 2011).

In reviewing the situation in the US, Gray (1997) writes that within this underlying anti-black discourse, as a source of social ill, blackness becomes the other, or the deviant, and race becomes the organising principle of morality. As discussed earlier, scandals, like most media events, guide what is appropriate behaviour and values to hold by contrasting what is deemed conventional social behaviour with ‘deviance’. Making social action scandalous (distinguishing between good and bad) is, therefore, part of an ideological system that defines media practice and popular culture generally (Lull and Hinerman, 1997). The perpetual negative framing of black people serves the dominant cultural imagination by marking them scandalous and thereby marking them as a transgression or a “source of moral and social threat to national life” (Gray, 1997: 89). In this system of signification, race continues to quietly organise the discursive terms through which the boundaries of social, cultural and moral order are made visible and maintained (Gray, 1997: 86).

Race scholars have argued that media (entertainment and news and their hybrids) represent reality in a way that promotes certain meanings and interpretations – usually white privilege or the idea that whites occupy the top of a racial hierarchy wherein blacks are largely and naturally consigned to the bottom (Entman and Gross, 2008). In a sense, black people are, by and large,

deemed a social problem in mainstream media (Schutte, 2015). Gray (1997: 87) explains that “as a social construct in the American moral and social economy, blackness is constructed and marked as a sign of excess and danger”. Entman and Gross (2008) further the argument, stating that the norm in the media is a largely “unintentional slant that reinforces white antagonism towards blacks”. The treatment of a potentially scandalous event, therefore, takes the form of a story complete with believable characters, motives and plot lines, where black characters are depicted as villains, reinforcing the negative racial stereotypes (Entman and Gross, 2008).

## 2.6. Scandal susceptibility

Divergence in the representation of scandal can be caused by what Thompson (1997: 40) terms “scandal susceptibility” or how much certain institutions, professions, values or people are prone to a scandal. Thompson (1997: 40) argues that there are certain types of norm which are more scandal sensitive than others: sexual relations, financial transactions and political power are particular examples. Given this, we have to consider that there is a scandal hierarchy and that some people and institutions are more vulnerable to scandal than others, just as certain norms are more scandal-sensitive (Thompson, 1997). Therefore, any scandalous misdeed attributed to a politician today will be read against a generalised reputation of misdemeanour. The same logic can be attributed to negative black stereotype in the media, where any misdeed by a black person will be read according to a long history of seeing a black person as deviant (Entman and Gross, 2008). As such, a scandal can be framed within Thompson’s (1997) ‘structure of expectations’, where black people are expected to be deviant and negative representations follow.

This history of misdemeanour or the history of certain groups being negatively depicted in the media discussed above can be explained using Thompson’s (2000: 50) articulation of media scandal as a visibility. Thompson (2000) explains that some individuals and organisations are prone or sensitive to scandal because they come up for greater scrutiny from the media. From this perspective we can understand that public figures and political leaders are particularly vulnerable to mediated scandal because they are more visible. Thompson (2000) argues that these individuals, in an age of technology or mediated visibility, face new challenges (and opportunities) because they become the focus of intense media scrutiny. Thompson (2000) theorises that visibility is connected to public or political power; the more power a person acquires, the more susceptible to scrutiny he or she becomes and hence a likely victim of scandal.

Although Thompson (2000) does not broach the subject, the intense media scrutiny that he discusses can be related to the experiences black people have with commercial or mainstream media. We must understand that by the same logic of mediated visibility so too are some individuals more likely to be confronted by scandals on the occasion of transgression of a norm. As has been pointed out by media critics, scandal susceptibility can be variable because the rules that should apply universally might not be so in divided societies where it is possible that some have more power and privilege than others and thus can attract much fairer coverage (Allison, 2015). In this regard, Entman and Gross (2008) argue that the black body is a figure that is particularly vulnerable to mediated scandal because the stereotype connecting blackness to scourge is well known to many people through mediated forms of communication. Given this consideration, the current discussion on scandal and visibility will be furthered by adding the element of race.

The point here is that individuals have different levels of susceptibility to scandal (Thompson, 2000), which is linked in part to the visibility of the individual according to race (Gray, 1997). The consideration that has to be made is that institutionalised racism is a factor in social life and, as such, in racially discordant countries social institutions act against black people more than white people (Warren, 2016). This discrepancy between social groups means that black people, because of historical prejudice, are thus more susceptible to scandal because they are seen to be natural transgressors of the moral code. Gray (1997: 89) contends that "unequal power relations, social inequality, racism, sexism, and homophobia based on various forms of racial and cultural difference continue to function as the markers of "scandalous" threats to the moral and social boundaries". [This sentiment means that we have to be sensitive to the fact that although politics, presidents and financial irregularities might be scandal prone, black presidents might be more so. We also have to, in equal measure, keep in mind that South Africa has a long history of prejudice and scandalisation of the black body and thus social institutions, systems and rules are experienced differently where certain individuals can be scandalised more than others.

### 2.6.1. Whiteness

What this section is exploring, an argument that will be furthered in Chapter Three, is that the reason black South Africans, especially working class township dwellers, disregarded mainstream media prescripts and continue to vote for the ANC is because, regardless of personnel change, institutions like the mainstream media are still thought of by the majority of

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black South Africans as 'white'. Ultimately the argument set forth is that the respondents who will be interviewed in the township might have perceived the President's situation as one where a black politician is scandalised by a 'white media'. In possibly adopting this perspective, the black township dwellers under review could have read the Nkandla scandal within the oppressive race politics they have always lived under, and thus chose to side with the ANC.

In order to better understand the sense of injustice that might be felt by black people at the hands of what they perceive to still be colonial or racist institutions, we have to briefly engage with the antithesis of blackness. Nell Irvin Painter (2015) argues that white identity is given power in society by virtue of being deemed inadequate or not interesting enough for scrutiny. Due to this, whiteness is perceived or allowed to toggle between 'bland nothingness' and racist hatred. Save for the rare cases of crass racism that are seen as anomalies, whiteness is thus construed as uninteresting (Painter, 2015). This means that whiteness is vague or invisible, and thus white identity is hardly ever questioned because it is perceived as bland normalcy (Painter, 2015). Calmore (2005: 100) postulates that white social identity is able to present itself as invisible because it styles itself as "abstract individualism", while masking its support for various systems of dominance.

Garman (2011) concurs writing that English-speaking whiteness - with its attendant privileges - has often escaped notice in South African public discourse by firmly positioning itself on the side-lines of the political battles, which are then fought between black African and white Afrikaner nationalists. Despite the camouflage, Calmore (2005) further argues that whiteness must be recognised and acknowledged as more than colour, and as an interlocking pattern of beliefs, values, feelings, and assumptions; policies, procedures, and laws; behaviours and unwritten rules used to define and underpin a worldview. In this sense, whiteness is embedded in historic systems of oppression that sustain wealth, power, and privilege (Calmore, 2005: 104-105). Although a minority in South Africa, the power of whiteness manifests in the institutional leverage held that regards black as deviant and white as normal.

In addition, and this is especially true of South Africa, although there is in existence problematic whiteness in the form of anti-black hate, the malleability of whiteness means that its members can disassociate themselves from problematical whiteness by claiming individuality, even though their group history, membership, and position make such disassociation virtually impossible (Calmore, 2005). While the attempt to disassociate may be made in good faith, Painter (2015) argues that it often fails because white people are generally

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locked in histories, socialisations, systems, and structures that defeat the best of intentions. This systematic dominance and its benefits can be extended and understood as white privilege. Calmore (2005) further argues that white privilege does not exist and operate independently of white supremacy, dominance and power, and thus white individuals do not go through life without the benefit of historical, systemic, cultural, and institutional advantage.

The almost inescapable attributes of whiteness – privilege, supremacy, dominance, and power – are the cornerstones of the interlocking patterns and systems of subordination that create, maintain, and perpetuate the anti-black racism (Calmore, 2005). Critics argue that the interlock between white privilege and social institutions is the reason whiteness cannot be considered abstract individualism, because it is in historical group relations that white people have benefited from the domination of others (Calmore, 2015). It is in this regard that critical scholars have pointed out that when we speak of black and white relations and the way these two groups encounter the world, we have to realise there exist socially institutionalised white advantage and black disadvantage (Biko, 2004). A case in point is the South African white minority which has the highest living standards in the country compared to the other social groups, the greatest access to resources (including education) and still has a high degree of control within the economy, via the ownership of some of the biggest businesses which often have a global reach (Garman, 2011).

The historical system of dominant whiteness means that all white people are socialised into and choose to be a part of a hierarchy of oppositional dualities (Calmore, 2005). This racialised discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions where there is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black) (Hall, 1997). There are the rich distinctions which cluster around the supposed link, on the one hand, between the white 'races' and intellectual development – refinement, learning and knowledge, a belief in reason, the presence of developed institutions, formal government and law, and a 'civilized restraint' in their emotional, sexual and civil life, all of which are associated with 'culture' (Hall, 1997), and the link, on the other hand, between the black 'races' and whatever is instinctual – the open expression of emotion and feeling rather than intellect, a lack of 'civilised refinement' in sexual and social life, a reliance on custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions, all of which are linked to 'nature' (Hall, 1997).

Whiteness is therefore constructed and becomes meaningful only through its opposition: racial non-whiteness (Steyn, 2001). These dualities contrast white images with black images: whites

are good, blacks are bad; whites are in positions of authority, blacks are subordinate; whites are patient and work hard, blacks are lazy and like to complain; whites vote by issue, blacks vote by race; whites are orderly and safe, blacks are rowdy and dangerous; whites are peaceful, blacks are violent; whites are authentic and honest, blacks are deceptive and manipulative; whites are generous, blacks want more than their fair share; and, finally, it all coalesces into whites are moral, blacks are immoral (Calmore, 2005). Such a list of oppositional dualities illustrates how racialised narratives are used to articulate invidious distinctions of blacks as the inferior other. In such a context, dominant whiteness “a structured, systemic, and group-based phenomenon”, is thus able to hide itself behind the social construction of individualised everyday whiteness which is superior to blackness (Calmore, 2005: 107).

It must be noted, however, that such blatant opposites are of course useful for the purposes of explication, but when it comes to institutions and discussions in the public sphere, a great deal of this clarity is obscured. Regardless, the idea is still operational in complex ways that are not easy to unpack. One good example of the point made above and the complexity of the duality is the Marikana massacre that took place in 2012. South African media scholars and civil society activists have argued that the massacre showed that the colonial trope of the immoral or “primitive and savage black male” is not foreign to South African mainstream media representation and has been used in contemporary media reportage (Schutte, 2015: 8). Together with a racial prejudice, critical scholars have pointed out that the Marikana massacre is a continuation of elite interests against majority interests.

What the reportage of the massacre demonstrated, in its distorted representation of the miners, is that the mainstream media automatically assumed fault in the marginalized. The 2012 Marikana massacre, where 34 miners were gunned down by police fire has been raised as a case study in the negative reporting of downtrodden social groups, and the complicated relationship subalterns have with both the race infused colonial domination and the black post-colonial administrators in power (see Chapter Four). Critics have pointed out that the mainstream representation of the conflict was clearly and unashamedly biased towards business, and pushed a narrative that delegitimised the legitimate, but legally unprotected, actions taken by the miners (Duncan, 2013). In the immediate aftermath of Marikana, the media were criticised for relying on police accounts to report on the incident, which were bent towards portraying the striking miners as the aggressors and instigators of the massacre (Hlongwane, 2016).

Hlongwane (2016) writes that the suppression of the victims of the Marikana massacre did not only emerge from politicians' or business interest but from the media too. Critics have pointed out that what the mainstream media coverage of the massacre constantly reinforced was the latent theme of miners being inherently violent, with the coverage creating a sense that protests were comprised of unruly mobs (Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Although critical coverage followed, the mainstream media was accused of sensationalising the violence, and the early coverage illustrated a slant towards the sensational, with a clear emphasis on portraying the behaviour of the black mineworkers as unruly (Rodny-Gumede, 2015).

As a result, the predominant idea propagated was that the protests were 'wildcat', 'violent' or 'frenzied', instead of being framed as peaceful gathering threatened by the police (Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Furthermore, the miners were seen through colonial tropes that deemed black people as violent threats and monstrous beings that dabble in black magic. This view was characterised by the editorial of a prominent South African newspaper, the *Business Day*, which made the claim that the strikers were: "driven by antiquated beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery", and believed that the powers of 'sangomas' (witchdoctors) would make them invincible (Fogel, 2015). This view was also propagated by politicians with Deputy-president Kgalema Motlanthe claiming that "mineworkers at Marikana had been in a muti-induced trance in which they would either kill or be killed" (Fogel, 2012).

This denial of agency criminalised the striking mineworkers, and thus justified violent intervention from state apparatus (Fogel, 2012). Although black politicians were also involved, Schutte (2015) argues that the colonial tropes used were intended to gain buy-in from the 'whitist' public, and ensure that the state could get away with using heavy-handed law-enforcement methods. In a 'corporatist' state that believes that all of society should be structured to serve the interests of, mainly white, monopoly capital, Schutte (2015) writes that South Africa suffers from a whitist complex. This is the symbiotic relationship between whites and the ANC, where despite tensions the needs of white and middle class South African are put before all other race groups. As such, Schutte (2015: 10) writes that, "this whitist 'synecdoche – anti-black narrative in which whiteness becomes the normalized standard for all behaviours" becomes prevalent within all social systems.

What is argued here is that inasmuch as the negative attitude towards the marginalised emerges from a crude white-black racism, it can be complexly applied to the oppression of disenfranchised groups. It is a racial positioning that morphs into a continued bias against the

subalterns and works to make of the underclass and the subalterns a group of people who cannot represent themselves and who cannot be absorbed into civilised society. What is to be noted is that the race dimension persists but becomes more complex, because of the compact between elite groups across race. Therefore, although the racial nature of the power configuration is obscured, what is much clearer to see is that coalition against the subaltern always needs an underclass to oppress. In the case of South Africa, this underclass is drawn from the large black majority.

### 2.6.2. Blackness

Therefore, in this dominant schema, blackness is on the opposite end of the invisibility of whiteness, and it tends to ricochet between hypervisibility and oblivion. If whiteness is passed off as invisible then blackness is constructed as hypervisible, which means that those perceived to be different are constantly watched. Ryland (2016) argues that hypervisibility is a type of scrutiny based on the perceived difference, which is usually misinterpreted as deviance. Often, this deviance becomes a focal point for outside attention and comes to symbolize or represent a hypervisible person, group or place. Ryland (2016) further argues that when a person becomes overly visible, he or she is often constantly under the gaze of others. This visibility is not the type that people tend to seek if given a choice, because they are being observed not for recognition but judgement. Ryland (2013) states that a simple example of this phenomenon is black teenagers walking into a shop, and being under the scrutiny of the cashier, who watches them closely waiting for them to shoplift, which is different reality from being acknowledged (seen) as 'normal' and valued customers.

Similarly, feminist scholars have argued that women are seen in the same light, in that they are not judged in the same way as men (Doyle, 2016). "Comparatively, when women are represented in spaces, they are often hypervisible, as black bodies are stereotyped as abnormal, hypersexual and their social location highlighted as deviant" (Mowatt, French and Malebranche, 2013: 645). The disparity between treatment of different sexes illustrates the continuance of the double standards that are still present in society despite progress made in the fight for equity. Feminist scholars have long argued that women who seek public attention, or women who are in positions of power, can expect their lives to be scrutinised – while men on the other hand are spared a similar audit (Mowatt, French and Malebranche, 2013). Doyle (2016) writes that when it comes to political contestation, for example, men with messy personal lives are portrayed as heroes and artists, while women are regarded as disasters and

moral cases used to deter other women from harbouring the same ambitions of public life. Women who become visible or are in the public eye are penalised for not staying at home and are easily demonised for supposed transgressions (Doyle, 2016).

Gray (1997) uses black popular music as an example of scrutiny and visibility of black bodies in the public sphere which was unsettled by the articulation of black pleasure and sexuality. Gray (1997) argues that in the decades of the 1920s and 1950s, and again in the 1980s and 1990s, black popular music and black dancing bodies appeared as visible objects of close cultural scrutiny and moral policing for their presumed threats to the civility of American national culture (Gray, 1997: 93). Taking from the work of Fanon and Du Bois, race scholars have argued that blackness or the 'fact of blackness' in society, and this is true of the media, is a troubling presence because it is seen as grotesque and ugly (Fleetwood, 2010). The abhorrence associated with blackness, therefore, makes it visually and theoretically hypervisible.

Thus, as discussed earlier, if whiteness can be collapsed to nothingness, blackness is in the weaker position of being hypervisible. This means that the black body is stereotyped in contemporary representations making it a highly visible and recognisable object of shame and degradation (Gray, 2005). However, scholars have also pointed out that, at the same time, black people are systematically marginalised from society and mainstream media representation, which is related to their systematic oppression in the society (Mowatt, French and Malebranche, 2013). Hall (1997) writes that the black body in media representation is defined by a particular and acute split or 'extreme alternative' because it can both be good and evil, or visible and invisible at the same time. People who are in any way significantly different from the majority – 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation (Hall, 1997). Marginalised groups are thus often represented through sharply opposed, polarised, binary extremes – good/bad, civilised/primitive, excessively ugly/attractive (Hall, 1997).

An example of this dialectic is young black men who are highly visible in South African media as representations of social crisis and an ever present danger (Malila et al., 2013). At the same time, this group is also marginalised by the media, hardly appearing in coverage unless with negative connotations (Malila et al., 2013). This point connects well to our discussion on scandal and its aspects of visibility and contestation. This discussion demonstrates that black people are prone to scandal because of their constant scrutiny for wrong doing, and the fact

that they are omitted from public life because they are perceived to be of value only when they serve as an example of transgression.

The point is that media scandal, as a narrative, is framed in a particular way which, in most cases, suits the anti-black dominant discourse. This perspective conceives of scandal as a cultural construct, or as a “discursive regime that has invested in representing social, cultural, and political struggles over power in racial terms, framing such struggles to the racial and economic order in moral terms” (Gray, 1997: 86). Gray (1997) further argues that such racialised discourses work by naming and rendering black people as “scandalous”, and as transgressors and opposition to the dominant order. The stereotypical depiction of black people as contravention often results in moral panics or periods where this group is defined as a threat to societal values (Cohen, 1972: 28). Similarly, it has been argued that due to his overt ethnic and populist platform, Jacob Zuma triggered a moral a panic about the competency of the black government in power, his election in 2009 heightening the sense that black people were corrupt and incapable (Friedman, 2011).

## 2.7. Discursive contestation

Black politicians have criticised the South African media sphere for being overly critical of government because black people are in power (Jacobs, 1999). As far back as the Mandela presidency in 1994, the ANC has accused the media of prejudice and ill-treatment (Jacobs, 1999). The historic rift between the ANC and the mainstream media, considering the sway both institutions hold, means we have to seriously consider the polysemic nature of media material and scandal. Gray (1995) notes that at some point in the reportage of a scandal, the story takes on a life of its own because the diverse people in different positions might make sense of the story differently. Therefore, in analysing reportage on scandal and how it is understood by the audience, it is important to consider the fact that a scandal does not materialise as such until the narrative is made accessible to a consuming public, who interpret and use the symbolic resources scandals provide for their own purposes (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 16).

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the interpretation of an event is made in relation to a broader societal context. Media scandals (like all media content generally), therefore, enter a network of personal relationships, where the scandal is “implicitly evaluated and granted its moral intensity through personal reflection and interaction” (Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 16). Lull and Hinerman (1997) explain that the transgressions provided by the narrative can only be adjudged to be so when events are made available to the public, who then determine the

seriousness of the transgression. It is precisely because of the ability to adjudicate and deliberate on social issues that some scholars have stressed that scandals, as well as media messages, are open to interpretation (Gray, 1995).

Making a more critical race reading, Bobo (2004) argues that it is possible that black people flatly subvert mainstream media due to the fact that they are wise to historical bias. Put differently, critics argue that audiences may, at times, choose to reject dominant messages because they are aware of the fact that mass media representations attach excess, danger and social decay with blackness (Gray, 1997). As has been discussed, there is overwhelming evidence that black people experience media power and other powerful social structures differently and thus might be more sensitive to scandal that involves a black person (Bobo, 2004). Theorists have noted that when faced with this hidden but oppressive force black people, or any other subordinate group, strive to represent their reality by countering the dominant narrative and bringing some sort of balance to a lopsided system (Gray, 1995). Thompson (2000) argues that the exclusionary nature of norms and values, which permit certain kinds of actions but excludes others, or forces them underground, tends to result in contestation. This is to say that when negative representation is used in the service of prejudice or suppression, the attendant societal norms and values will be subverted or challenged (Gray, 1997).

The interpretation of events, therefore, by those marginalised (as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five) is thus made with these factors of social justice in mind (Bobo, 2004). Black people have a history of standing against unjust and dominating social systems, which means that negative representations have implications. Bobo (2004) argues that black people are wise to the fact that the media are capable of acting as an extension of an unjust social system. The point made is that power relations are central to scandals, and thus, given the lopsided social relations, the contestation that might be at the heart of a scandal is not just about the norm versus the deviant, but rather two groups facing off over a moral issue they both recognise as credible but frames them differently (see Neuendorf, 2000 on the OJ Simpson trial).

The difference in position between different racial or class groups might stem from the fact that marginalised groups feel undone by the exercise of power and its extended messages in the media. In the same vein, some sections of the black population might support Jacob Zuma because they see the bigger transgression to be racial abuse rather than the abuse of political office to self-enrich. The OJ Simpson case, possibly just like Nkandla judging by the fact that the ANC did not suffer massive electorate damage, showed that social structures can have a

major bearing on the process of interpretation. Therefore, when black people unite to defend OJ Simpson in the United States or Jacob Zuma, it is not to defend a murderer or a corrupt politician but to defend themselves against an unjust system that has a propensity to dehumanise them by default.

In this regard, Gray (1997) postulates that values and norms are often contested features of social life, adhered to by some individuals and rejected (or ignored) by others. This observation further makes the point that scandals are never interpreted uniformly by audiences because at times negative coverage of certain groups in the media come to be seen by that group as problematic and thus in need of contestation (Gray, 1997; Entman and Gross, 2008). Therefore, it is possible that, rather than being a point of agreement on moral terms, a scandal can be a marker of difference, with one group in disagreement with the contravention because they see themselves to be outside the dominant framework.

## 2.8. Conclusion

Mainstream media prescriptions, especially involving scandals, are not shared by an entire population of media consumers and the complexity of why that is has been outlined in this chapter. Hence, a major scandal like Nkandla that dominates mainstream media messages with the media occupying the position of arbiter, does not necessarily have the same negative effects on an underclass black audience. Given this condition, what must be considered is that there is a great deal of diversity and variability in the nature of values, norms, and moral codes which are relevant. As such, what counts as scandalous activity in one context, may not be so in another sphere because of a range of underlying knowledges and experiences rooted in racialized histories (Gray, 1997).

Therefore, the narrative surrounding scandal is never clear cut or to be taken in only one sense. The important lesson learnt, which is in line with one of the themes of the study that messages can be contested, is that the interpretation of scandal is potentially widely divergent. With an emphasis on unequal power relations, this study makes the point that scandals must be further understood as instances of 'discursive contestation' (Prinsloo, 2014). This is to say that those subordinate to power have the potential to challenge and contest oppressive social arrangements if they do not subscribe to certain aspects of the dominant value system.

## Chapter Three: Context (Two nations)

For at least the past 10 years – but more accurately, forever – this country has been at the mercy of a plot between the government and Big Business, in which as much money as possible is siphoned away on behalf of an elite that amounts to no more than a few thousand people (Poplak, 2017).

### 3.1. Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, since the overthrow of apartheid, black politicians have criticised the South African mainstream media sphere for being overly critical of the government (Jacobs, 1999; Reid, 2017). The historic rift between the ANC and the mainstream media, which spans as far back as the Mandela presidency in 1994 (Jacobs, 1999; Grootes, 2014), means that we have to seriously consider the possibility of a divergence of views when it comes national issues. Due to this recent history, and a much longer history of racial strife, the previous chapter noted that marginalisation and race are central to the possible variation in the interpretation of scandal, which, in some cases can be favourable to a person who is negatively implicated. Bobo (2004) makes the point that, due to a history of racism, the interpretation of events by those marginalised is often made with factors of social justice in mind.

As such, the centrality of socio-political issues to the process of interpretation demonstrates the importance of lived reality in understanding the scandal. This point, as discussed previously, illustrated that the experience of the social structures can have a major bearing on the process of interpretation. Due to such considerations, it is important that the study further discuss the political economy of the mainstream media, or the context of production in relation to the South African social context. The political economy critique of mainstream media is useful as a contextual backdrop because it critiques the simple notion that the transition to democracy was beneficial to all (Bond, 2000). Such insights allow the study to further explore the idea that South Africa has maintained stratifying structures of old, which lead to the sustenance of a divided public sphere. Therefore, this chapter will explore the idea that stratification of the public sphere creates an environment suitable for a mismatch between a historically white mainstream media and a disenfranchised black ANC voting public.

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### 3.2. Elite continuity

South African scholars such as Friedman (2011) have argued that mainstream media functions for and guards the interest of a mainly white suburban middle class. Gray (1995) adds to the insight, arguing that television representations of blackness operate squarely within the boundaries of middle-class patriarchal discourses. Furthermore, critical race scholars have pointed out that there exists an intimate connection between scandal and commercial media organisations (Thompson, 1997: 49). Mainstream media is touted as a champion of whiteness because the sector is invested in the preservation of the status quo and has the resources to police any deviation. Therefore, the cultural discourses propagated by these organisations maintain normative universes that perpetuate marginalisation and difference (Gray, 1995). This is to say that mainstream media represent black people within existing material and institutional hierarchies of privilege and power based on class (middle class), race (whiteness), gender (patriarchal), and sexual (heterosexual) differences (Gray, 1995: 9).

To further illustrate the continued prevalence of white normative media values in post-apartheid South Africa, critical scholars have pointed out that the diversification of ownership in early post-apartheid South Africa is evidence of a maintenance of control (Tomaselli, 2000). Media scholars of the 1990s took on the radical political critiques of the time to challenge the academic mainstream narrative of a mutually advantageous political and economic settlement (Bond, 2000). Tomaselli (2000) maintains that white capital in the 1990s continued to exercise corporate control by virtue of the fact that mining capital responded to the takeover of the state by a black government by selling majority shares in the media houses they owned to black businesses. Instead of being transformative, Tomaselli (2000) argues that this move was reactionary and was intended to safeguard the interests of mining elites who sold to likeminded black capitalists.

History suggests that by the end of the 1970s there had arisen a crisis of capitalism that had economic, social and political consequences (Hart and Padayachee, 2013). Economically, there was an over-accumulation of capital in the hands of a minority which destabilised the apartheid system (Bond, 2000). Politically, the expulsion of a vast majority of people from the 'inside' of privilege generated too much conflict which threatened the legitimacy of the South African capitalist state (Bond, 2000). The result was an ever-increasing, multi-dimensional crisis, which was spotted as early as the 1970s by the business community. The sector lobbied for structural changes that would accommodate the majority of the African population, arguing

alterations had to be made to South African society in order to realise the potential of the economy (Marais, 1998: 38). Due to the pre-emptive moves made by business, when the restructuring took place in the 1990s, the old structures remained intact because the shares in different companies, including the media, were sold to elites who largely shared the same capitalist outlook (Tomaselli, 2000).

In this respect, South Africa's transition to democracy has, therefore, come under scrutiny from a critical left, which has challenged the idea of a "mutually advantageous political and economic settlement" (Jacobs 2002: 8). Tomaselli (2000) writes that all the restructuring that took place post-apartheid, "was simultaneously a continuation of historical patterns" and thus a replacing of whites with blacks in corporate entities, and was not designed to solve the problems of gross structural inequality across society. Critics postulate that the racial substitution that took place was not designed to provide increased popular access or diversity of opinion in the media, but to make cosmetic changes that upheld the status quo (Tomaselli, 2000). Therefore, what happened was that the post-apartheid media houses, no matter the race of the people at the helm, bolstered capital interests as they had in the past and thus supported the continuance of a class-based social formation.

The point made is that, given South Africa's apartheid legacy, the changes or transformation that took place in South Africa during the years of 'transition' were superficial (Tomaselli, 2000). Habib and Padayachee (2000) argue that if political transitions are supposed to enable new social groups to enter the political arena and create the possibility for significant changes in economic policies, the South African transition failed to do so. Considering the many historical overlaps between contemporary social systems and those of old, Sparks (2011) writes that elite pacts are the path most likely taken by the post-conflict societies that democratised in the 1990s. This understanding of 'elite pact' has been adopted in media studies to understand the social transformation or the lack thereof that characterises post-authoritarian societies (Jacobs, 1999).

### 3.3. Elite pacting

Jacobs (1999) postulates that what emerged after the negotiated transition was an 'elite-pacted democracy'. Adherents of the critical perspective have argued that despite racial mixing in the spheres of power (economic and social) and a complete overhaul of the political sector, the post-apartheid transition was an elite-pact which allowed the continuance of a class-based social formation (Jacobs, 1999; Sparks, 2011). Elite pacted transitions have been criticised for

failing to transform old oppressive structures, and for ensuring that certain group interests not be threatened as a country moves into the necessarily more uncertain period of democracy (Herbst, 1997). As such, Marais (1998) argues that it is highly likely that South Africa's transition extended the disparities from the old order in ways that reinforce the apartheid inequities forced on the black majority.

Due to the failure to overhaul the economy, scholars have pointed out that it has remained the privilege of a few (Bond, 2000). This reality is reflected by a severe case of uneven socio-economic development, where the top five percent of South Africa's population earn and consume more than the bottom 85% (Bhorat, 2015; Bond, 2000). This means that the legacies of apartheid continued unabated, where an extremely skewed and concentrated capitalist accumulation left South Africa with dire poverty, a racial bias in income (95% of the poor are black) and inadequate access to basic services (Seekings and Natrass, 2005). White South Africans remain with much higher incomes, earn more on average than any other race group, and have retained many of their economic privileges through surrendering their monopoly on political power (Marias, 1998; StatsSA, 2017).

In addition to white South Africans, two groups of Africans have benefited from the new order: the middle class and black business (Sparks 2011). Both groups have been actively promoted in the civil service, parastatals (state-owned companies) and in the private sector (Sparks, 2011). Therefore, as noted above, in our discussion of media diversification, the policies aimed at racial inclusivity have been successful only in changing the ethnic composition of a small minority middle and upper class. Therefore, while some black South Africans have seen a substantial rise in their income, the outcome for the mass of the black working class has been much less favourable (Sparks, 2009; Seekings and Natrass, 2005). Efforts to transform the economy have thus been less successful in changing the marginalisation of black people from the socio-political sphere and from the media sphere. The result has thus been the elevation of a narrower layer of Africans to considerable wealth and power, while the living standards of the majority have stagnated (Sparks, 2009).

### 3.4. Passive revolution

It is thus that the negotiated transition is considered a consolidation of the economic pact that was achieved by the formation of numerous formal and informal coalitions between 'white' and later 'black' capital (Marais, 1998). Therefore, it can be argued that what South African white minority capital achieved during negotiations was a reorganisation and reconsolidation

of the hegemony; a passive revolution, or a “stage-manag[ed] class compromise, which providing for the continued development of the forces of production” (Marais, 1998: 84). In Gramscian terms, the continuation of the previous hegemony required that the ruling bloc be restructured along new lines. Using the Gramsci idea of passive revolution, this framework can be understood as the dominant class coalition model, which describes the process of class domination in postcolonial settings (Chatterjee, 2012). The significance of the passive revolution concept is its ability to ascribe the continuance of the features that marginalised less powerful groups because dominant groups have come together (on relative terms) to maintain a hegemony (Chatterjee, 2012).

Elite continuity has been shown to have much purchase in South Africa because there is considerable ideological stability in institutions, with the media facilitating and monitoring the social contract (Sparks, 2011). However, despite the relative social stability brought by the elite pact, we have to note that the dominant class coalition is built on major differences and animosity between competing groups. Chatterjee (2012) contends that because no one class has been able to wield power on their own, passive revolutions necessitate that power be shared by the dominant classes. To this end, to structure the maintenance of good relations, a characteristic feature of a passive revolution, which aided the sharing of power, is a relatively autonomous state; supervision of the state by an elected political leadership; a permanent bureaucracy and an independent judiciary.

Chatterjee (2012) further asserts that dominant forces (political and economic) are in the end aligned due to sharing the same economic objectives within a political space supervised by a relatively autonomous state. They also compete with one another, and are, therefore, engaged in a process of ceaseless push and pull. Therefore, although engaged in a power-sharing structure that is necessitated by the duty to maintain a hegemony, Chatterjee (2012) argues that there has been a capture of the greater share of power by the bourgeoisie class aligned to global capital. In this regard, Chatterjee (2012) writes that despite the measures put in place, due to the forces of globalisation, corporate capital, compared to the landed and political class, has gained relative ascendancy. The dominance of this group means that there has developed a rift between the middle class and the political elite because the middle class have come under the sway of the corporate elite.

This is true of South Africa. Although white elites of yesteryear have now been joined at the top by black elites in a move that has been described as both elite continuity and elite renewal

(Sparks, 2011), this does not mean that the transformation is a matter of an easy transference of power. Race relations considered, when Chatterjee's (2012) argument is applied to South Africa, it points to the alignment of the corporate elite with the white middle class, who share a solid history. Part of this history is a racially based ideological difference with the black elite that now centres on governance and consequently stability for capital (Southall, 2003). The contemporary roots of the tension can be traced to the institution of democracy (Wasserman, 2006). The election of the ANC was enabled by the previously disadvantaged black citizens who exercised their newly acquired political power to vote in a party of their choice (Steenveld, 2004: 102). The move resulted in the election of a predominantly black government, which has been the source of great anxiety and frustration for white South Africans since 1994 (Friedman, 2011).

Therefore, elite continuity and renewal in South Africa has pronounced old fractures, because the retention of power by the old economic elite has pitted the group against the centre of power occupied by the black political elite (Sparks, 2011). Thus, the advantage of using a combination of the earlier mentioned concepts of elite continuity and elite renewal is that we are able to comprehend not just the continuity but also the renewal, which is then characterised by endless competition involved in the restructuring of a new order (Sparks, 2011). In this respect, despite the relative social stability brought by the elite pact, it has to be noted that the dominant class coalition is built on major differences and animosity between the competing groups. Chatterjee (2012) asserts that, although these forces are in the end aligned, they also compete with one another for power and limited resources (Chatterjee, 2012).

### 3.5. Liberal versus developmentalist approach

The continued conflict between dominant frameworks in South Africa is evidenced by the racially charged tensions between the government and the media in post-apartheid South Africa (Steenveld, 2004). According to Wasserman (2006), this tension, in part, has been shaped by the complexity of the reimagining of a new South Africa. The new order was envisioned in a language of 'modernist' state-hood that placed its faith in constitutionality, equality before the law, human rights and social justice (Wasserman, 2006). The sticking point, however, has been the fact that the civil and legal environment created to realise the vision have been imbedded within a dominant Western politico-economic background (Wasserman, 2006). Subscription to this worldview, by an economic grouping eager to defend itself from a majority government,

meant that the media emphasised freedom from governmental intervention and individual rights (Wasserman, 2006).

This outlook has come to clash with the perspective of a black government that has sought to use its limited power to fashion the state into a creation of its own making (Jacobs, 1999; Chatterjee, 2012). The conflict between ideologies “outlined the divergent normative positions arising from contrasting value systems” (Wasserman, 2006: 79). Two general positions have emerged in the debate about the role of the media within the new post-apartheid South Africa. A ‘constructive’, developmental, and more sympathetic approach was favoured by the new government, and a watchdog, oppositional approach was, preferred by media professionals and political opposition (Steenveld, 2004).

The developmental approach argued for a patriotic media that balances the public’s right to know with the national interest, collective rights, and values of care and community (Wasserman, 2006). This approach basically meant that the new government hoped that the media would not be too critical and would support the nationalist development agenda (Berger, 2000). The media, on the other hand (with a few exceptions), harboured a ‘liberal humanism’ framework (Wasserman, 2006). This approach, largely championed by media professionals who prescribe to a Western ideology of government critique, suspicion of state power and free market fundamentalism press freedom, prized a monitorial and adversarial stance to government (Wasserman, 2006; Jacobs, 1999).

The two positions can be seen as linked to two divergent discourses, which are informed, respectively, by Western ideas about media freedom and democracy, and the other by nationalist discourse intent on the recovery of Africa values, and the material transformation of the media industry (Wasserman, 2006: 75). As highlighted in Chapter Two and the preceding sections, the conflictual relationships between competing elites in South Africa is characterised by competing value systems, with the former liberation movements informed by an ideology that differs from the racial discourse on which white South Africa was built (Tomaselli, 2000). Steenveld (2004) argues that an example of this phenomenon can be found in the utterances of President Thabo Mbeki, South Africa’s second democratic president, who often invoked Pan-Africanist identity as an opposition to Western ideologies that were often perceived (by the liberation movement he represented) as racist (Wasserman, 2006).

Steenveld (2004) notes that the point of making the Pan-Africanist argument was to affirm the moral, cultural and political values of black South Africans that were degraded by centuries of

racial subjugation. The exercise was driven by the need to assert the existence of a culture and history that racist ideology had denied, by generating discourses that would articulate an alternative to the racism of the West (Steenveld, 2004: 98). In essence, this was the articulation of a new social subject and social project that can be understood as the assertion of black identities, values and rights in institutions that are perceived to be 'white' (Steenveld, 2004). Wasserman (2006: 78) contends that these articulations should be seen as counter-discourse "against the racial hierarchies of apartheid, to the extent that they are being perpetuated by the commercial media".

In this sense, "the media represented the ideological arm of white bourgeoisie power" (Steenveld, 2004: 100). Mbeki pointed to such in several public rebukes of the media, where he criticised the sector for perpetuating colonial stereotypes. In the main, commercial media was accused of such because it was seen to readily champion the interests of white minority capital, and did little to promote the post-apartheid developmental agenda (Sparks, 2011). What, therefore, took place during this time, and is still in effect today, was that the more the media made a case for government critique, the more government and its allies have responded by accusing the media of racism (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005). What has thus taken centre stage in the public animosity between political and economic elites in South Africa is the contention that the media, due to its ideological ties with white hegemonic capital, holds a bias towards the ANC government, and it marginalises the black poor (Reid, 2017).

Sparks (2011) has observed that what has manifested in the South African public sphere over the last two decades is that the historical problems that come with a racially-defined competition for resource and power have been reproduced in acute form in public discourse. As such, the animosity has reached a point where in policy discussion documents the ANC repeatedly criticises the media for biased reporting. The documents charge that a large degree of mainstream media entities, print media especially, are dishonest, and lack professional integrity and independence (ANC, 2010). Because of such bias, the ANC (2010) has charged that the media is not a neutral but contested terrain and, therefore, reflects the ideological battles and power relations based on race, class and gender. In an ANC newsletter, subsequent to being elected ANC president in Polokwane in 2007, President Zuma (2008) argued, that due to the negative coverage the ANC is subjected to, the mainstream media:

"are not merely examples of faulty analysis of public opinion surveys, or a simple misreading of the mood. They indicate a general trend within most mainstream media

institutions to adopt positions, cloaked as sober and impartial observation, that are antagonistic to the democratic movement and its agenda for fundamental social, political and economic transformation...There are few, if any, mainstream media outlets that articulate a progressive left perspective – which is endorsed at each election by the majority of South Africans and represented by the ANC, its allies and the broader democratic movement”.

Due to its white minority business leanings, the ANC (2010) has, thus, maintained that the media represent views that are out of touch with a great majority of the black population who support the ANC. Furthermore, the ANC (2010) has pointed out that ordinary black South Africans who support the party en masse do not subscribe to the anti-ANC narrative propagated by the media because, having come out of apartheid, they know “the full meaning of unregulated power and unbridled capitalism”, and they have experienced a media system that is “inimical to our democracy” (ANC, 2010). In this respect, Steenveld (2004) argues that due to the identity of the media and its historic relations to the dominant economic groups and big business, it is not out of the ordinary to contend that media materials are possibly interpreted in racial terms favourable to the ANC. Given the noted failure of mainstream media to communicate the message of abandoning the ANC in the 2014 national elections, the research asks if the above might indeed be the case.

### 3.6. Polarised pluralist model

Due to such contestation, Hadland (2008) contends that there is a degree of complexity to the argument that must be added. Despite the binary lens applied, Hadland (2008) argues that the South African media system is more complex than being case of either/or. In such an instance, Hadland (2008) theorises that there is a case to be made to re-examine the fit of the media models currently in place to the country. Therefore, although in the eyes of many South Africa firmly fits a liberal framework, because the country’s media displays independence and neutrality, it has been argued that it is not as good a fit as imagined (Jacobs, 2002). This does not suggest that South African media does not perform the monitorial function expected, but it does, however, highlight that the mainstream media’s assumed watchdog role often stops short of partisan advocacy (Jacobs, 2002).

In addition, Hadland (2008) adds that South Africa’s supposed alignment with a developmental or something closer to what he terms a ‘corporatist tradition’ is also doubtful. It can be argued that South Africa displays elements of the corporatist tradition, which is common in societies

with limited cultural pluralism. The dominance of the ANC and its call for a developmental media points to this model, which is applicable in countries with a fair degree of common national ideology, which is obviously not the case in South Africa (Hadland, 2008). Other commonalities the South African media market shares with the democratic corporatist model include a sophisticated pattern of civic life. Despite the stated similarities, Hadland (2008) argues that it cannot be convincingly argued that South Africa resembles this model in a significant manner because this corporatism does not find its way into the media in any systematic way without significant contestation.

Although South Africa displays a dominant liberal model, and swathes of the corporatist model, Hadland (2007) argues that, by and large, the country's media system corresponds largely to a polarised pluralist model. This suggests that the South African media system is anything but a classic example of the liberal model. Comparative media systems theorists, Hallin and Mancini (2004), note that such contradictions are a common feature of many countries because it is rare that one model perfectly fits. Moreover, it is worth noting that scholars have argued that this phenomenon is a major factor in post-conflict societies, such as South Africa, which exhibit strong contradictory forces, because of the consequence of previous subjugation (Jacobs, 2002). Therefore, Hadland (2007) suggests that South Africa is neither the liberal model that the media imagines it to be nor is it the corporatist model that the government equally desires, but it is a combination of these two that gravitates towards a truer reflection of the country's media system as a polarised pluralist model.

When closely scrutinised, Hadland (2007) argues that South Africa exhibits aspects that are more appropriate to the polarised pluralist model, where the interchangeability of media and political elites, the partisan nature of media audiences, the high levels of external pluralism and the low degree of internal pluralism, are all common features. Other notable features, which all apply to the South African context, include low literacy and readership rates, a late contested transition to democracy and an authoritarian tradition of intervention of the state (Hadland, 2007: 14). Additionally, South Africa fits the polarised pluralist model because it exhibits the schema's common features, which include: an internal plural society and a media system that requires greater political party turnover or plurality but is stuck with a powerful single-party state (Hadland, 2004).

### 3.7. Path dependence

The above is to note that what the research comprehends is that South African audiences might not operate in an environment where they simply choose one framework over another. The picture might be much more complicated. With these factors considered, it is important to note that when South Africa's placement in any media model is critically analysed, it is evident that its features derive, not only from the dynamics of the new political dispensation, but also reach back to apartheid and colonial eras (Hadland, 2007). As has been noted when discussing elite continuity, Hadland (2007: 13) argues that Hallin and Mancini's work demonstrates that every country's media system is the "product of its particular and often complex history". Hadland (2007: 13) advises that when examining post-authoritarian societies, it is important to keep in mind that they are countries transitioning from the collapse of an old system to adopting a new one.

Postcolonial scholars point out that in such a process of transition there can never be a total transformation free of the past because many of the old systems will coexist next to the new (Mbembe, 2001). These scholars have argued as well that the most pertinent theoretical framework to apply to post-authoritarian countries undergoing a process of transformation is one which emphasises the importance of historical legacies (Jakubowicz, 2001). As a more positive and wider approach than elite continuity, Friedman (2015) argues that the path dependence approach has gained ground as a way to analyse post-apartheid South Africa. In opting for the path-dependence approach to media study in transitional societies, Jakubowicz (2001: 61) argues that the approach is useful because it broadly outlines that the legacies of the past offer the most consistent map of the kind of transition a country is likely to take.

Path dependence explains how the set of decisions one faces for any given circumstance is limited by the decisions one has made in the past, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant or, as Friedman (2015: 45) puts it, the "past survives stubbornly into the future". In this regard, the path dependence approach may be seen as a dynamic process whose evolution is governed by its own history (David, 2006: 1). Therefore, in applying this concept to normative media models, one is able to contend, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) have, that every country's media system is the product of its particular and often complex history. One proponent of the use of path dependence in the study of post-conflict transformation is Ekiert, (1999; also see Linz and Stepan, 1996), who persuasively argues that one can expect a country to pursue a path to transformation which is not only determined by 50 years of oppression, but

also by economic, political and cultural conditions shaped by the last 500 years of that country's history.

In understanding the implications of Hadland's (2007) argument, the path dependence theory is helpful to understand the existence of multiple media models in one system. Transition scholars postulate that post-authoritarian countries attempted to mimic more developed countries after the transition, but most of those attempts failed due to country-specific circumstances. Similar circumstances relate to South Africa, with scholars arguing, as noted earlier, that in applying models there has often been little substantive engagement with context (Berger, 2000). As such, South African media practitioners have fallen victim to "lifting concepts like media and democracy from western conditions and applying them unthinkingly" (Berger, 2002:21; Hadland, 2007). In this regard, Jakubowicz (2001) argues that there has been a tendency for post-authoritarian countries to copy foreign media models, and later oppose these models because they prove themselves impractical when applied to differing contextual conditions.

In terms of the application of media models to newly liberated post-conflict countries, Splichal (2001), for example, finds Gabriel Tarde's theoretical triad consisting of invention, imitation and opposition to be particularly relevant for the discussion of post-communist or post-authoritarian transition. Splichal (2001) argues that three early media policy orientations that contributed to shaping views on the new media order were: 'idealistic', 'mimetic' and 'atavistic'. According to Splichal (2001), the first orientation considered by newly liberated formations was the 'idealistic', which was in line with the tendency of dissidents to think in terms antithetical to the previous authoritarian system. Therefore, this orientation assumed the advent of universal franchise would usher in a direct communicative democracy, which would result in a more inclusive and participatory media system (Jakubowicz, 2001). This idea is reminiscent of the ANC approach to media normative standards in South Africa.

The idea was to implement the democratic participant press theory and create a media system based on the values of equality/justice and solidarity (McQuail, 1992), with a facilitative and dialectical/critical role for journalists (Nordenstreng, 1997). These views represent what Sparks (1998: 79) has called the 'total transformation' school of thought, which viewed the transition as a social revolution and assumed fundamental discontinuity between the past and the present. Critical scholars have argued that the reasons why this orientation was rejected almost

immediately after transition are varied, but one which is readily available is that old dissidents had a change of heart when they faced the job of running the country (Marais, 1998).

Jakubowicz (2001) argues that the liberation movements realised – in the light of the immediate transitory situation – that the idea of a direct participant communicative democracy would not get backing from the new government. In addition, some theorists have argued that pressure applied by global capital resulted in the choice of strategy drastically different to the transformation goals that were once planned (Bond, 2005). Rather than institute the radical measures intended before the fall of the oppressive regime, the need to achieve a political contract with the old elite in the process of a negotiated settlement came into play. Operating within the confines of a “pacted” transition, the impact of policy decisions on the market, dominant international trends and foreign advice, these factors all swayed the political elite to abandon ideal goals (Jakubowicz, 2001; Marais, 1998; Bond, 2005).

With the rejection of the ideal orientation, the strategies and media policies that were pursued instead combined elements of the two other orientations, with more ‘competitive democracies’ taking a mimetic approach, and ‘war-torn’ and ‘non-competitive’ regimes gravitating towards the ‘atavistic’ orientation (Jakubowicz, 2004: 57). In adopting the ‘atavistic’ approach, incoming governments assuming power post-transition tended to reject the liberal systems and frameworks proposed, preferring to keep the older and more restrictive systems (Jakubowicz, 2004). Therefore, what really emerged in post-authoritarian countries after transition was not civil society but ‘a political society’, where ‘patriotic’ systems of political and public life were dominated, and indeed ‘colonised’ by incoming nationalist political parties (Korboński, 1994).

The mimetic approach, on the other hand, which is also called ‘imitative transformation’ or ‘mimetic development’, refers to post-conflict countries that ended up copying (with various degrees of success) the liberal media patterns derived from Western Europe and North America (Jakubowicz, 2001). The imitation includes the adoption of necessary tenants such liberalisation of media entities and the creation of a balanced dual (public and commercial) system of broadcasting (Jakubowicz, 2001). The ‘mimetic’ orientation, therefore, sold itself as focused on the objective of the public service phase of media policy developments that took place in Western Europe (McQuail, 2000: 208). Proponents of this model based their favour of this concept on the idea that the model is designed to create an open and plural media system, which is different from the closed and oppressive system of old (Jakubowicz, 2001).

Accordingly, what is given most value in such media systems is the social responsibility, a guardianship/stewardship role for the media, and the fourth estate function of journalism.

Jakubowicz (2001: 67) points out that whatever the pros, this normative standard that was applied when instituting these transformative measures were lifted from Western European models and thus came with many flaws. Scholars have noted that due to the system's foreign nature, the new organisational frameworks were usually created first as part of the top-down social engineering approach to transformation. The underlying elements of the applied systems culture were then usually introduced, disseminated and internalised by the general population at a later stage (Offe, 1997). It is because of such imposition that the imitation and indeed transplantation of foreign patterns and arrangements often ran up against a variety of obstacles and have rarely been successful (Jakubowicz, 2001). Furthermore, Smid (1999) argues that the 'mimetic' orientation encounters a difficult application because it is conceived as a way of achieving approximation with 'the West'. Therefore, in spite of the legal and institutional frameworks introduced, it is argued that the model failed to function as intended because the importance of the country's cultural underpinnings was often ignored (Jakubowicz, 2001).

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### 3.8. Type A and B countries

Eastern European post-communism insights considered above illuminate the fact that there are different traditions of normative theory that can be applied to different sociocultural contexts, just as there are different traditions of democracy in different countries (Jakubowicz, 2001). Likewise, the noteworthy aspect of engaging with the literature to emerge from transitional societies, as noted by postcolonial scholars, is that the models discussed above are often developed and operated parallel to each other in the same context (Hadland, 2007). The insight that transitional societies have offered media studies is that democracies will always be more complex and fluid than the models depict, and thus it has come to be understood that no 'actually existing' democracy falls neatly within one tradition (Hadland, 2007). Jakubowicz (2001: 57) argues that the media model characteristic of the post-conflict stage of transitions is a combination of elements and democracies that "exist as an amalgamation of principles; a creative and contradictory mix of ideas that defy the orthodoxies of any particular school of thought".

The implications of this understanding mean that analysis of scandal in South African society is then a difficult undertaking because the media systems, or the value systems that are used, are eclectic. Therefore, the way in which a person understands a media message might depend

on a number of factors including, class, geography and race. The contention is that the media scene is full of contradictions and national particularities. This is because new nations, formed out of conflict, build their social and media systems to fit their history, cultures and political systems. As such, as latecomers to a world full of options they tend to be heterogeneous, adapting ideas from many parts of the world (Jakubowicz, 2001).

To further understand the phenomena of multiple normative perspectives existing in one, some scholars have argued that a number of factors influence this development. Jakubowicz (2005) argues that a great deal of weight must be attached to initial conditions prevailing at the start of the transformation process, which, in turn, have their roots in a country's particular history. Jakubowicz (2005) further argues that in order to simplify matters when it comes to successful adoption of post transformation policies, there is a need to group countries or to make a distinction between Type A and Type B. This typology is useful because it shows how material conditions can lead to particular kinds of democratic formations and normative media understandings.

Jakubowicz (2005) argues that Type A countries are able to develop institutional frameworks and to some extent the corresponding cultural change begins to produce the sets of values and behaviour patterns which ensure the proper functioning of those institutions. Jakubowicz (2005) notes that all successful Type A countries are marked by a history of conflict. This means that, on occasion, they might depart from the principles of democracy and use democratic institutions and mechanisms provided by them to pursue objectives contrary to their true purpose. However, a majority of the time, measures taken after liberation ensure that the basic prerequisites of democratic consolidation are satisfied. Additionally, such countries develop strong market economies that have private domains, together with state-run business organs (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Therefore, Type A countries are characterised by relative prosperity, high educational standards, the existence of organised non-governmental movements, which are relatively free of state repression, and grass-roots pressure for change.

Thus, although post-conflict countries can display elements of the atavistic orientation, Rizman (2001) argues that from a merely formal point of view many countries' transitions have more or less succeeded in imitating advanced democracies of the West through regular elections, democratic constitutions, workable parliaments and cabinets, multiparty systems, a visible separation of powers. Type B countries, on the other hand, have been less successful. Jakubowicz (2001) argues that Type B countries exhibit mechanisms and procedures of formal

democracy but are still abused or subverted to perpetuate the political and economic elites hold on the levers of power. Such countries are characterised by low living standards, mass deprivation, low educational standards, and weak existence of non-governmental movements that are violently crushed by the state (Jakubowicz, 2001).

The important point is that the two types are extremes and a significant number of countries fall into either category but carry elements of the other. Therefore, it is possible for countries that have undergone 'successful' transitions, such as South Africa, to qualify as Type A but also have a fair amount of Type B tendencies. Thus, although a country may exhibit many Type A characteristics, it can also exhibit weak relations between what Linz and Stepan (1996) call the "five arenas of consolidated democracy", i.e. civil society, political society, rule of law, state apparatus and economic society. The predominant feature in Type B countries that is most relevant for this study is their lack of an organised non-state or non-affiliated movement or civil society. In this sense, it has been argued that South Africa, therefore, displays a strong and a weak civil society in one system, i.e. a strong civil society in the white-dominated middle-class arena, and a lack of the same systems in the working class black arena (Friedman, 2011).

Jakubowicz (2005) argues that it is difficult to describe precisely which elements of which model shape the media the most in particular countries. However, as a general rule, Type A countries have acquired more features of the Western ideals or mimetic orientation, while Type B countries retain models reminiscent of former authoritarian powers or an atavistic approach. As pointed out by Hadland (2007), scholars have argued that South Africa, like many other African countries, exists as a combination of systems (Jacobs, 2002). On one side it has a maturing democracy with a strong civil society, and on the other it has an increasingly repressive regime that has failed to overhaul the past systems of inequity. Due to such characteristics and a tendency to accommodate contradictory systems, post-conflict societies should be seen as complex spaces.

### 3.9. Two nations

Continuing with this notion of different countries existing in one, South African scholars have argued that South Africa exhibits two publics or two societies (Wasserman, 2006). Former president Thabo Mbeki (1998), speaking in parliament once described the country as divided into "two nations, the one black and the other white". He went on to say:

One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographical dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility of exercising their right to equal opportunity, and the development opportunities to which the Constitution of 1993 committed our country. The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst-affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility of exercising what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation.

Therefore, it has been argued that South Africa is an example of a dual economy in which a relatively small proportion of the population participates (Mbeki, 1993). The consequence of this phenomenon is a dual political reality, in which the majority exist on the margins (Paton, 2016). It is in this regard that Leibbrandt and Woolard (2007) observe that in real terms the bottom two fifths of the population have moved backwards, with this segment most adopting the favoured medium of political protest to communicate their frustration arising from economic exclusion. Thus, while the rest of the country may be defined as engaged and an empowered citizenry, this bottom segment is violently marginalised (Leibbrandt and Woolard, 2007). Freidman (2015:49) describes the same phenomena in writing that in the “suburbs democracy exists so vigorous in its denunciation of government that it has become difficult to say anything positive about it without risking ridicule or abuse. But in the townships and shack settlements, local power holders seek to maintain a monopoly, partly by using force against independent voices which challenge them”.

In this regard scholars have argued that it is thus becoming increasingly common that South African politics and society are described as following two roads: the formal world of laws, institutions, including parliament and court organs such as the Public Protector, and another world of the informal dynamics of political barons who wield great power over the poor and working class (Schrire, 2016). Therefore, due to the divergence in social systems, it has been argued that what happens in the courts, mainstream media and other elite spheres is often not reflected in “what happens or what is talked about in taxis and in the homes or the social grant

queues of township regions” (Paton, 2016). In this respect, one can argue that there is an increasing consensus in South Africa that there is a Type A country with a functioning democracy that exists alongside a Type B country with fewer civil amenities, and these worlds are not necessarily in communication.

As such, South Africa presents a compelling case of ‘mixed’ political and communications territories. Glenn and Mattes (2011) argue that South Africa is an example of a complex postcolonial communication environment because ‘pre-modern, modern and post-modern’ features exist side by side in the media landscape. Large parts of the country, especially rural areas, still exist in a pre-modern communication environment. Simultaneously, many black South Africans access a limited media sphere of broadcast television or news provided in indigenous languages by a public broadcaster, or widely read populist tabloid newspapers (Glenn and Matte, 2011). On the other end, wealthier South Africans, particularly whites, have access to a media landscape that has all the characteristics of post-modernity, exhibits almost unlimited choice, “and a diminishing sense of national conversation or shared political destiny” (Glenn and Matte, 2011: 2).

Garman (2010) adds that that this present condition of social divisions has long roots in South Africa’s history of colonialism. Interestingly, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) makes use of the term “bifurcated” to characterise the state and citizenship in both the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras in Africa. Mamdani (1996: 17) points out that colonial society was divided into citizen and subject domains. Urban power, designed for white habitation, spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, while rural power, designed to keep blacks subjugated, spoke community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to reinforce tradition (1996: 17). Chipkin (2007) echoes Mamdani’s insight, arguing that the state, in operation, gives meaning to the type of citizenship possible, which means that a bifurcated state gives rise to bifurcated or second-class citizenship.

Mamdani’s work (1996; also see Chapter Four), therefore, shows that the manifest conditions in the country are due to the divisive approach to governing adopted by British colonialists and later by apartheid nationalists: direct rule as a form of urban civil power (which excluded natives) and indirect decentralised despotism, through which tribal authorities ruled over subject black populations. This means that historical governance of Africa has always strived to divide society in two and encourage the development of two social worlds. This notion of bifurcation in society is also supported by Chatterjee (2003) (his concept will be discussed at

length in Chapter Five) who argues that in postcolonial society there exists civil society that democratically caters to the needs of the middle classes and the political society where the lower classes are governed by force and coercion.

Therefore, what has been described with regards to South African social life is that it exhibits a Manichean quality. This is a term used by Frantz Fanon (1968: 41) to refer to the dualistic nature of the colonial world. Seekings and Nattrass (2005) add nuance to the idea of a Manichean society by arguing that an examination of data about South Africa indicates growing intra-racial inequalities on top of existing inter-racial disparity. The authors observe that in 1994, the year apartheid ended, the average per capita income among the black population was one-tenth that of the white population (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). Among people aged fourteen years or more, 90% of the white population had passed at least standard six (corresponding to grade eight in the United States) in school, compared to 46 % of the black population. Among people aged eighteen years or more, 61% of the white population had passed at least matric (standard ten or grade 12), compared to just 11% of the black population. Thirty-six percent of black households and 0% of the white population lived in shacks, traditional huts, or hostels. Only 18% of black households had internal piped water, and only 37% had electricity, compared to 100 percent of white households (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005).

Although recent figures suggest that the provision of services has gradually improved in black communities, the veracity of racial division is maintained by statistics that reflect that although white South Africans consist of only 8% of the population they earn five times more than blacks (Statssa, 2017). It is in this respect, some observers have argued, that one can still make the argument for a racially divided nation given that there is still a strong correlation between race and household income in South Africa. Post-apartheid figures show that nine out of ten households in the bottom six deciles (the poorest 60 percent of households) were black in 1993; a small proportion were coloured, and a tiny proportion were white (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). By contrast, three-quarters of the top decile were white, and these figures are still reflected by present statistics (Statssa, 2017).

Although the above stated is unambiguous evidence of interracial inequality still in existence in the country, Seekings and Nattrass (2005) argue that when black mobility in the economic order is considered, what is important to keep in mind is that black and white are no longer synonymous with rich and poor in post-apartheid society. Moreover, in the final decades of

apartheid, the deracialisation of formerly discriminatory policies, upward occupational mobility among black workers, and rising unemployment resulted in declining interracial inequality but rising intra-racial inequality, especially among the black population (Seekings and Natrass, 2005). Therefore, in light of historical and enduring social inequalities, while racial difference is significant for understanding political participation, it is also important to keep in mind that the democratic government has brought millions into higher economic categories, across racial divides.

Therefore, the consideration that Seekings and Natrass (2005) ask us to make is that it is also worth noting the rising income among black households. By 1996, the average household income in the richest tenth of black households was over two hundred and fifty times higher than the average income in the poorest tenth. The richest tenth alone earned about one-sixth of the total national income, which is more than the combined share of the other nine-tenths of black households put together (Seekings and Natrass, 2005). There are very few countries in the world where income inequality is higher than it is among the black population in South Africa. Whiteford and Van Seventer (2000) estimate that “within-group” inequality now accounts for over two-thirds of total inequality, whereas it accounted for only 38 percent in 1975.

This means that in post-apartheid South Africa inequality is driven by two income gaps: between an increasingly multiracial upper class and everyone else; and between a middle class of mostly urban, industrial, or white-collar workers and a marginalized class of black unemployed and rural poor (Seekings and Natrass, 2005). Seekings and Natrass (2005) argue that if South Africans, as nationalist discourse often puts it, comprise a ‘nation’, it is an extremely unequal one, so unequal that it seems senseless to use the term ‘nation’. Given the above evidence, what one has to keep in mind as the research proceeds is that South Africa does not consist of two nations but several. The country possibly contains a mixed upper class, another mixed middle class, and a working and lower class that is predominantly black.

### 3.10. Townships... Joza

In a highly unequal country such as South Africa, with 30 out of 55 million people or 55% of the population living in poverty (Statssa, 2017), the social and material context within which media messages are received, powerfully shape meaning-making (Ponono, 2013). As far as economic depression and income inequality go, the Eastern Cape, especially, presents an interesting context to investigate the possible divide between mainstream media and township dwellers.

The Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa (Statssa, 2017) with 30% of the population unemployed, slightly more than the national average of 25% (Jacob, 2017). Furthermore, 36% of the households in the province survive on social grants, which is their main source of income (Statssa, 2017).

The depression of the region is directly related to the fact that apartheid social engineering ensured preferential employment, education and opportunity for white people in South Africa. These policies led to an improved quality of life for the latter group and a breakdown of black households (Bray et al., 2010). Today, the racial structuring of households is evident in the fact that unemployment is at 4.6% among white people and 42.5% among black people (Hunter, 2010: 14). The statistics of the Makana Municipality under which the township of Joza falls reflects the same legacies of oppression, with only 34% of the population in employment (Statssa, 2017). The social divisions are further demonstrated by the fact that the average household income for black homes in Grahamstown is R29 400, compared to a significantly higher R115 000 for white households and suburban areas (Statssa, 2011).

These statistics are evidence of the societal breakdown in black communities caused by exploitative apartheid policies. Joza, like many townships around the province, suffers from the same malaise of high rates of poverty, unemployment and low levels of education, legacies that can be directly linked to the historical economic exploitation of the former homeland areas (Van der Berg, 2007). The depression of the former homelands was meant to benefit white society by establishing black settlements as labour pools for white business, and thus townships originated from South Africa's particular economic requirement for inexpensive migratory labour (Bond, 2003). Townships (some of which fell into homelands and some like Joza not) were created as urban enclaves of cheap labour supply for the comfort of the white settler population. Mngxitima (2013) adds that they are also a testimony of a long history of racial segregation which dates back not just to apartheid but also to colonialism. The squalid living conditions endured by those who populated them, even after apartheid, meant that under restrictive macro-economic conditions and neoliberal micro-economic policies living conditions remained intolerable (Mangcu, 2012).

Given the social inequalities that persist into the democratic state, and the mooted divergence between the media and marginalised lower classes, this research then focuses on the relationship that youth in the township have with mainstream media. The question asked is how youth in the township of Joza made sense of mainstream media messages that pertained to

Nkandla, and why the scandal had a limited effect on them. The research also asks whether the material conditions of the youth in Joza are such that they live in a world too far removed from the concerns of mainstream media.

Such questions are relevant when one considers that research has found that black, coloured and Indian survey respondents think the media is significantly less relevant to them than white youth (Malila and Oelofsen, 2013). Malila and Garman (2016: 68) point out that part of the problem is that mainstream media in South Africa judge and stereotype young people as a “collective of disengaged and apathetically disinterested citizens”. This is a trope which influences how the rest of society, especially those in political and public spaces, will judge young township people. By this measure, it is evident that mainstream media does not only suffer from stereotypical depiction of race, but also constant disregard for marginalised youth (Malila and Garman, 2016).

Therefore, as has been described in Chapter Two regarding the visibility of black people as deviants and their invisibility as lesser beings, the same principles apply to young people. The case is particularly acute when marginalised youth are considered because they are often stereotyped in the media sphere as a homogenous group who are apathetic about politics and thus rendering them invisible in mainstream media discourse (Malila et al., 2013). Scholars have illustrated that young people, especially township youth, are considered to disregard politics because they do not face the same struggles as those who fought against apartheid. They are therefore deemed a generation of young people who need ‘to be fixed’, because they are seen as the root of many of the social ills befalling this country (Malila and Garman, 2016: 68; Boyce, 2010: 87). Malila and Garman (2016) go on to argue that, as a result of their stereotyped image and negative representation as a collective object, marginalised, unemployed black youth are not heard in the South African public sphere.

This research thus looks into the interpretation that young people living in the township make of mainstream media messages. Particular attention is paid to this group because, due to the negative representation alluded to above, this group has expressed a feeling of disregard and suspicion towards the media (Malila et al., 2013). Malila and Garman (2016) detail that young black South Africans from the Eastern Cape have voiced the opinion that they are “stigmatised” by media discourse as apathetic or a lost cause prone to crime. Therefore, due to their daily experiences of disillusionment, young black South Africans are reportedly suspicious of both the media and politicians, and do not easily trust either grouping. This is despite still wanting

to be well informed and seeking to understand the environment in which they live (Malila and Garman, 2016). It is in this milieu of marginalisation and distrust that it is interesting to ask: when the media and politics collided during the Nkandla debacle, what were the views of young South Africans?

### 3.11. Conclusion

This research then seeks to investigate how young people from marginalised spaces such as Joza, who have expressed a distrust of politicians and the media, make sense of media messages. The area that has been opened up is that South Africa accommodates a divided civil society, and it is possible that different values systems are applied by different classes or races. This is a context in which black people (due to historical oppression) find themselves in a Type B country set up without a strong civil society, while the middle classes enjoy a Type A country with all its benefits. Therefore, what the study has alluded to is that in the South African media sphere there exists a number of value systems which align to a history of race and class. Due to the stated differences, it is worth looking into the understanding that young people, living in the township, have of mainstream media messages.

## Chapter Four: Theory of Subalternity

The clue to our general disinterest may lie in the identities of these people. They are political and social outsiders on the fringes of our society. We don't care because we don't consider them to be "us" (Hlongwane, 2016).

Shackdwellers are viewed as thoughtless, as if we cannot reason like other people. But our main tactic for raising our grievances as citizens has been direct petitions to local government figures, who have ignored us. We are viewed as pests by other citizens who have homes; they don't ask how it is that we have to live in shacks in the first place. We are viewed as non-taxpayers, as if we make no contribution to society (Mdlalose in Hlongwane, 2016).

### 4.1. Introduction

The reportage considered in Chapter One described the disbelief articulated by mainstream media when the ANC registered a dominant national electoral victory in the 2014 elections despite predictions to the contrary (Grootes, 2014). What can be deduced from the confounded reactions is the failure of the mainstream media to account for the actions of groups that are outside their framework. In the end, mainstream media displayed a reproachful unawareness of the mechanisms of a world outside their purview. This ignorance was most forcefully evidenced by commentary that likened the black voting public to clowns for continuing to support the ANC (Nobaza, 2014). In this regard, the following chapter will primarily pursue the idea that instead of being seen as engaged in deliberate action, predominantly black ANC voters were depicted as fools for not adhering to mainstream media prescriptions (Schutte, 2014).

Subaltern theory will be used to make the point that when read against the grain, the continued support for the ANC by groups that were assumed ripe to turn their backs on the ruling party, clearly shows the failure of the mainstream media to comprehend the thoughtfulness of marginalised people. The literature that will be reviewed to understand the interpretation of mainstream media messages by a township audience will commence with a discussion of the fact that mainstream discourse seldom depicts marginalised groups as conscious actors (Guha, 1983). Subalterns are viewed pejoratively as passive receptors that are meant to follow dominant frameworks. Therefore, the first port of call in this discussion of subalternity will be Orientalism, a paradigm that grapples with the susceptibility of dominant representation to

mischaracterise subordinate groups. That discussion will be followed by a focus on subaltern studies and the insistence on the independence of a subaltern domain of politics from the elite domain. The idea of parallel spheres of existence will be followed by a review of reception studies, an area of study which maintains the active nature of audiences who are often thought of as passive.

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## 4.2. Orientalism and representation

The discussion so far has highlighted the lack of agency and conscious challenge of power attributed to subaltern groups. The previous chapter discussed the blatant disregard of black subaltern voices, whether mine workers or the general ANC voting populace (van Onselen, 2014; Duncan, 2013). What has been noted is the fact that the actions of subaltern groups are often interpreted as mob passions or uncalculated manoeuvres that are more criminal than legitimate (Hlongwane, 2016). Edward Said's (1978) seminal work on Orientalism expands this line of inquiry, taking further what Ranajit Guha (1984) referred to as a 'structural dichotomy'. This is to argue that the denial of subaltern voices arises from oppressive institutionalised practices that favour official representations. Said's (1978) classic study argued that the exercise of colonial power was based on the presupposition of European superiority, which condemned the 'Other' to representations of backwardness and deviancy, and thereby, justifying subordination (Prakash, 2000).

Stuart Hall (1997) has further stated that the lack of subaltern agency in colonial inspired domination establishes a connection between representation, difference and power. In making the connection, Hall (1997) postulates that the nature of this power needs to be clarified in order to understand that colonial control was a mixture of physical coercion and epistemic subjugation. When seen as systematic, Rao (2010) argues that the first form of colonialism was more transparent and it included violence, oppression and conquest. The second was actualised by a more covert epistemic violence that made its mark through the destruction of knowledge systems outside of European traditions (Rao, 2010). The annihilation of indigenous knowledge through organised ideological violence was thought to bring civilisation to the uncivilised. This thinking effectively marginalised the natives from mainstream society and discourse because they were rewritten into history by the colonialist as subordinates (Rao, 2010).

When applying the above social history to media power, Hall (1997) argues that it is a more astute definition of media power because it includes the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices. Hall (1997) further states that this description is ideal for media

analysis because it takes seriously the fact that that power is held in representation; the power to mark, assign and classify. Power is then understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way (Hall, 1997). Therefore, what we are able to gather from this discussion so far is that representation is not an innocent process of depicting reality but it can be an exercise of hegemonic power (Hall, 1997). In this regard, Said's seminal (1978) study demonstrated that, far from simply reflecting countries in the East, Orientalism enabled European culture to exercise power over the Orient.

Critical scholars have used Orientalism to argue that Western depictions of non-Western cultures have contributed to the exercise and maintenance of power in colonial and modern societies (Harindranath, 2006). Orientalism showed that colonial discourse is an apparatus of power based on a perceived ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and "the Occident" (Said, 1978). The Oriental was antithetically evaluated and thus seen as irrational, depraved, childlike, and 'different', as opposed to the rational, virtuous, mature, and normal European. In the same sense, Africa, as the rest of the Orient world, was generally represented as the 'Other', the antithesis to 'civilised Europe' (Harindranath, 2006). The identification of the 'Other' with bestiality and the European with enlightenment, therefore, justified locking the 'inferior' races into servitude (Harindranath, 2006; Hall, 1997). Although later colonial perceptions would smooth its abrasive outlook in an effort to gain greater control (Mamdani, 1996), the overriding object of colonial discourse was to use racial difference to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types in order to establish domineering systems of administration and instruction (Bhabha, 1993).

This radically simplified thinking of the Other, where the Orient was always uniformly considered as inferior, enabled the view of the Other as an unchanging abstraction that appeared monolithic and passive (Said, 1978; Prakash, 2000). Africa was thus considered outside of 'homogenous time', as something pre-capital and pre-modern that was stuck in humanity's past, (Chatterjee, 2003: 5). This was due to the fact that Africa, and the rest of the colonial world, was considered unchanging, temporally separated from Europe's present and thus incapable of achieving 'progress' (Mamdani, 1996). The bipolarity thus turned on a double distinction: between experiences considered universal and normal and those seen as residual. The residual or deviant case was understood in reference to what it was not. African societies thus became premodern – which meant not yet modern, forever doomed to play catch-up with the civilised world (Mamdani, 1996).

The separation meant that Western civilisation was in a position to guide the uncivilised world into modernity. The strategic function of the distancing between those deemed knowledgeable and the rest was to create a space for subject people only through the production of knowledge by superior powers (Said, 1978). In this arrangement, the Occidental was viewed as a teacher of civilisations, who had the duty to bring morality and progress to the darker parts of the world which were stuck in simple modes of existence (Prakash, 2000). As an eternal child or beast detached altogether from time, and as an ahistorical figure, the Orient was construed as an external object available to the Orientalist's gaze (Prakash, 2000). The 'Other' was then given meaning or created by the discourses and practices of European exhibition, because they were made to signify through this discourse (Hall, 1997).

Orientalist discourse thus depicted the Oriental as something to be judged, as in a court of law, something studied; in curriculum or education, and something disciplined; in a school or prison, (Said, 1978). As a body of knowledge, Orientalism produced texts and institutional practices that were characterised by a mutually supporting relationship between power and knowledge (Prakash, 2000). In making the point that through different practices of representation (scholarship, exhibition, literature, painting, etc.), a discourse produces a form of racialised knowledge of the Other which is deeply implicated in the operations of power, Said's discussion of Orientalism paralleled Foucault's power/knowledge argument (Hall, 1997; Prakash, 2000). In short, Orientalism was a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978).

### 4.3. Subalternity

The essence that can be distilled from Orientalism is the insight that the Oriental is never a free subject of thought or action but contained and represented by dominating frameworks (Said, 1978). Said's (1978) work supports the argument made in this discussion about the lack of agency of subaltern actors and the power of civic institutions such as the media to use historical and racial bias to negatively represent subaltern groups. The discourses allow the producers of text who 'create' the Oriental to speak for the 'uncivilized' world encountered. Spivak (1988) argues that, due to the extraordinary power of oppressive forces that confronts them, subalterns 'cannot speak'. This means that subalterns lack the means to speak for themselves and this void in the public sphere is filled by the colonial or the nationalist officials who represent them (Spivak, 1988).

Although Spivak (1988) used her critique of subaltern studies to specifically highlight the plight of women as bottom feeders of an inverted triangular colonial structure, her insights are productive to analyse a subaltern township public. Inspired by Said and Gramsci, South Asian scholars defined the subalterns as those outside of the elite, whether under colonial or the subsequent post-colonial formations (Chatterjee, 2012). Furthermore, they used the term to refer to groups cut off from upward and 'outward' social mobility, and thus cut off from the civic structures that establish a fully formed citizen (Reddy, 2000; Spivak, 1988). The present study argues that similar is the plight of the township subaltern. As evidenced by the discussion in Chapter Three, the majority of the poor in South Africa are cut off from the mainstream. Furthermore, these subaltern groups are wedged between white elites who continue to benefit materially from the history of racialized oppression, and black elites and black middle classes who are the new custodians of political power.

When taken into the media study, subalternity is useful in observing how the silencing of the marginalised by social structures is replicated by the media through representation, as evidenced by Duncan's (2013) study of the Marikana massacre which found that only 3% of all the articles written at the time of the massacre consulted workers. Between business sources and politicians, subordinate groups were represented by those deemed more authoritative. Spivak (1988) argues that subalterns seldom get the opportunity to self-represent because they are not seen to have the ability to do so as they are construed as stupid, lazy or criminal. Furthermore, due to the fact that subalterns have limited access to public platforms and spaces to self-represent, pronouncements that are deemed logical are therefore made on their behalf (Spivak, 1988). Such an elite focused vantage point denies the subaltern a voice because they are ideologically interpolated into a continued position of subjugation and marginality (Spivak, 1988).

Guha (1983) argues that elite historiography is blind to the political efforts of subalterns. This is because the historiography of Indian nationalism is mostly drawn from bureaucratic sources that hold onto the prejudice that the development of the nation was predominantly an elite achievement (Guha, 1999; Young, 2016). It has been argued, therefore, that mainstream narratives largely celebrate the continuity of hegemonic power and serve as datum in the life-story of the empire, because such texts were not simply records uncontaminated by bias, judgement and opinion, and are complicit in the existing power structure (Guha, 1983). As public record, and daily observers of history, Hall et al. (1978) point out that routine structures

of news production compel the media to reproduce the definitions of the powerful by relying on elite sources as the primary definers of news (Murdock and Golding, 1973).

Critical scholars have pointed out that the mainstream media are not only in service of an elite agenda due to institutional pressures, but also because they share the same value system. As noted in Chapter Three, a more politically astute argument has been forwarded by critical commentators who have pointed out that a liberal Western inspired value system has assumed dominance of the South African civil society space (Friedman, 2011; Jacobs, 2002). In this regards, media scholars have noted the adherence to neoliberal principles has meant mainstream media acts in a partisan way. As has been argued, especially by reference to the Marikana massacre, when it comes to the coverage of subaltern political activity, mainstream media exhibits a commitment to the aims and interests of the neoliberal regime (Jacobs, 1999; Bond, 2000; Duncan, 2013).

In this regard, Guha (1983) has argued that the consequence of marginalising the subaltern and the lack of ascribing them historical agency gives lie to the myth that subaltern resistance of power is spontaneous or unpremeditated. Critics point out that this is an elite posture to subalternity that has a tendency to miss the collective social and political actions of subaltern actors (Guha, 1983). Consequently, Chatterjee (2003) argues, subalterns are active and political in a way different from that of the elite. Guha (1983: 4) adds to this thinking, claiming that due to its bankruptcy, or its inability to see beyond its own structuring, elite historiography fails to acknowledge the independent domain of subaltern organisation as the 'politics of the people'. Furthermore, Guha (1983) charges that due to its partial nature, elite historiography cannot provide an explanation for the peculiarities the nation because it fails to acknowledge the independent contribution of subordinate people.

Postcolonial and subaltern scholars have thus put forward that subaltern actions or the 'politics of the people' is an autonomous domain because it neither originates from elite politics nor does its existence depend on it (Chatterjee, 2003). The primary actors in this domain are not the dominant groups but subalterns. In writing about the mischaracterisation of the Orient, Said (1978) observed that the world outside the elite is a parallel domain of politics. Said (1978: 40) wrote that although this independent domain is 'different, it is, however, a "thoroughly organized world of its own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence" that has existed alongside the domain of elite politics throughout the colonial period. As discussed in Chapter Three, the above relates to the

dual political reality in South Africa, where civil society, which includes the media, subscribes to one view while the majority live by another (Paton, 2016).

#### 4.4. Janus-face/bifurcation

The coexistence of the elite and subaltern modes of politics, therefore, reveals the failure of the colonial bourgeoisie to speak for the nation (Guha, 1984). This is because there is no unitary “nation” to speak for given the number of people and groups that have never been integrated into the hegemonic structure of the state (Guha, 1984). The complex matter of exclusion is one this research turns to, arguing that colonialism in Africa established separate development, or a ‘structural dichotomy’ which meant the institutional segregation of different races for the purpose of domination (Mamdani, 1996; Guha, 1984). Mamdani (1996) has convincingly argued that colonial powers stabilised racial domination (territorial segregation) by grounding it in a politically enforced system of ethnic pluralism (institutional segregation) or a regime of differentiation.

In this regard, the African colonial experience came to be crystallised in the nature of the state that was forged through that encounter (Mamdani, 1996). Organised differently in rural areas from the urban, that state was Janus-faced and bifurcated, and thus contained a duality: two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority (Mamdani, 1996). Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition. The former was organised on the principle of civic plurality to check the concentration of power, the latter around the principle of fusion to ensure unitary authority (Mamdani, 1996).

The exclusion or institutional segregation that defined civil society under colonial rule was a form of indirect British rule, where racial dualism was anchored in a politically enforced ethnic pluralism. Therefore, in practice, as pointed out by Mamdani (1996: 17), “indirect rule meant the domination of natives in the institutional context of semi-servile and semi-capitalist agrarian relations”. Through this route, we can arrive at a history of the global political economy that can be termed ‘racial capitalism’, because the historical developments of capitalism relied upon the elaboration, reproduction, and exploitation of notions of racial difference. Johnson (2016) contends that notions of difference – absolute, racial notions of difference – were used to define, describe, and justify the political economy of subjugation. “The history of racial capitalism is a history of the interconnected process by which economic,

geographic, and racial differences were seeded, took root as a divisive particularization” (Johnson, 2016).

As such, Mamdani (1996) argues that the emphasis on differentiation for financial gain meant the forging of specifically native institutions through which to rule subjects. Although the separation between races can be thought of in simple terms, the complexity of the issue is highlighted by Mamdani (1996) who argues that colonial domination was not solely about exclusion, and that separate development meant a simultaneous institutional integration and segregation. This means that the segregation adopted was not exclusionary but inclusionary. As such, Mamdani (1996) writes that the way to further understand colonial power is not to concentrate on the partial and exclusionary character of civil society but to understand that the population of subjects was ruled not by exclusion but by inclusion as a separate entity.

In such a case, Guha’s (1983) notion of a parallel domain of politics becomes an important analytical tool for this research because it enables us to understand that a separate sphere, where a racialised economy is concerned, has always existed alongside the mainstream. Similarly, offering an example specific to African colonial arrangements, Mamdani’s (1996) analysis focuses on the way that the subject population was incorporated into – and not excluded from – the arena of colonial power for the purpose of domination. The point of this particular exercise of power was that the dominant institutionalised power remained dominant through the preservation of difference or rural tribal composites, which functioned as subordinates to the larger structure (Mamdani, 1996).

The emphasis is on incorporation into the larger structure without being integrated, where the very idea of incorporation becomes a form of domination. Johnson (2016) similarly argues that it is common for people to emphasise that slavery or subsequent oppressive colonial relations “dehumanized” enslaved people, but to point out solely this aspect is misleading. Mamdani’s point was that the more advanced form of racial subjugation was not built on inhumanity, but rather on seeing blacks as human but unequal. Johnson (2016) makes a similar point, arguing that in order to understand the link between slave relations from 19th century Atlantic slavery and today, we have to realise that the system was not about seeing the other as animal but wretched (Johnson, 2016). Mamdani (1996) points out that if we are to understand the nature of colonial power we cannot think of it as exclusion but inclusion into the dominant sphere on unequal grounds.

Chatterjee (2012) argues that the complexity of such arrangements in postcolonial societies is evidenced by the fact that political leadership has to balance a hegemonic order with development. This has meant that, in an effort to maintain the structures that reproduce elite privilege, postcolonial leaders have had to figure out strategies to disenfranchise whilst attempting to reverse the very effects. The idea of inclusive differentiation makes sense considering that the postcolonial reality is that capitalism has displaced indigenous black African South Africans from sources of livelihood and relegated them to independent nonmarket spheres parallel to the world economy (Chatterjee, 2012, Mamdani, 1996). Therefore, in the spirit of institutionalised segregation, based on differentiation and inclusion, modern capitalist developments operate within the sense that “basic conditions of life must be provided to displaced people” (Chatterjee, 2012: 123).

Taking from the ideology of institutional segregation, capital domination has taken to the idea that it is unacceptable that “those who are disposed of their means of labour because of the primitive accumulation of capital should have no means of subsistence” (Chatterjee, 2012: 123). In a world that has excluded the majority from the formal economy, governmental agencies, in accordance with calculations of political expediency, have taken up the obligation to look after the poor and the underprivileged (Chatterjee, 2012). Sparks (2011: 7) argues that the social-democratic version of neoliberal democracy recognised that extremes of inequality often have a negative effect on democracy, and, in order to sustain the system, regulation of excesses of capitalism and the provision of social welfare were needed. Such an analysis applies aptly to South Africa, where there have been many measures and policies instituted by the post-apartheid state to redress the economic inequalities of the past. One of these measures has been the roll out of state-sponsored social grants that are now benefitting one-third of the country's citizens (Russouw, 2017).

The efforts of unity, in such disparate societies, have given legs to the idea that Western democracies live in the utopian idea of homogeneous empty time, or what Marxist would call the time of capital (Chatterjee, 2003). The simultaneity experienced in homogeneous empty time allows us to speak of categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets, and other economic terms (Chatterjee, 2003). In this regard, in his essay “On the Jewish Question,” Marx (1964: 12-14) wrote that the political citizen is “an imaginary member of an imaginary universality”. Another way to put this is that the process of signification in the world often assumes the consensual nature of society. It is assumed that members of a society exist because they share a common stock of cultural knowledge with fellow inhabitants who all have access

to the same 'maps of meanings' (Hall et al., 1978). What is expected under such arrangements is all members to have the ability to use these 'maps of meaning' to reflect fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, that help members to share the same perspective on events (Hall et al., 1978).

Chatterjee (2003) argues that this basic cultural fact about society sharing meanings has been raised to an extreme ideological level. As such, the assumption is that the politics of the world inhabit the empty homogenous time-space of modernity, and what is outside this time is premodern, and will die or catch up (Chatterjee, 2003; Mamdani, 1996). Above all, modernity has led people to believe that we are all living in the same society. As such, it is often assumed that people belong to roughly the same 'culture', and that there is, basically, only one perspective on events (Hall et al., 1978). This configuration carries the assumption that we all members of a society sharing roughly the same interests, and that we all roughly have an equal share of political power (Hall et al., 1978). This is the essence of the idea that there is a unitary public, an idea that, as argued in Chapter One, has been found wanting when applied to South Africa.

This 'consensual' or unitary viewpoint has important political consequences when used as the taken-for-granted basis of communication (Hall et al., 1978). This view denies any major structural discrepancies between different groups. Fraser (1992) points out such a blanket consensus marginalises subordinate groups in society because their views are stifled by more dominant mainstream representations. Consensual views of society, therefore, represent society as if there are no major cultural or economic breaks, no major conflicts of interest between classes and groups (Hall et al., 1978). In this regard, critical scholars have, therefore, argued that empty homogeneous time is the utopian time of capital because the real space of modern life consists of heterotopia, which is heterogeneous, and unevenly dense (Chatterjee, 2003). Homogenous empty time, or consensual relations in historically conflicted societies, are thus a fiction created by capital for the purpose of creating a unitary space for transaction (Chatterjee, 2003).

The concept is described as utopian because, for Marx and other critical scholars, the material realities of human existence – "distinctions of birth, social rank, education, occupation" – continue to guide and determine the course of history (Chatterjee, 2003). This is so even as the inauguration of a new sort of history, the history of political equality, was announced to the world (Johnson, 2016). What this basically means is that the notion of empty time or consensus

is limited because such a view is one sided as it looks at only one dimension of the time-space of modern life (Chatterjee, 2003). Chatterjee (2003) further argues that people can only imagine themselves in empty homogeneous time, but live a different reality. Chatterjee (2003) also calls duality the heterogeneous time of modernity, where politics does not mean the same thing to all people.

The critical factor that this discussion has been drawing out is that the engineering of differentiation in colonial times has been carried over to postcolonial societies. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is no doubt that the political elite embraced the use of bourgeoisie political modernity, but this democratic tendency existed alongside undemocratic relations of domination and subordination. As noted in the discussion of Type A and B countries, Chatterjee (2012: 127) argues that colonial institutional arrangements have produced a split between the domain of "properly constituted civil society and a more ill-defined and contingently activated domain of political society". The basic argument is that at the founding moment of the postcolonial democratic nation, there is an unresolved conflict between universal affiliations that come with modernity and particular identities that come with being subjugated. As such, because the modern form of the nation is both universal and particular, the narrative of the nation is split into a double time and hence its inevitable ambivalence (Chatterjee, 2003).

#### 4.5. The politics of the governed: civil society and the political society

To further the discussion on the duality of postcolonial nation-states, the argument will venture into the institutional arrangements that define an exclusively constituted civil society and its various iterations. The universal dimension of the postcolonial nation is represented, first, by the idea of the people as the original locus of sovereignty in the modern state and, second, by the idea of all humans as bearers of rights (Chipkin, 2007). A nation is thus considered as such because it enshrines the specific rights of citizens in a state constituted by a particular people (Chipkin, 2007). The basic framework of rights in the modern state is thus defined by the twin ideas of freedom and equality. Civil society, as the ideal that energised the European interventionist political project that railed against monarchies and the barbarism of medieval times, was thus adopted for this purpose in Africa. As altruistic as the ideal is, however, it is worth noting that Fraser (1992) recommends that we keep in mind that as an actually existing form, the concept is demographically limited.

This limitation is especially germane in postcolonial settings where civil society has historically not been extended to all. Mamdani (1996) has written that civil society is a historical construct which gave rise to an autonomous legal sphere that governed civil life. In as much as this intervention ended the despotic rule of monarchies, the creation of the legal sphere in Africa enabled contractual relations between free individuals. The rule of law meant that law governed behaviour which was the essence of the modern state, recognising the rights of all citizens. In this sense, civil society was understood as civilised society, and this delineation excluded those deemed outside the order (Mamdani, 1996). The exclusion that defined civil society under colonial rule was race and its history is laced with racism (Mamdani, 1996). Civil society in the colony was first and foremost the society of settlers and legal rights, but such free association was reserved for citizens who were recognised as civilised and not the subjects who fell under the rule of tribal authorities (Mamdani, 1996).

This form of democratic or direct rule, was therefore construed as urban civil power that came with civil liberties. It was about the exclusion of natives from the civil freedoms guaranteed to citizens in the civil society (Mamdani, 1996). The institutional segregation meant that citizenship was a privilege granted to citizens and the uncivilised were subject to tutelage. These subjects were then administered under indirect rule, which signified a form of rural tribal authority (Mamdani, 1996). Under this form of rule, natives were incorporated into a state-enforced customary order, which allowed a minority foreign power, through division and tribal authority, to dominate black natives who made up the majority (Mamdani, 1996). As such, in the African colonial experience, the state came to be janus-faced because it was deliberately organised differently according to race, and contained a built-in duality because it housed two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority (Mamdani, 1996).

Both of these facts, the bifurcated nature and the social design of a single society housing multiple designations, must be borne in mind when considering the relation between modernity and democracy in postcolonial countries (Chatterjee, 2003). Subaltern scholars have argued that the multiplicity of postcolonial societies are especially important when analysing, not just the marginalisation of subalterns, but their agency too (Guha, 1983). It is in this regard that the subaltern studies project has communicated a split in the domain of politics between an organized elite domain and an unorganized subaltern domain (Guha, 1983). The idea of the split was thus intended to mark a fault line in the arena of colonial and postcolonial national politics, where the masses, especially the peasantry, are often drawn into organised political

movements and yet remain distanced from the evolving forms of the postcolonial state (Chatterjee, 2003).

The emphasis on the split in the domain of politics, therefore, was to reject the notion, common to both liberal and Marxist historiographies, that the peasantry lived in some “pre-political” stage of collective action (Chakrabarty, 2000). It was to say that peasants or subalterns in their collective actions were also being political, except that they were political in a way different from that of the elite (Chatterjee, 2003). To untangle or distinguish subalterns and their endeavours from the elite, Chatterjee (2003) takes from Guha’s (1983) idea of the ‘politics of the people’ and proposes the notion of a split between the political society and civil society. The concept of civil society and political society supports the point made by Mamdani (1996) that postcolonial societies continued the ‘bifurcated’ nature of colonial relations because they adopted the divisions of the prior state.

As argued above, civil society, and this includes the operations of mainstream media, has always been, and by some measure still is, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens (Chatterjee, 2003). “Civil society is thus populated largely by the urban middle classes and is the sphere that seeks to be congruent with the normative models of the bourgeoisie civil society and represents the domain of capitalists hegemony” (Chatterjee, 2012: 127). Furthermore, Chatterjee (2003) argues that civil society appears to be a closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law. In effect, civil society and the proclamations made by its attendant media institutions is limited to a small section of the population, where a few culturally equipped middle class members are much better able to take advantage of the systems.

The other domain is the political society, which includes large sections of the rural population and urban poor (Chatterjee, 2003). Here there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship. “These people do, of course, have the formal status of citizen and can exercise their franchise as an instrument of political bargaining. But they do not relate to organs of the state in the same way that middle classes do, nor do government agencies treat them as proper citizens belonging to civil society” (Chatterjee, 2012: 127). This sentiment is not dissimilar from the work of Mamdani (1996) who argues that in Africa, and in South Africa, there has been a continuation of the structural mechanisms of apartheid and colonialism which have resulted in a failure of the new state to extend citizenship or full rights and capabilities to all.

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The subjugation of those relegated to subjecthood is further entrenched by the state of relations in the political society. Subalterns in this domain have to bargain and make claims on the government outside the properly sanctioned civil society, which means that they are thus governed outside of the constitution, rights and laws, through unstable arrangements reached by direct political negotiation (Chatterjee, 2012). Therefore, there is an important dimension to the relationship between subalterns who exist in the political society, and politicians have to deal with them. Since subalterns operate outside of the formal system, it is highly likely that this domain of politics is not under the moral-political leadership of the capitalist class and are closer to the politicians who they have to deal with (Chatterjee, 2012). This is what Chatterjee (2003) has termed the “politics of the governed” which is the independence of the political domain of the subaltern from the control of the elite.

Therefore, as much as this consideration takes seriously the functions and the direction offered by a vanguard leadership, it also accepts that outside the elite political domain, outside the legal arm of the state, and the discursive influence of the mainstream media in postcolonial societies, there exists a parallel world that cannot be reached by a vast range of elite sources. This parallel domain has unique social practices that are regulated by beliefs and frameworks that are outside the hegemony (Chatterjee, 2003). As such, this analysis has to keep in mind going forward, that the subaltern, working-class people of Joza township under investigation exist in this domain. Due to their location in a distinct sphere, they can thus interpret media messages emerging from the domain of civil society in various ways. The necessity of this research is to uncover the possibilities of such divergent interpretation, and to unearth the possible interpretations made by a marginalised group outside mainstream media.

#### 4.6. Subaltern counter public sphere

The purpose of this section on counter public sphere is to link postcolonial theory, discussed above, to critical aspects of the public sphere debate, and to further the idea that the downtrodden do have the ability to counter dominant messages. This section of the chapter will attempt to demonstrate that exclusionary power exercised by the mainstream public sphere, which sits squarely in the domain of civil society, has the potential to be contested and resisted by counter public spheres that exist outside of this space. The section will concern itself with an interrogation of the South African mainstream media public sphere. The argument that will be made is that the South African public sphere, as with all elite public spheres, does not allow enough space to include the voices of the marginalised (Jacobs, 2002). As such, subaltern

voices tend to form their own politico-social forums, or operate outside the mainstream (Fraser, 1992).

Critical media scholars have argued that the dominant liberal model assumes a homogeneous society or public in a country that is in fact divided along racial, ethnic and class lines (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005). As has been highlighted scholars have noted that the problem with discussing South Africa as a unified public is that you neglect to highlight that there exists two, if not multiple, 'publics'. What often plays out in such a situation is the duality of a vocal public, which is able to articulate and promote its own interests by means of mass media, and a voiceless public, whose interests are marginalised (Duncan, 2003). Some have taken this argument further, and closer to what we discussed in Chapter Two, and have stated that members of the second public lack access and participation in the media and media debates because the mainstream media exhibit a racial, gender, class and regional bias that keeps members of subordinate groups on the margins (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005).

Fraser (1992) argues that the bourgeoisie or liberal conception of the public sphere, the idea articulated by Jurgen Habermas, that it was a space where 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'common interest' as equals is an inadequate normative ideal in the servicing of an 'actually existing democracy' (Fraser, 1992). This conception incorrectly assumed that public discussions were open and accessible to all. Furthermore, it incorrectly held that private interests were not part of the equation and inequalities of status were bracketed, permitting citizens to deliberate as peers. It was imagined that the result of this free flowing discussion is the formation of 'public opinion' that is strongly guided by "consensus about the common good" (Fraser, 1992: 59). Although Habermas forcefully advocated for its conceptual usefulness, he too admitted that the "full utopian potential" of the public sphere was never realised because the claim to open access never became a reality (Fraser, 1992: 59).

In defending the failure of the ideal version of the public sphere to materialise, Habermas (1991) argued that the failure of the public sphere was due to the lack of a sharp differentiation between society, state and market. Such a measure, Habermas (1968) argued, would have ensured the separation of private from public interests. Geoff Eley (1992) has countered Habermas's argument and contended that the liberal ideal of the public sphere remains unattained, not because of a lack of clear divides, but because it has always been an ideal impossible to operationalised in contextual environments that are deeply unequal. In fact, Eley (1992) notes that instead of the ideal of inclusion and consensus, exclusion and contestation

were part of the character of the public sphere from its inception. Furthermore, Eley (1992) argues that, contrary to what some accounts might have us believe, the exclusionary nature of the bourgeoisie public sphere was not innocent or accidental but an essential feature of the domain.

Fraser (1992) concurs, arguing that despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere rested on, and was constituted by a number of significant exclusions. Moreover, Fraser (1992) postulates that the birth of the public sphere had logics of exclusion on gender, class and racial grounds inscribed into its very fibre. Eley (1992) writes that the public sphere was developed in the later eighteenth century in the context of widening political participation and the crystallisation of the ideals of citizenship. It was founded in the struggle against absolutism and was aimed at transforming arbitrary authority into rational authority, which is subject to the scrutiny of an organised citizenry. Therefore, Eley (1992) contends that exclusionary operations exhibited by the public sphere were essential to liberal public spheres because the exclusions aided the process of class formation.

Fraser (1992: 114) points out that in all the leading European countries, the soil that nourished the conception of the liberal public sphere was 'civil society' and the emerging new congeries of voluntary associations sprung up in what came to be known as "the age of societies". The crucial point is that this network of clubs and associations, civic, professional, and cultural groups were anything but accessible to everyone (Fraser, 1992). On the contrary, it has been argued that they were the arena, the training ground, and eventually the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men, who were coming to see themselves as a 'universal class' and, who were also "preparing to assert their fitness to govern" (Fraser, 1992: 114).

Socially then, the public sphere was the manifest consequence of a much deeper and long-term process of societal transformation that Habermas locates between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century, as a trade-driven transition from feudalism to capitalism (Eley, 1992). As the formation of institutional practice, the exclusions and conflicts that appeared as accidental trappings in the Habermasian perspective became constitutive in the revisionist view (Fraser, 1992). In the opinion of revisionist scholars, the public sphere was not simply an unrealised utopian ideal, but rather a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule (Fraser, 1992). The point is that the new liberal values of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are a result of the developmental processes of class formation and social growth. Therefore, the bourgeoisie public sphere has since inception been

an unequal space that functions informally to marginalise lower classes from participation as equals (Fraser, 1992).

Fraser (1992: 20) then argues that “in stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalise the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday contexts and in official public spheres”. Moreover, these pressures are amplified, rather than mitigated, by the peculiar political economy of the bourgeois public sphere. In this elite public sphere, the media constitute the material support for the circulation of views that champion private ownership and operations that further profit (Duncan, 2014). Consequently, subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation (Duncan, 2014).

In such a configuration, Fraser (1992: 120) writes that “political economy enforces structurally what culture accomplishes informally”. Therefore, the problems of the public sphere are not only problems to do with the ideal, but problems intrinsic to the society and its constitution because of the fact that it has always pitted those with means against the disadvantaged (Fraser, 1992). Much like all spaces characterised by domination and subservience, the elite nature of the South African mainstream public sphere means that there exists contestation because two competing ways of seeing the world exist alongside each other (Jacobs, 2002; Eley, 1992). Therefore, the actually existing situation in South African is that popular democracy is still severely marked, not just by a divisive racial structuring but by class, ethnic and gender divides (Steenveld, 2004).

Although Habermas (1962: xviii) stressed that his concern was with “the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere” because of its dominance, the problem that has been noted against his analysis is that it devoted too much attention to the bourgeoisie. In doing so, it is argued that Habermas committed two errors, first, he idealised the liberal public sphere and, secondly, he failed to examine other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres (Fraser, 1992). The consequence of the oversight is that Habermas stressed the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere and its claim to be ‘the’ public arena in the singular (Fraser, 1992; Warner, 2002). Fraser (1992) argues that this is an invalid conception of the public sphere because the failure to consider alternative publics in stratified societies is detrimental to dominated groups because it allows the assumption that they can participate equally in the dominant public sphere.

Furthermore, Fraser (1992) contends that equal participation in an unequal society is unrealistic because social inequalities are not bracketed or set aside in social engagement; they are part and parcel of the exercise. “Insofar as the bracketing of social inequalities in deliberation means proceeding as if they don't exist when they do, this does not foster participatory parity. On the contrary, the failure to recognise the struggle of the marginalised, or the insistence to ignore inequalities, usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates” (Fraser, 1992: 120). In such a situation, which is similar to what commentators have described in South Africa, members of subordinated groups have limited space for deliberation about their needs, objectives, and strategies (Wasserman, Bosch and Chuma, 2016). In such cases, subalterns are less likely than otherwise to “find the right voice or words to express their thoughts” and more likely than otherwise “to keep their wants inchoate” (Fraser, 1992: 123). This state of affairs, then, renders them less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests in the dominant public sphere (Fraser, 1992).

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Due to the problems detailed here that are inherent in the bourgeoisie public sphere, members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, people of colour, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics (Fraser, 1992). As such, Fraser (1992: 123) coined the term: subaltern counter publics, to refer to the “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs”. She maintained that insofar as these counter publics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they are useful to the democratic process because they help expand discursive space and enlarge public discourse. Fraser (1992) also argued that recognition of counter publics is good for democracy because the contestatory function of subaltern counter publics fulfils the ideal democratic function of competition of ideas in a free market space, much more than a single, comprehensive public sphere.

This means that the public sphere is not a harmonious arena where all are in agreement about public good; it is rather a space where competing publics come together to struggle over ideas and opportunities (Fraser, 1992). This conception makes sense because in unequal societies, where not all members get the same share of voice in public matters, discursive relations among differentially empowered publics are as likely to take the form of contestation as that of deliberation or agreement (Fraser, 1992). Therefore, instead of a blanket or unified public that shares consensus on issues, recognising counter publics allows us to seriously consider the possibility of contestation, and take seriously what those subordinated have to say.

The point that will be carried forward is not that competing counter publics contest all discourse propagated by the mainstream, but the fact that the mainstream, in its classical liberal/bourgeois guise, is and has always been partial (Eley, 1992). The preceding chapters have similarly argued that subalterns in South Africa have had to struggle for a voice in mainstream discourse. Miners in the small town of Marikana were labelled rabble-rousers and massacred when they fought for a decent wage, and the black voting populace was depicted as clowns when they opted to continue supporting an unpopular government. Therefore, contrary to such dismissive stances, this research, through ethnography, seeks to describe how one of these subaltern groups participants elaborate their own alternative styles of politics. The aim is to see how a counter public contests “the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public by elaborating an alternative style of political behaviour” (Fraser, 1992: 116).

#### 4.7. Audience study – traditional vs cultural model

The above sentiment aligns well with the project taken up by the Subaltern Studies initiative of recognising the subaltern domain as an active and parallel structure that has the potential to differ from the elite. With parallel structures considered, the question becomes how to see, recognize, hear and explain this domain. In this regard, audience study will be considered because the scholarship goes beyond recognition of the marginalised and engages the possibilities of paying attention to their views, which are ignored by mainstream media.

On the notion of independence and activity of those outside the mainstream, audience studies have made similar advances to those considered by subaltern study. Subaltern scholars argued that the truth about subalternity is contrary to the continued negative depictions of Africa and Africans as passive receptors (Guha, 1984). Importantly for this study, Guha (1984) maintained that, when read against the grain, subalterns are active participants in historical development, but elite focused writing is blind to that reality. In this regard, audience studies adherents persuasively argued that audiences have the ability to interpret messages variously because they are active participants instead of passive readers (Hall, 1980). What is, therefore, noted going forward is that audience study made the point that members of the audience can possibly divert from the meaning intended by the producer.

When analysing the divergence of black township people from mainstream media messaging, this insight is important in understanding what meaning is gleaned by young black township youth of mainstream media messages. The aim going forward is to decipher the sense in which subaltern actors may possibly interpret mainstream media messages in ways contrary to what

is intended by the producers of the message. In order to do so, building from the subaltern studies and subaltern public sphere discussion, audience study has further stated that to remedy the situation of a top-heavy communication environment that privileges the more powerful producers, reception analysis must focus on the audience, and acknowledge the complexity and agency of interpretation.

Audience critics have pointed out that there is no necessary relation between the receiver and the producer of the message that guarantees that the encoded message will be interpreted or decoded by recipients in the way they are intended (Morley, 1992). A powerful critique of this traditional prototype, which conceives of the communicative process as a direct sender/message/receiver model, where a message is transmitted directly from encoder to the decoder without distortion, emerged from scholars working within Cultural Studies (Hall, 1980). Scholars criticised this hypodermic needle approach, which suggested that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver, for concentrating on the text or the production side of the communication interchange, without any evidence of how the message is received and understood by those on the opposite end (Strelitz, 1994).

The argument that Hall (1980) made was that the traditional approach to media studies conflated the one particular moment, the production moment, with the meaning of the circuit as a whole (Strelitz, 1994). These scholars emphasised that researchers had to realise that, in explaining the meaning possessed by media message, “rather than privilege one single phenomenon – such as the process of production” it was rather in a combination of processes – in their articulation that explanations for interpretations could be found (du Gay, 1997: 3). Hall (1980) argued that the best way forward, therefore, is to move away from too rigid a focus on production, away from the traditional approach that emphasised the text in the process of interpretation. In this regard, Hall (1980) advocated for an analytic separation of the encoding and decoding moments in communication. Hall’s (1980: 53) model put to the fore the fact that because of its concentration on the production mode or the text, the standard view lacked a “structured conception of the complex structure of social relations that frame individual interpretation”.

As such, audience scholars argued that in order to fully comprehend the process of meaning making in a complex cultural context, researchers had to broaden their scope. Hall (1980) argued that this meant that practitioners had to see reception or interpretation as an independent moment in a complex whole. As such, what needs to be stressed when examining interpretation

is the fact that as much as the act of interpretation is a mental and individual process, it is also social, intimately involving other people and context (Morley, 1992). Therefore, this inquiry does not undertake only to stress the notion of an active reader of signs, but also to expand on the idea that when interpreting a message people are complexly tied to a range of socio-political and socioeconomic factors. Such an inquiry, will, therefore, respond to the pedestrian mainstream media tendency of opining about subaltern interpretation without the requisite socio-historical context.

#### 4.10. Hall's encoding/decoding model

Despite the usefulness of audience studies insights, the early approaches such as the uses and gratifications perspective were criticised for giving audiences too much power over the text (Curran, 1990; Morley, 1991; Strelitz, 1994). Critics noted that there developed “romantic versions of audience studies” which came to characterise a recession of audience work into “pointless populism”. In this regard, Hall (1980) argued that the perspective overestimated the power of the individual, and thus the openness of the message. In doing so scholars pointed out that “polysemy must not be confused with pluralism” (Hall, 1980: 13). The criticism levelled was that some audience research insisted the polysemy of media texts too blindly and overemphasised the resistance of individual viewers, while neglecting the power of the media (Morley, 1991; Strelitz, 2000).

In order to move beyond the criticism, cultural studies developed the structuralist approach that furthered the uses and gratifications-inspired culturalist perspective (Hall, 1980). Stuart Hall (1980) thus devised the encoding/decoding model of communication as an attempt to take forward the insights which had emerged from within each of the prior perspectives (Morley, 1991). Hall (1980) sought to combine the culturalist focus on questions of consciousness and experience, with its accent on agency, with the structuralist focus on the structuring of experience via factors which stand outside of subjectivity. While not downplaying the importance of culturalist insights such as individual agency – the strength of the structuralist approach taken by Hall (1980) was the stress on ‘determinate conditions’.

Hall's (1980) model took from the hypodermic needle approach the idea that the media is a structured activity and that big institutions that produce messages have the power to set agendas and influence people (Morley, 1991). “In a ‘determinate moment’ the structure employs a code and yields a ‘message’: at another determinate moment the ‘message, via its decodings, issues into the structure of social practices” (Hall, 1980: 506). This notion moved away from view

that the message directly affects behaviour, but held onto the idea of the media setting the agenda and providing a frame of reference on issues. Furthermore, from the uses and gratifications school, the model borrowed the idea of the active viewer who is able to challenge the ideological positions being offered by media producers (Strelitz, 1991).

Strelitz (2000) states that the model is considered central to reception analysis because it prevents the lure of the notion that the text has a definite meaning that is only read in one definite way. At the same time, the model resisted sliding down the slope of completely open texts that are at the mercy of readers to construct any sort of meaning. "The point of the preferred reading model was to insist that readers are, of course, engaged in productive work, but under determinate conditions. Those determinate conditions are, of course, not only supplied by the text, but also by the producing institution and by the social history of the audience (Morley, 1991; 19). The consideration made here was that bearing in mind a macro structure, people decode texts in ways that reflect personal biographies and histories, and thus decode or interpret texts in different ways.

The overall strength of the model, thus, was the understanding that audiences construct meanings with the cultural resources at their disposal under determinant conditions (Hall, 1980). Interpretation of media texts was thus understood to be a contextually informed cultural practice in which audiences actively construct meanings using socially acquired cultural resources. In constructing meaning, the model identified three decoding potentials: the dominant, negotiated and oppositional. The dominant-hegemonic position is when the viewer takes the connoted meaning full and straight and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded. The second position is the negotiated code, which states that it can be assumed that the majority of audiences adequately understand what has been dominantly defined and professionally signified (Hall, 1980).

Decoding using a negotiated position, therefore, contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements. The position acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic power to make the grand significations, while, at a more restricted, situational level, it makes its own ground rules. People who make use of this position accord dominant discourses the privilege of defining events, while preserving the right to make a more negotiated application of local conditions. The third position is the oppositional code, which takes place when the audience understands the literal and the connotative articulation given by a discourse but decide to decode the message in a contrary way. The person involved may, thus, understand the message

that is communicated by the dominant order, but decide to make sense of it using an alternative framework.

Anyone of these codes could be true of the way that township dwellers interpret mainstream media messages. However, given that mainstream media was convinced that the ANC stood a chance to significantly lose a large chunk of the electorate, only to be proven wrong by the voting figures, we have to assume, at this point, that an oppositional reading is highly likely. Therefore, the discussion to follow will build on the three positions, and utilise Hall's (1980) model as the basic framework or the launch-pad from which to understand the meanings made by young people living in Joza. The model is useful because it can guide the analysis by grounding it in the fact that interpretation is structured by dominant discourses, but people can still accept, negotiate or reject dominant discourses propagated by mainstream media.

#### 4.11. Post-structuralism

The underside of this necessary drive towards situating individual interpretation within cultural, economic and social frameworks is that it risks automating audience responses to messages or unduly stressing that meanings are made according to social position (Harindranath, 2009). The reconceptualisation of the audience that occurred during the structuralist movement suggests that both the text and audience need to be examined as socially specific objects of analysis. In other words, this was the recognition of the power of the text as well as the agency of the viewer as a member of a culture or society (Livingstone, 2007). Therefore, the insight that was attained in stressing the structured nature of audience activity is that active meaning construction implies a perpetually unresolved tension between textual features and social factors.

However, in making this observation, Harindranath (2009) argues that audience scholars elevated audience activity and the pit they fell into was social determinism. Although structuralist approaches have been lauded for countering the naivety of culturalism, the Morley (1980) inspired audience studies approaches have been criticised for privileging the social in the act of interpretation (Harindranath, 2009). The emphasis in this form of reception research has been on the demonstration of audience interpretations as socially motivated. It is worth noting, and this is the reason the following sections of this project will concern themselves with the issue, that socio determinism has especially been the case in studies of interpretation of audience members residing in marginalised social spaces. Although this research has often

successfully demonstrated links between social/cultural positions and interpretation, the flaw of the approach has been to view meaning making as contingent on class and culture (Harindranath, 2009: 37).

Harindranath (2009) argues that in the attempt to hold on to audience agency, researchers aligned to this culturalist perspective have made the mistake of making a straightforward cause and effect connection between social positions and audience responses. On the contrary, it is doubtful whether the knowledge of a person's class, age, gender, and so on, is enough to predict their interpretation of text (Harindranath, 2009). Following Bourdieu's (1984) lead, it could be argued that this socio-economic position is fundamental in transcendentally shaping the subject's horizon of knowledge and behaviour. However, Harindranath (2009) theorises that even that stance is to reduce a complex web to a relationship of linear causality. In moving forward, therefore, the proceeding sections clarify how to conceptualise the audience and its socially motivated dimension without subscribing to deterministic notions.

As such, the most pertinent concept that needs to be examined in order to progress this theoretical analysis is the person-society relationship. This means that this analysis must, therefore, continue to be wary of the dialectic of a socially-situated but yet individual reader who has a relationship to texts and is problematically related to social structures. It follows that the subjectivity of the audience member who confronts the text is shaped by all these intersecting identities – whether class, race or gender - and to privilege a socio-economic position over others is to be reductionist. Therefore, the next level that this research will attempt to attain is to examine a way to conceptualise audience interpretation without being reductionist or deterministic. Harindranath (2009) maintains that in order to achieve the stated objective, there has to be an exploration of the ways in which social factors help create and maintain interpretive frameworks.

#### 4.12. Post structuralism – individual extensions

To attempt to make an argument for a post structuralism aligned theoretical framework that also holds onto audience activity, the work of James Lull (1990) is useful. Lull (1990: 151) argues that the readings audience members make of media messages are extensions of themselves, not only extensions of physical surroundings but also extensions of mental frameworks. This work is important to this study because, unlike classic sociology, which made a sharp distinction between the individual and society and sparked disputes in social philosophy, Lull (1990) argues that the two categories, the individual and society, are

connected. Furthermore, Lull (1990) maintains that people interpret media messages as extensions of social groups, who possess mental and behavioural orientations that are constructed within culturally diverse circumstances.

In his examination of television viewing, Lull (1990) observed that audience members' interpretations and uses of television extend to not only the individual viewer, but also to social and cultural dispositions. In practice then, many of the social uses of television or the way in which people use television are extensions of the personal and social positions and roles of family members. Lull (1990) concluded that many characteristic patterns of audience involvement with television, the specific ways families in different cultures use television, can be regarded as rituals that are manifestations of microsocial (family) and macrosocial (cultural) rules. Lull (1990: 151) further argued that the way people interact with television and the way we make sense of media messages embodies extensions of the values, mental orientations, and day-to-day behaviour of individuals that are influenced by culture.

Lull (1990) thus distinguished between three levels of ritualised extension: the culture, characteristics of a social context broader than the family, the household (defined by the domestic establishment, including family members and physical location), and the person (individual particularity). In addition, Lull (1990) also noted that viewing activity does not divide neatly into these categories, and in reality they might be a simultaneous extension of all three: culture, household and person. Therefore, what we can glean from Lull (1990) is that people make sense of media messages according to a variety of factors which include: ideas they have of themselves, frameworks that come from household or intimate family spaces and according to a wider culture. Therefore, while malleable, culture must be considered only as the basic framework of rules that guides the construction of everyday routines.

This definition moves closer to subverting social determinism by highlighting the fact that interpretation is a process that mixes three different levels of the person (individual, family and culture), and that their construction of meaning might be a creative mixture and not necessarily a determined one. Therefore, in the attempt to avoid the straightjacket presented by social determinism, we must start by first recognising, as we have done so far, that the act of interpretation is imbedded within a society, and although individual behaviour is inevitably shaped by culture, choices can be individual (Griswold, Lenaghan, and Naffziger, 2011: 20). The above stated concept allows us to understand the individual within a structure but one with

the tools to make readings and meanings that are over and above those recommended or preferred by the text or any other macrosocial variable.

#### 4.13. Conclusion

In order to understand the failure of the mainstream media to comprehend the independence of marginalised people, this chapter started off by considering subaltern theory. The discussion reflected on the fact that mainstream discourse seldom depicts marginalised groups as conscious actors. The chapter also noted that subalterns are often viewed pejoratively as passive receptors that are meant to follow dominant frameworks. In making a case for seeing subalterns as silenced but active social players, subaltern theory allowed the discussion to understand that when read against the grain, such marginalised groups display a high degree of calculated thought. In reference to this study, such insights enabled the understanding that the disparaging way in which support for the ANC by groups that were assumed ripe to turn their backs on the ruling party was treated showed that there is insufficient appreciation in South African mainstream discourse of subaltern spaces as active and distinct structures.

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Subaltern study and Orientalism showed that the mainstream discourse, and by extension mainstream media, operate in two ways: (1) as though subalterns are backward and have to have decisions made for them and (2) mainstream media ignore the inherent difference in race and class and frameworks that might separate the sector from those occupying the lowest rungs of society. As such, mainstream media ignore the fact that subalterns might inhabit a parallel world and engage a parallel structure of politics because the sector too readily assumes that people inhabit the same public space they do.

The limitation of such a stance is demonstrated by counter public sphere insights. This view furthers the study's critical edge in arguing that maintaining the simplistic notion of a homogenous public further oppresses and silences marginalised groups. As such, this view extended the introductory remarks made in this study that the idea of a unified public has proven problematic in South Africa because groups on the margins are engulfed by the dominant view. Through such a lens we can understand that mainstream media failed to anticipate and was shocked by the way black groups voted because the public sphere was too self-absorbed and has naval-gazing tendencies. In order to think outside of this box, subaltern counter public sphere insights enabled the study to take into consideration that, when faced with a dominant power, marginalised groups form their own counter public spheres or parallel discursive arenas that allow them to invent and circulate counter discourses.

To further the notion of independence and activity of those outside the mainstream, the chapter ended off by considering audience studies. What was noted going forward was that audience study made the point that members of the audience can possibly divert from the meaning intended by the producer. In this regard, Hall's encoding/decoding model was then taken up as a guide to understand responses; whether the township inhabitants under review accept, negotiate or reject dominant messages. As a guideline to determine whether members of a specific socio-economic category accept or reject messages, the theory of interpretation proffered by post-structural audience studies was further problematized by introducing the thought that it can be susceptible to social determinism. In order to get around this predicament, the section leans on theory that stresses that the individual is an extension of his/her society. The importance of this insight is that it restores the individual agency threatened by social determinism by making the point that people make use of frameworks provided by self, family and culture to make informed choices about the world.

## Chapter 5: Theory of multiple realities

“You know,” he says, “I have an idea for you.” He suggests I should forget about trying to become a marketer, but stay at HubSpot anyway. “Think of yourself as an anthropologist,” he says. “Like you’ve been dropped into some strange culture, and you’re studying their rituals. You could maybe write about it. It might be interesting”.  
(Lyons, 2016)

### 5.1. Introduction

The end of the previous chapter concerned itself with the bilateral issue of audiences and the environment they inhabit. Reception studies has found that audience members function as social objects. As a guideline to understand how young people living in the township understand mainstream media messages, the theory of interpretation proffered was further problematized by introducing the thought that it can be susceptible to social determinism. The argument reviewed was that the heavy focus on social factors to explain interpretation in audience study can be deterministic. In order to get around this predicament, the section leaned on Lull’s (1990) insights that stress that the individual is an extension of his or her society. The previous chapter argued that this definition moves closer to subverting social determinism. This is by highlighting the fact that interpretation is a process that mixes three different levels of person (individual, family and culture), making the construction of meaning a creative mixture, and not necessarily a determined one.

The importance of this insight is that it restores the individual agency threatened by social determinism by making the point that people make use of a range of lived experiences to make informed choices about the world. Therefore, in the attempt to avoid the straightjacket presented by social determinism, critics have urged we must recognise that the act of interpretation is imbedded within society, and that, although individual behaviour is inevitably shaped by culture, choices can be individual (Griswold, 2011: 20). The above stated concept allows us to understand the individual within a structure but who has the tools to make readings and meanings that are over and above those recommended or preferred by the text or any other macrosocial variable. Building from that discussion in Chapter Four, this study will attempt to further explore ways to conceptualise audience interpretation without being reductionist or deterministic.

## 5.2. Culture

Harindranath (2009) maintains that in order to achieve the stated objective, there has to be an exploration of the ways in which social factors help create and maintain interpretive frameworks. This has to be done while bearing in mind the multi-dimensional nature of the audience's subjectivity; or more explicitly, conducting further inquiry into the individual-collective dialectic. The thrust of the argument will, therefore, express that the interpretation of media messages by audiences can be best understood as an extension of society and culture. Thus, in order to gain this understanding of situated audiences, the study will have to "engage with the situational contexts in which the media are used and interpreted" (Moore, 1993: 32). Therefore, in the attempt to link the individual and society, or understand the complexity of situated beings, the emphasis of the study is centred on the complexities of the cultural frameworks people use to understand the world.

Cultural studies theorists have contended that culture is inherent in all social patterns, and it is the 'sum' of their connected relationships (Hall, 1982). Furthermore, Hall (1982: 21) argues that culture is a special form of a "general social process: the giving and taking of meanings – a common culture". The above description is useful because it emphasises the relation of culture to meaning (DuGay et al, 1997). Raymond Williams termed this the social definition of culture, where "culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour" (du Gay et al, 1997: 12). This perspective insists on the need to view cultural processes as a whole and advocates an analysis of media that is related to the social structures that produces them (Dahlgren, 1997).

This understanding is thus useful for the study because it ties the individual to social relations of power, or makes the connection between the micro and macro environments. Furthermore, this 'cultural studies' definition of culture is important to consider because it stresses that culture is "situated in the dialectic between being and social consciousness" (Hall, 1980: 19). In this respect, culture is conceived of in the Geertz (1973) framework as a signifying system or 'webs of significance' spun by humans in an effort to understand the world. Lippmann (1922: 16) advocated for human culture to be understood as largely the "selection, the rearrangement, the tracing of patterns, and the stylising of the random irradiations and resettlements of our ideas". Therefore, this means that we learn a great deal about the world,

often, not through direct observation, but through signs that we acquire from our culture or cultures.

The approach advocated by Geertz (1973) must then be understood as interpretive, a conscious move away from positivist thinking, and towards the recognition that a person does not cast off culture when reasoning. Geertz (1973) categorically states that there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. In this regard, Geertz (1973) states further that the relationship between culture and meaning is fundamental to the understanding of the behaviour exhibited by human beings. What is significant with Geertz's (1973) conception is the thinking that culture is made up of shared patterns of meaning which provide the frame of reference for everyday life. This conception is useful, in so far as it provides a foundation for explaining culture as the thread that unites an intersubjective world by giving the individuals in it a common sense of reality, a common world view or set of values (Harindranath, 2009).

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### 5.3. The life-world

The above conception corresponds to Lull's (1990) ritual view of communication, which conceives of communication as a process through which shared culture is created, modified and transformed. Individuals thus interpret the world "through a system of typifications and relevances; which are common to all members of the community or group" (Harindranath, 2009: 100). The theoretical underpinning of this claim is phenomenological philosophy and sociology. The school of thought postulates that culture is a thread that unites and holds together an intersubjective world by furnishing the individuals who comprise it with a common sense of reality or a common world view or set of values (Geertz, 1973). The most crucial idea in this phenomenological sociology for our present purposes is the concept of the 'life-world'.

The life world is described as a common sense world, or the world of daily life (Gurwitsch, 1970). It is a self-evident reality into which an individual is born and lives with others (Harindranath, 2009). The concept refers to the fact that people are born into a world which already contains objects, rules and meaning (Gurwitsch, 1970). The socio-cultural world is pre-constituted and pre-organised and it follows that its particular structure is different for each culture and society (Lippmann, 1922). "We are born into a meaningful world where things are encountered, 'naturally' as it were, as parts of the totality of pre-reflexive existence. Man is born into a world that is physical and socio-cultural that existed before his birth" (Harindranath,

2009: 99). The sociocultural structures that people encounter, therefore, are made up of various elements whose meaning and significance are taken for granted.

The work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) demonstrates that society, on the one hand, exists in the individual's consciousness as subjective reality before being reified into objective external reality. On the other hand, individuals become members of a society through the process of socialisation, a process by which they internalise social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The significance of this conception for the purpose of the theory presented here is the suggestion that an individual's life-world is constituted by his or her own personal experiences, as well as social meanings derived from social interaction. "In Schutzian terms, the former results from the 'biographically determined situation' which provides the individual with a stock of knowledge; whereas the latter is a socialised "common sense of knowledge of everyday life." (Harindranath, 2009: 98).

Interpretation is thus closely tied to socio-historical features. This means that it is historically grounded and bears the marks of those who came before us (Harindranath, 2009). Social experience is thus interpreted or understood using frameworks from within cultures that individuals are born into, or "the cultural world of a certain socio-historical group and that of a society at a present moment in history" (Harindranath, 2009: 99). This conception begins the work of loosening the grasp of social determinism on interpretation within structured settings. At this point, therefore, an argument can be made for an understanding of interpretation that takes from both the society, and internal, personal experiences of the individual. This conception is a refined understanding of Lull's (1990) extensions discussed in Chapter Four, which state that the process of understanding is not necessarily determined by social aspects but brings together the individual and the social.

#### 5.4. Multiple realities

What must be stressed through this conception, which is an element of interpretation that is sometimes overlooked, is the biographical and, therefore, to a certain extent, the subjective and personal. Harindranath (2009) points out that accounts of individual life world or everyday construction of social reality sometimes lack emphasis on individual biography and may thus appear deterministic. A way around such a dilemma is to use Schutz's (1973) conception of each person's everyday life having a unique quality that is derived from his or her biographical situation. This means that the physical and sociocultural environment is defined by the

individual, within which they have a position, physically, and in terms of status and ideology (Harindranath, 2009). This is to say that the individual has a personal history, a stock of knowledge that is unique to them (Schutz, 1973).

What is important to recognise here is that Schutz (1973) balanced the potentially deterministic conception of the life-world with emphasising the subjective meanings of a person's membership to their community. The biographical situation is therefore not deterministic but generative, because a person produces personal biographies or unique personal experiences using tools derived from an external cultural world (Harindranath, 2009). The production of self through borrowing from various codes or signs that exist in the society takes us closer to understanding that individual meaning making is constructed from a wide variety of sources. Schutz (1973) distinguishes between various groups with which an individual shares a common social heritage, and with 'voluntary groups' (those which they choose to join and can relatively easily disassociate). The individual therefore stands at the intersection of several social circles, some of which are voluntary, and others more formative.

This is thus to speak of the relative freedom provided by the ability to choose participation in group activities, which is then the freedom to choose the personality a person wants represented in interaction with the outside world (Harindranath, 2009). This conceptualisation is important because it further enables the development of a theory of interpretation that moves beyond social determinism. It allows the understanding that a person has the ability to "mediate between the primary sphere of immediate human experience and the derived spheres of pre-established cultural interpretation" (Wagner, 1970: 25). Harindranath (2009: 101) further confirms this thinking arguing that the capability to inhabit several spaces and personalities precludes any easy "deterministic marking and the prediction of behaviour along 'classic' sociological variables".

It is with these insights in mind that we can further our understanding on interpretation by introducing the concept of 'multiple realities', which is to acknowledge that people create not just one reality but multiple (Harindranath, 2009). This notion furthers the aforementioned discussion about the complexity of the system of signs used by people to make sense of the world. This is to say that an individual person has sub-universes or provinces in which they live, which provide a framework of reality. "These meanings are, to the experiencing individual, unquestioningly real, but each province is incompatible with others since, according

to Schutz, it is characterised by its own peculiar cognitive style; transformation from one to another is affected through a Kierkegaardian ‘leap’ or ‘shock’” (Harindranath, 2009: 101).

An individual’s interpretation of their life-world, is therefore defined by their experience within ever-widening circles in whose intersections they reside. Each of these spheres of relevance, which include culture (ethnicity), work, education, gender, religion and so on, contributes to the shaping of the social reality of the individual (Harindranath, 2009). “A person’s life-world, his/her personal history or historicity arises out of uniquely sedimented subjectivity, formed not only by the prefigured, ‘existential’ world into which he/she was born, but also by his/her personal experiences, and therefore does not correlate with such strict compartments” (Harindranath, 2009: 102). This is not to overemphasise the personal and the subjective at the cost of neglecting the social, because the life-world is predominantly a social world. The point however is to stress the delicate balance the two. It is to say that individuals define their worlds according to their own experiences, and are rooted in an intersubjective reality, suspended in webs of significance (Harindranath, 2009).

## 5.6. History between text and reader

The study has now comprehensively discussed the social determinism or social influence versus individual agency debate. Earlier discussion of Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model allowed the study to grapple with individual interpretation within a cultural system. At this point, the study moves towards a closer scrutiny of the specific interpretive practices that constitute a black South African’s construction of reality. The point that has so far been made is that an individual is imbedded within a society, and in their meeting a media text they bring their extensions to bear on the text. Reading a text is thus always from a pre-existing point of view, which is tempered by personal experience. A person, therefore, interprets a media text from an evaluative position because they are situated in a cultural and historical process that informs all judgements made.

Therefore, for a deeper understanding of interpretation, our analysis needs to account for diversity, contradictions and the internal dynamics within a person and society more broadly. Having made the point that the meaning making or the understanding mechanism of an individual is situated or imbedded within a socio-historic, and cultural terrain context, the key to moving this theory forward is a closer look at the specific nature of that embeddedness. The

importance of the above discussed notion of an imbedded theory means that we have acknowledged that a person is not context-free but is located within webs of significance.

As discussed previously, this means that a person is born into a world that has pre-established signs that are passed onto the individual through culture. Therefore, understanding, meaning making or interpretation hinges on the idea of prejudice, which is to say that “understanding can occur only within a set of prejudgements” (Harindranath, 2009: 72). The enabling condition that makes this possible is prejudice (in the negative and positive) or prejudgement. This is to say that lived phenomena are not objectively assessed by people because it is not “so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being (Harindranath, 2009: 73).

The concept of prejudice alludes to the fact that there is a long history between the reader and the social world or, for our purposes, between the reader and text (Desai, 2001). Knowledge of generic features of the social world produces a series of expectations which enable the viewer to understand the text (Ang, 1985). Expectations are constituted by the audience’s anticipation, which arise in turn from a long history of viewing or message interpretation (Harindranath, 2009). Bobo (2004: 181) adds to this view, writing that audience members engage with a text “with a knowledge of the world and a knowledge of other texts, or media products”. What this amounts to, as we have indicated, is that when people encounter a media text, “they do not leave her/his histories, whether social, cultural, economic, racial, or sexual at the door” (Bobo (2004: 181).

In the context of a long history between reader and text, it is important to note that the experience of black and subaltern audiences of dominant discourse is strained. As has been discussed, in relation to mainstream media, black people have a long history of negative representation and a marginalisation (Bobo, 2004). Furthermore, mainstream media has been criticised for a continued degradation of traditional African values and customs (Sesanti, 2008). Adding weight to our discussion concerning individuals interpreting messages using prejudgements, Bobo (2004) notes that there is a complex process of negotiation, whereby, specific members of a culture construct meaning from a mainstream text that has a history of racial identification. The possibility, Bobo (2004), alludes to is that due, in part, to audience histories and experiences, the variation between intended message and reader interpretation might be great.

The step that Bobo (2004) takes that furthers this argument is the view that audience members from marginalized groups (black people, women, the poor) are sometimes prone to have an

**Commented [BC21]:** Seems to be an inconsistency within the quote: ‘they ... do ... they’ usually and not ‘they ... do ... her/his’.

oppositional view to mainstream media. The motivation for this 'counter-reception' is that "we understand that mainstream media have never rendered our segment of the population faithfully" (Bobo, 2004: 181). Bobo (2004) argues that black people have as evidence of mistreatment and misrepresentation years of watching films and television programmes and reading plays and books that have negatively depicted the black body (see Chapter Two). Bobo (2004: 181) goes on to state that out of habit, as readers of mainstream texts, black people have learned to "ferret out the beneficial and put up blinders against the rest". Bobo's insights point to the possibility of a strong racial group membership that affects interpretation, and it is vital that the study consider this insight because South Africa has a history that is steeped in racial segregation.

### 5.7. Cultures and colonialism

It must be noted, however, that although there is a long-running relationship and a trust deficit (Bobo, 2004), the relationship between the viewer and the text is negotiated and the projection of meaning onto the text is never fixed, but flexible (Harindranath, 2009). This study has alluded to the fact that our culturally and historically situated set of prejudices or horizons undergo a constant revision. As such, what must, therefore, be made clear at this stage is that one cannot assume the individual will take up one decoding position, which is dominant or oppositional. The literature already covered has pointed out that people use personal biographies to choose how to construct social systems. This means we have to expect individuals will exhaust available decoding positions because the process of interpretation is more complex than a simple knee-jerk reaction caused by race.

If stereotypes and prejudices facilitate our thinking about or making sense of a world by providing us with the frames of reference, then we have to interrogate them further by examining the variety of possible cultural stances and stereotypes in post conflict societies. The sample group under investigation in this study might be influenced by two competing cultures (if not more); a dominant colonial white culture and a subordinate African culture they are born into. Furthermore, if one says that that people read according to their culture and prejudice, it cannot be simply assumed that reading is made according to only the culture of birth because that would be to disregard history. The point that is made here is that culture is an important reference in the act of interpretation. However, in order to properly weigh up its influence, we have to be cognisant of the fact that South African culture might not be simply a person's culture of birth. In the end, a person might use references and codes that are taken from the

greater South African culture, which is a mixture of cultures (Tshawane, 2009; Magubane, 1971).

Magubane (1971) argues that plurality of culture is the case in post-colonial societies where, due to domination, the struggle between groups led to a mixing of cultures. Therefore, moving forward with the analysis, the study will pair the preceding discussion about the importance of culture and context with a detailed examination of the contact of cultures during and after colonialism. The consideration made, as has been argued in Chapter Three, is that the history of domination that characterises the country affects not only race relations, but communication too. This is because the way people take up cultural concepts emitted by mainstream media might vary because some concepts have historically been limited to a few, and might be rejected by those not factored in. Therefore, when we talk about culture in reference to communication in the postcolonial world, we cannot only talk about culture as uniform or a web of meanings unaffected by other cultures.

Hall (1997) writes that colonisation created a classificatory system that was used to classify sub-groups of human types and to break up the diversity of society into distinct typings according to essentialised characteristics. Therefore, although, classification is a fundamental aspect of human culture, as it allows the generation of meaning. Divisions according to race represent the negative aspect of classification because the systems can become a tool in the dispossession of power (Hall, 1997). The cultural function of colonial knowledge, in its drive to dominate for extraction, was to organise people through their differences into different social groups (Hall, 1997). Racism is thus the use of classification as a system of power, where the markings of difference across populations become a reason why groups of people should be treated differently (Hall, 1997). The power of racism thus is to ascribe positive values to one group and negative values to another, and then to establish a system which becomes the basis of how to treat these various groups unequally (Hall, 1997).

Desai (2001) argues that racism was thus the legitimising force of colonial authority because the discourse of race and its subsequent power relations was such that whites gave orders and blacks obeyed (Desai, 2001). This was to rule by creating a dominant order, where the prevailing discourses relied on the representation of a savage 'other'. Mudimbe (1977) writes that the African was presented in European Enlightenment thought as an 'other' with abnormal differences when compared to the white male, and, as such, race distinguished between savage and civilised. This involved securing the position of domination of the white race by assuring

the control and exploitation of the subaltern population (Reddy, 2000). With the negative classification achieved, the dominant Western culture was free to pursue the project of colonialism which was billed as in an effort to save the dominated African culture from savagery (Desai, 2001).

## 5.8. Race and racism

The discussion will now move onto the importance of considering race in a theory of interpretation that is to be applied to a postcolonial setting. What is evident from the above consideration is that individuals, especially of an 'inferior' culture or race, are potentially essentialised in mainstream discourse and media representations. Media messages produced by dominant groups often subscribe to racialised mythologies that follow a pattern of reducing black people to simple tropes rather than as complex humans (Hall, 1997). Thus, a diverse range of characteristics are fixed or held in place, disallowing the dominated any sense of agency and multiplicity (Bobo, 2004). Such a simple view of subjectivity contradicts the theme that has been running throughout this discussion, which is the insight that readers are complex beings that can draw on multiple subjectivities when making sense of a media message.

With these factors considered, this analysis must delve further still into race theory to fully understand the possibility of the interpretation codes that might be elicited. Time has been invested in discussing race theory and colonialism because this project and the theory presented attempts to understand how an individual living in the township interprets media messages when confronted by a set of oppositions or cultures that are potentially discordant. The reason it is important to consider racism as a negative system of classification and objectification, which potentially has an influence on interpretation, is that if people interpret from within a culture, what does this process of sense making look like when the history of colonialism and apartheid as a lived reality are considered? If people draw from their culture or cultural references to make meaning, what happens when the predominant images that represent them are negative?

The possibility of encountering a negative representation of self in mainstream media might tell us how media messages are read by historically marginalised people. As discussed in Chapter Two, the possibility of negative interpretation might be the answer to why people voted for the ANC despite the negative media coverage. They might have done so to continue to stand with a historically black political party against the persistence of white domination. This

conception suggests, as we have alluded to before, that the interpretation of media messages by young black people in the township negotiates between negative representation, and positive cultural outlook or more fluid blending of multiple identities presented by a social contest with several competing cultures.

Nyamnjoh (1999) makes the point that no culture or ethnic group really ever dies, because it learns to adapt by taking on the traits of the dominant culture. This process of acculturation is highly prevalent in formerly repressive systems, where dominated cultures borrowed and morphed to survive (Magubane, 1971). This insight is supported by the writing of Du Bois (1903), who makes the point, which is especially true in South Africa, that the culture of the colonised does not die but exists uncomfortably next to the culture of the coloniser which continues to be dominant. The mention of uncomfortability suggests the possibility of an internal tussle in the mind of the black person. Such a struggle comes into play when black people attempt to merge what is best from their own repressed culture with the best from the dominant culture in an environment which constantly reminds them that their culture is less valuable (Du Bois, 1903).

Given what has been discussed about negative representation and domination, the work of Fanon (1952) is instructive. Fanon (1952) observes that the black man is black in relation to the white man. This point is similar to the one made by Mudimbe (1977) that Africa was formed as a series of oppositions in order to distinguish between the savage and the civilised. Fanon's (1952: 84) point is that the elements a black person uses to construct their being is provided for them by the other, the white man, who has "woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories". The crucial point highlighted by Fanon (1952) is that the reason racism is so effective is because it operates on two levels; first on the "bodily and corporeal schema", which is physically dominated, and second, below the surface, on the "schema composed of the stories and anecdotes and metaphors and images, which construct the relationship between the individual and the cultural space" (Fanon, 1952: 84).

The big take away from Fanon's (1952) conception of race is not just the negative understanding of stereotypes but also the perceived effects these have on the psyche of black people. Fanon (1952: 85) argues that the negative representations that the black person 'knows so well' enable a dislocation from his inherited sense of being. This dislocation then removes the self from the self, and imprisons the black individual in the world of whiteness, making them an object. Thus, when a black person is faced with the weight of representations that are

placed on him, Fanon (1952) writes that it is possible that he ceases to be a person but becomes the sub-human and the construction the white world intends for him to be.

For the purpose of this study, this can be understood to mean that there is chance that some of the people under investigation will suffer from an inferiority complex caused by their skin colour, which might affect the way they interpret media messages produced by mainstream media. Also to be considered is that another possibility is of a deep-seated resistance to such depictions, which is what Bobo (2004) highlights. And, lastly, and this is the importance of using Hall's (1980) schema, a negotiated position might be applied, where audiences might accept the dominant representations but with reservations. The argument made is that, although the preceding might be true, it may also be true that black South Africans living in the township, because they are so conscious of their blackness and culture, are engaged in a constant struggle to merge the dominant culture with their own.

### 5.8. Contestation and resistance

The noted phenomenon of struggle between cultures in a context of domination means that it is equally important to discuss contestation, because the question of dominance always leaves open the possibility of resistance (Prakash, 1991). Having made an argument for the elite nature of the mainstream media, it is important to understand that even if messages are not openly and politically contested by the marginalised, there is a possibility that there might be a wide berth between the two. This is because the media does not always represent the interests of those marginalised, and as such are open to resistance and negotiation (Bobo, 2004).

So far, this study has examined colonialism as domination and its effects, but what needs to be explored in this section, however, is the fact that even though colonial expansion was legitimated, and largely accepted by both dominated and dominant people, there have always been undercurrents of ambivalence and anxiety (Desai, 2001). What has happened in the course of colonial domination, despite the evaporation of liberties and self-reliance, is that a critical awareness of colonial domination and the use of tropes for the purpose of legitimation has, to some degree, been attained by the dominated (Prakash, 1991). It is in this respect that this next section is intended to make the point that the process of domination and subordination is always a fracture and thus a point of friction between social formations. This is to make the point that dominated people have the possibility to accept, resist and reform the prevailing order.

Magubane (1971) argues that because colonialism is economic, political and cultural domination, a process of acculturation - or of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group - must be considered. In his regard, the process of domination is not solely about one culture being dominated by another, and as such, any theory investigating patterns of behaviour of indigenous populations must take into account the 'total situation', which is to say domination and inevitable counter point – resistance. Magubane (1971) writes that with regard to scholarship concerning acculturation and cultural diffusion, critics often tended to take the hegemonic colonial system for granted, instead of paying attention to the dimensions of a new social structure created by the struggle for power (Magubane, 1971).

Magubane (1971) argues that a total historical analysis of social change must then take into account three stages of acculturation: 1. An initial period of contact between the invading whites and Africans: African resistance to white rule of formerly independent chiefdoms, and the use of physical force to overcome African resistance. 2. A period of 'acquiescence': where some Africans, alienated from their traditional society, are impelled to acquire the techniques and social forms of the dominant group, as shown by adopting its religion, going to school, and assimilating value patterns and cultural traits functional in the new order. 3. A period of resistance in a new way: Africans develop a 'national' consciousness that transcends 'tribal' divisions and confront the colonial power with the demands of national liberation (Magubane, 1971).

Such an analysis is to note that, although constructed in dominant discourses as essentialised objects of European history and exploitation, the subaltern refused the role of passive objects without a history (Reddy, 2000). Marginalised groups organised and articulated counter-discourses or an alternative tradition that constructed a history of resistance which reversed the stories of the dominant group (Reddy, 2000). Nationalist organisations countered European domination by claiming a history of resistance that was traced to many wars fought between indigenous people and colonial forces. This claim functioned as a way of positioning the counter tradition of resistance, next to the dominant tradition of colonialism, as equal (Reddy, 2000). Like the dominant, the subordinate wished to secure a 'counter-identity' and appropriate as much control over social existence as possible (Reddy, 2000). These counter-discourses, therefore, produced an alternative 'tradition of struggle' and history, a tradition that that also constituted a subaltern identity (Reddy, 2000).

Such a nuanced view of the history of colonial domination provides an often missing sense of agency for the victims or subjects of colonialism. This is because this consideration goes against the grain of mainstream history by including the experiences of dominated African subjects as a core part of the colonial encounter (Desai, 2001). Therefore, Prakash (1991) suggests that the issue of resistance, or producing alternative counter-discourses, should be explored as a practice which has the ability to disrupt and transform the solid body that is dominating. Prakash (1991) argues that the subordinated can incorporate the principles and values of the social hierarchy, which continues to dominate them. They can do so while also, inadvertently, expanding its limits by resisting certain aspects of it. This sort of resistance relates to the audience studies idea of a structured sense of agency referred to in Chapter Four.

Therefore, to acknowledge a history of resistance is to see acculturation as a mixture of two conflicting ideals rather than complete dominance. It is to see a tentative balance and to acknowledge that Africans have engaged with the discourses of the coloniser to produce their own inventions of Africa (Magubane, 1971). Therefore, Africa is not only invented in the negative or in the way suitable to the dominant. The concept of resistance allows us to see that people counter dominant discourses, and thus Africa, and any other situation of dominance, can be reinvented and turned into a positive conception (Desai, 2001: 7). This is to understand that colonial representations or stereotypes are a terrain of struggle and that the dominated have always sought and fought to represent themselves. The usefulness of this view to this theory of interpretation is quite plain, as it means that negative media representation or media representations that people disagree with can possibly be altered and reimagined.

Additionally, the theory of resistance is useful here because it points to the fact that it is unhealthy to assume or maintain easy binaries, such as domination or resistance. Reddy (2000) argues that the common assumption is that colonialism was about absolute dominance by the empire and the postcolonial period was about the triumph of revolutionary causes that fought on behalf of the subaltern. Such binaries allow themselves to easily fall into the tendency to often think of resistance as the negation of domination, as something conceived and mounted in opposition and external to, if not autonomous (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). This is a tendency to delink the two moments as if there is first a period of domination, which is then followed by an independent time of resistance (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). The point of this account is to show that such a binary cannot be retained and to point out that there is often a conceptual divide between the colonial and postcolonial moments.

In this regard, Haynes and Prakash (1991) argue that the tendency to separate domination and resistance “allow two assumptions to reassert themselves: first that relations of power enjoy a rather uncomplicated and unchallenged life until moments of societal upheaval; and, second, that in ‘normal’ times, the cultural practices and identities of the dominated remain firmly grounded in a terrain mapped by the dominant”. Such an understanding allows us to investigate power relations, whether colonial, postcolonial or post-authoritarian, not as singular or monolithic but rather as a practice fraught with contradictions and tensions (Reddy, 2000). Work done on the subject of resistance has argued that power must be seen as a tenuous exercise because it is constantly fractured by the everyday struggles of the subordinate because resistance is constantly present in the behaviours, traditions and consciousness of the subordinate (Haynes and Prakash, 1991).

Using the work of Gramsci, Hall’s (1997) insights add to the discussion, stating that hegemony is a process of domination, resistance and accommodation and, as such, one has to be mindful of the importance of a ‘revised’ notion of subjectivity that retains a sense of agency. Through such a lens, we see that social structure, rather than being a monolithic, autonomous entity, unchallenged except during dramatic instances of revolt, appears to be more commonly a constellation of contradictory and contestatory processes (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). One must also keep in mind that resistance rarely marks pure forms of escape from domination; struggle is constantly being conditioned by the structures of social and political power (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). In sum, neither domination nor resistance is autonomous; the two are so entangled that it becomes difficult to analyse one without the other (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). Power and struggle always appear to be phenomena which often coexist and shape each other, instead of polar opposites as commonly thought.

Therefore, analysis of colonial or postcolonial societies requires an acknowledgement of the fact that such societies are skewed societies with friction and conflict between social groups as a constant at their core (Fanon, 1963). Subscribing to this revisionist historiography means realising that the history of the colonial system is, in large measure, a history of the variety of African responses to the new situation. This is a history of the ways Africans came to terms with a new set of forces, the ways they accommodated, resisted, or escaped (Desai, 2001). Resistance, thus, is part of the very history of colonialism, instead of being outside of it (Desai, 2001; Reddy, 2000). The history of the colonial situation is in large part the history of African resistance to white rule. It is the history of African survival, which marked the height of the

colonial era, and the African nationalists' movement efforts for national self-determination (Reddy, 2000).

To understand the core and constant fissure in social relations between unequal groups is to understand that domination is not a smooth operation, and in such arrangements there exists a critical (mis)understanding. Desai (2001) writes that the misunderstanding is 'critical' in at least three senses: firstly, it is critical as in 'necessary' because the project of colonialism and unequal relations following it need the misunderstanding to prosper; it needs another, a different and distinct entity that can be dominated. In the second sense, critical means that the misunderstanding between the two entities has the inherent potential to be refuted by one or the other. In the third version of critical, which I touched on above, the colonial relation is critical because it is crisis-ridden, or one could say that it is forever in flux. The power dynamic between unequal groups is always in a state of negotiation, it is always contested because it is unequal and thus forever experiencing crisis (Desai, 2001).

This critical misunderstanding that is the colonial encounter can be thought to be about the process of invention and counter-invention that takes place when two opposing cultures meet. The concept is useful for this theoretical overview because it opens the possibility for agency in a dominated context, colonial, racial or otherwise. If misunderstanding is inherently part of the colonial relation, this means that stereotypes or the representations and texts that collectively invented the negative connotations of Africa, must be rethought as a space for contestation and not just one-sided domination (Desai, 2001).

Popular culture, referring to those activities that texture people's everyday lives, provides an especially important arena for studying everyday resistance (Gray, 1995). It is in cultural forms, such as media, that domination is constantly forged and fissured (Gray, 1995). Such a view considers popular culture as a realm invaded both by power and resistance. For this study, this means that one has to understand that negative representations in the media sphere are inherently open because they are up for contestation. Therefore, when one discusses prejudice as an essential feature of interpretation, then what has to be understood is that when dealing with positive or negative stereotypes, the agency of the subordinate cannot be negated. This means that, as already argued, in considering that interpretation of media messages by young people living in the township might be influenced by race relations or negative representations of black people in the media, we must also consider that this race context does not preclude agency.

Therefore, this means that if we acknowledge the power of the mainstream media to shape debates in society and opinions, if we acknowledge their power to structure the way in which we think about the world, then we have to also acknowledge that such power can be resisted and, ultimately, revised. Thus, what we seem to have in South Africa is an acknowledgement of media power but not of potential resistance to that power by the people involved. The importance of this analysis is to then highlight the fact that discussion about media power in South Africa should always bear in mind the counter power or possibility of resistance. This research is prompted by the fact that there seems to be a lack of insight into the possibility that marginalised groups might be rejecting the dominant narratives produced by the mainstream media because they were exercising agency. Although certainty on this matter cannot be reached without thorough investigation, the literature presented suggests that the power of the media to influence should be offset by the ever present possibility of resistance.

#### 5.10. Multipositionality

In light of the above discussion, Hall (1997) argues that the tendency for racial frameworks to allow appearance or an essence to stand in the place of what is, in fact, a deeply complex cultural system is the trap of racism. It is to seek the impossible: a guarantee of an essence from genetic features in a context of complex subaltern agency. Hall (1997) goes on to theorise that in the end racism cannot perform the function it is purposed for, which is to fix a constructed 'truth' beyond any doubt. Therefore, a more adequate reading of race relations maintains that the challenges imposed on the subordinate by a racist gaze need equal consideration because, through responsive action, subaltern groups reform such boundaries (Guha, 1983). When applied to this research, this to say that the simple way in which subalterns are depicted by mainstream discourse hides the possibility of variance in media reading.

The importance of above insights is that if we do not interrogate the meaning making of young black people in the township as a socially complex process, we can easily slide into dominant frameworks that assume that media messages cause direct behaviour change or that people interpret simply according to race or class. Such thinking, when carefully examined, tends to assume that young people in the township, who might be a culturally, racially and economically different from the producers of media messages, will either agree or disagree with the preferred meanings. This research argues that a positive or negative outcome is not guaranteed. This is to say that township dwellers have agency and thoughtfulness, and that they respond to

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messages in complex ways, just as other people do, and that they bring to bear a range of reference points when they interpret messages.

Therefore, when we consider race and class in South African society, we cannot simply assume that a racially and socio-economically different class of people will make sense of media messages in the way they are expected to, nor can we think they will blindly reject the messages simply because they reflect a different group. What we have to consider, in the words used by Hall (1997) is that interpretation does not offer any guarantees. The point that is drawn out is one comprehensively argued by Lewis (2008), who states that in the context of cultural conflict and social divisions, we have to understand that a black person is one person and many people, and this speaks to a 'multipositionality'. This means that we have to also realise that when we talk of a racialised subjectivity, or being aware of race in the process of interpretation, means being aware of the textured nature of black subjectivity, and we thus have to reject simple constructions of black people as 'uni-dimensional' individuals capable of only a single and uniform consciousness (Lewis, 2010).

As such, the researcher is aware that the analysis of the interpretation of media messages by young people living in the townships of Grahamstown might not necessary neatly fit into a race-influenced counter-reception framework. This means that the study must emphasise the need to delve deeper into race theory in order to understand the prejudice and the internal battles that might take place in the life-world of audiences under investigation. Although a comprehensive discussion of race has already taken place, we still need to examine further the notion of multipositionality and the possibilities provided by it.

### 5.10.1 Multipositionality and race

In the preceding sections, race has been discussed in reference to domination and resistance. The concept is again under discussion; however, this time in relation to its openness, which is due to the fact that domineering structures are often resisted. In this respect, Hall argues (1997) that race can be likened to language because of the ideas it can signify. Similarly, Winter (2008: 18) writes that race is a "metalanguage because it serves as a global sign, since it speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions". Therefore, since language is human in construction, race then is not a fixed concept but is socially and historically grounded (Hall, 1997). As an instance of trans-historic signification, race is only a sign that can be made to mean different things, in different cultures, and at different times (Hall, 1997). Lewis (2008)

emphasises that the meaning of all signs, including race, is relational because it is never fixed but subject to variation and thus multiple interpretations.

This discursive definition of race is important because it allowed the theoretical shift from an outdated understanding of race based on physical difference to an understanding of how ideas and knowledge of difference organise human practice (Hall, 1997). After initially subscribing to the science of race, du Bois (1903) abandoned the scientific definitions that were prevalent at the time. He went on to favour more socio-historical approaches – writing that Africans and people of African descent share a common history, have suffered a common disaster, and have one long memory of disaster (du Bois, 1903). As such, du Bois insisted that colour matters because its sense of meaning for black people is that it is a badge of social heritage of black pain and the dissemination of that experience.

This is an important point because it enables the study to comprehend that one of the sources of meaning that a person of colour is able to draw from is their historical tie to black pain and degradation. Furthermore, it is important that the study keeps the point in mind because it continues the discussion about the openness of texts. This is to say that in acknowledging the variation of message reception, as preceding sections have, by acknowledging that individuals have multiple realities and frameworks to draw from, then it must further be acknowledged that one of those realities is possibly a shared black history. This shared black pain could then draw black people together and drive them to keep an unpopular president in power. Therefore, in order to make sense of the meaning that is made by this group, the theory of interpretation forwarded by this study posits that in the context of complex multi-subject positionalities, domination has a powerful bearing on the process of interpretation of messages.

Writing on the subject of domination and multipositionality, Biko (2004: 113) writes that in order to accommodate the problems they face, black people often develop a Janus face or an ontological split. This split is explained as, on one hand, being dominated or made to believe you are inferior, while on the other, resisting the domination by realising humanness. Du Bois (1903: 43) points to this conditions of subalternity when observing that the question that he was repeatedly not asked in the United States, and the question that was on the lips of many people he met, was, “How does it feel to be a problem?”. Du Bois (1903: 43) further outlines that the African-American in the USA was ‘a problem’, ‘untouchables’ in India were ‘a problem’, so too, by definition, are girl-children in many parts of the world. Du Bois (1903)

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suggested that one of the consequences of living life as ‘a problem’, was that one lived with a ‘double consciousness’ – “two souls in one dark body”.

It is in light of this realisation that Du Bois (1903) postulates that black people are gifted at birth with a second sight, which is a way to see themselves using the lens of the dominant culture and their own, a way to see life in a very complex manner (Du Bois, 1903):

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. In other words, society makes difficulties for him because of his color, which thus means that the black person ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 1903: 8).

With this sense of double consciousness, seeing the world from two states of mind, the black man is always fighting to then understand his own self or attain a sense of self-consciousness. The life and history of the black man is the struggle to merge the two selves into one, into a “better and truer self”.

Fanon (1952) concurs writing that the black man occupies two camps, white and black, which leads to a dual way of being: one with black fellows, the other with the white people. The definition of double consciousness that I wish to posit here is one that considers a black mode of thinking as a split between seeing the world from the perspective of an inherited culture; one in which an individual is born into, and is compelled to see it through a dominant culture that considers the inherited culture inferior. The reason it is a split is because acquiring the traits of another culture different from the one you are born into and engaging with the world through the perspective of that culture necessarily implies a “dislocation, a separation” (Fanon, 1952: 14). Therefore, black persons and their mode of thinking or consciousness acquires an inferiority complex, which is to see themselves as a lower category human. As such, they inhabit the earth bearing this category and the awareness of a subjective division (Fanon, 1952).

Fanon (1952) furthers this analysis towards multipositionality in stating that the black person is a human being who knows himself to be complete because he inherits such understandings. However, he is convinced otherwise when the two cultures meet and one dominates the other, and, therefore, he has to strive to reconcile these warring perceptions of self in order to find the

“possibility of existence” (Fanon, 1952: 74). Fanon (1952: 84) goes on to call this the “triple person”, which is to be in three places at once, sub human, human and conflicted. The reason this insight is important is that it places emphasis on the fact that what takes place in the individual is not a simple merger of two cultures but the possibility of a warring of different conceptions. The strength of such a view, to move beyond a double consciousness, is that it enables us to understand that black people occupy multiple positions. This could mean being totally dominated, being oppositional, negotiating through conflict, indifference, or complete unawareness (Lewis, 2010).

### 5.11. Multiple realities of the postcolony

Bhabha (1993) has remarked that the importance of multipositionality, or this idea of multiplicity of the colonial subject, is not about getting lost in plurality, but rather about acknowledging a ‘third space’. In his understanding of multipositionality, Bhabha (1993) follows Fanon’s (1952) understanding of the fluidity of blackness. The point is that the meaning of race is not one meaning, nor multiple meanings present simultaneously, but a constant and unending production of contested and contradictory meanings (Bhabha, 1990). Bhabha (1990), therefore, states that the in-between nature of blackness can be seen as a third space or a newness. What the framework articulates is a cultural difference that is defined as in-between space, a space in which areas of difference may overlap, and thus create something unique (Bhabha, 1994).

The value of this discussion on multipositionality is not that a colonial subject draws from all available discourses simultaneously; it is that in doing so, they create anew (Bhabha, 1990). When applied here, the understanding is that the marginalised, those existing in the political society, those benefiting directly from the state through active negotiation outside the formal rules of citizenship, might converse with power in many ways. They might, in one instance, engage in riots or rebellion, and the next assume a language of deliberation rather than direct contestation. This is to move closer to what Chatterjee (2012) has called the need for a new conceptual framework in the analysis of postcolonial societies. Chatterjee (2012) argues that it is inappropriate to analyse political action in postcolonial settings as simply an uprising against the government or capital. Such has been the case in South Africa where many have falsely argued that the service delivery protests that have been regularly recorded since 2004 in poor areas will result in a great loss of electoral power for the ANC (Friedman, 2015). This counter view, which supports Chatterjee’s position, argues that service delivery strikes in South Africa

are launched by staunch supporters of the ANC, who have no intention of switching parties, but take to the streets in an effort to air their grievances (Friedman, 2015).

Chatterjee (2012) writes that since welfare and developmental functions are now widely recognised to be necessary tasks for the governments to provide for the poor, these functions are legitimately claimed by the poor. “This means that government officials and political representatives in rural areas are constantly besieged by demands for various forms of welfare and development benefits. It also means that peasants learn to operate the levers of the government system, to apply pressure at the right places or negotiate for better terms. This is where the everyday operations of democratic politics, organisation and leadership come into play” (Chatterjee, 2012: 132). This process of acquiescence and rebellion is more a play on the dominant power structure, and a way of manoeuvring, rather than attempts to revolutionise the system.

In this regard, Chatterjee (2012) argues that the power struggles that we see in postcolonial societies cannot simply be reduced to a dramatic confrontation between those in power, and the ‘contradictory consciousness’ of subaltern classes who acquiesce to the power but also violently oppose it. It is when such a stance is taken that one can see that this process is not about contradictory consciousness, but rather more about the relations of people to power, in environments where inequality is prevalent and enduring. To comprehend such a context, Chatterjee (2012) maintains critical scholars have to apply a new framework, one which is able to account for multipositionality of those that have to bear the brunt of a new history and an old history in a present world. In responding to Chatterjee’s call, the framework that has been developed here is novel because it considers interpretation by subaltern groups, who have to fight to gain access or to participate in public discourse, not contradictory, or passive but multifaceted and unique.

As a way towards a conclusion, the work done by Mbembe (2001) offers a further way forward. Mbembe (2001: 103) highlights the historical continuity discussed in Chapter Three, arguing that postcolonial African regimes did not invent government systems from scratch after independence. Rather, these states gained their social knowledge from several cultures, heritages and traditions, whose “features have become entangled over time” (Mbembe, 2001: 103). As such, Mbembe (2001) further argues that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic. Although it has its own internal coherence, it has developed unique systems in re-forming the old systems. Building on the point of uniqueness caused by the mixture of several traditions,

Mbembe (2001: 102) writes that the: “postcolony is thus characterised by a distinctive style of political improvisation, a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation”.

Mbembe (2001) forwards the argument that has been drawn out in this chapter by writing that in order to understand and to account for both the mind-set and postcolonial relations of power, “we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination, such as resistance vs passivity, autonomy vs subjection, state vs civil society, hegemony vs counter hegemony...” (Mbembe, 2001: 103). Doing so is to realise that what you have in postcolonial societies today is something “akin to a custom, which fronts as modernity but without being fully included in it” (Mbembe, 2001: 103). Therefore, although the colonial state model and its repressive tendencies have always lived side by side with a liberal civic order, the state has often practised the exact opposite of the liberal model of debate and discussion. Mbembe (2001) argues that this sense of uneasy split is more pronounced in the postcolony because its sense of divide between ruler and subjects is inflated to despotic levels.

It is in this regard that Mbembe (2001) argues that maintaining a framework of oppositions is unhelpful, and instead clouds the nature of postcolonial relations. This is because, although postcolonial systems are characterised by extremes, these extremes still live side by side. It is thus better to recognise that in the postcolony the nationalist orders that were instituted after independence was achieved operated within a mixture of systems and maintained hegemony in such a cacophonous environment by producing ‘overblown’ symbols (Mbembe, 2001: 103). Therefore, in postcolony the ‘overblown’ and ‘grotesque’ are essential features of the society. Influenced by colonial structuring, the dominant power is obscene in using violence in its display of power. The subject population is also obscene and grotesque in voicing displeasure. Obscenity and grotesque are thus part and parcel of the space because they can be used for repression and as ways to undermine those in power and to show vulnerability of officialdom. It is only through such a shift in perspective that we can understand that the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or collaboration but newness and reformation (Mbembe, 2001).

It is precisely this logic – the necessary familiarity and domesticity in the relationship between subaltern and power holder – that explains the contradiction between overt public acts of disapproval - such as service delivery protests - and covert private responses, such as defending those in power or voting to keep them in place. Mbembe (2001) agrees with Chatterjee (2012)

on the notion of the postcolony possessing more than one public space, each with its own logic. Moreover, Mbembe (2001) further suggests that there exists several of these spaces which are not parallel to each other but are entangled, and thus their logics cross. Due to all the entanglements, therefore, the postcolonial subject has to learn to bargain in this marketplace, and learn to manage not just a single identity but several – and thus learn to be “flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary” (Mbembe, 2001: 240).

This means that in order to understand interpretation by subaltern citizens and subjects in a postcolonial setting, we have to understand the multiplicity of their subject positions. This is “Because Africa is moving in several directions at once, this is a period that, at the same time, has been, is not yet, is, at once, in front and behind, inside and outside, above and below (Mbembe, 2001: 241). With these insights in mind, Mbembe (2001) urges that we must realise that the postcolony and its subjects are far from being uniform and cannot be reduced to simpletons or contradiction. Therefore, what has to be understood is that although the way subalterns make sense of the world might appear to be contradictory, the overlapping nature of systems in this society requires such a study to recognise that a person pulls from various frameworks or extensions in order to make unique sense of a changed and rapidly changing society.

## 5.12. Conclusion

The above theoretical overview has demonstrated that understanding interpretation will be a much more complex process than simply categorising responses as dominant or oppositional. All things considered, it is thus useful that Hall’s (1980) model makes provisions for a negotiated decoding. In addition, what the Mbembe (2001) and Chatterjee (2012) insights illuminate is that when examining what the responses or interpretations of young people living in the township make of media messages, a negotiated reading of mainstream media must be considered. This is because, as this chapter has synthesised, although subalterns might deride or challenge postcolonial government, they continue to vote for them. Therefore, their thought process and reasoning are potentially a matter of great variance that needs to be examined carefully. At this point the study was prepared for complex readings that might emerge from the use of multiple frameworks.

It must also be stated that considering multiple positionalities is not an attempt to cast a wide net to secure as many fish as possible in a sea of a variety of responses. It is rather an attempt

not to confine participant responses to negative or positive interpretations of oppression. Therefore, touching on the possibility of multipositionality is not to attempt to cover all possible responses that might be expressed, but to emphasise the point made by subaltern studies that subjectivity is not a simple binary between elite and subordinate. It is rather a complex mixture of standpoints affected by history, oppression, culture, conquest and many other variables. It is an attempt to grant the oppressed agency, the ability to convert forms of oppression to ways of living.

## Chapter Six: Methodology

He had unconsciously internalized a sense of superiority to these people and their way of life – living among them like a scientist studying ants. His inability to pierce the secret of their language, however, revealed the inadequacies of his method. (Greene, 2012)

### 6.1. Introduction

This research departs from the perspective that mainstream media made predictions about the outcome of an election that was ultimately contradicted by the actions of subaltern groups. The most recent American election serves as a famous example of this phenomenon. Due to various reasons, the American and world media were convinced that Trump was going to lose the election. Despite the incendiary nature of the racist white nationalist issues his campaign espoused, astute observers argued that the mainstream pundits were not paying attention to the home-truths Trump was speaking to the white working class (Frank, 2016). Mainstream media, therefore, misinformed audiences about the likely victor because their elitist stance meant that they knew little about what was happening on the ground. This research reflects on a similar occurrence in South Africa, when mainstream media missed how the black majority was going to vote because this group was not within their purview.

To gain a sense of what those overlooked were thinking about the Nkandla scandal, this research uses qualitative methodology, which includes interviews and participant observation. This approach was chosen in order to obtain insight into an insider perspective that would shed more light into a world that is missed by mainstream discourse. In this regard, the chapter has the explicit purpose of interrogating the link between the research question and the philosophy of ethnographic research. What the chapter does is to pair ethnography and subaltern analysis in order to smooth any concerns about the suitability of the methods to the research. It does so by going over the argument that has been covered so far and linking it to ethnography and its related subculture strands. A discussion of the logistics of the two techniques that fall under ethnography - interview and observation - is omitted from this chapter, but was discussed in detail in Chapter One.

### 6.2. Elite public sphere

The preceding chapters have noted that black subaltern realities are marginalised from mainstream media deliberation (see Friedman, 2011; Duncan, 2013). As such, it has been

argued that mainstream media acts in the interests of the suburban classes, who are powerful because they succeed in presenting their world as universal (Friedman, 2015). In this regard Friedman (2015) argues that to assert that the media represents the active citizenship of all South Africans is inaccurate, and thus it is more accurate to state that the media “represents the citizenship of some of us”. South African scholars have thus posited that mainstream media, both print and broadcast, have failed to accommodate notions of multiple public spheres, and adheres to a flawed concept of a single, elite public (see Jacobs, 2002; Duncan, 2003; Wasserman and de Beer, 2005).

Chapter Four noted that the assertion of a “harmonious, socially cohesive public sphere” in stratified societies further marginalises disenfranchised views (Ndlovu, 2010: 46; Fraser, 1992). Critics argue that the failure to acknowledge multiple publics in the media system means that the dominant value system, and the structure of the South African media sector remains intimately tied to the racial and elitist ideology (Tomaselli, 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Schutte, 2015). As such, Gray (1995) writes that media representations of blackness work within dominant white cultural discourses. This is to say that mainstream media represents blacks as a social menace (Gray, 1995). The Marikana massacre provides a case study of this broad problem of commercial media organisations privileging official sources of information, and their tendency to treat the marginalised as second-class citizens (Duncan, 2012).

The focus of such analysis, therefore, is the fact that the people in these post-conflict environments are still affected by historical power configurations, and, as such, their lives are deeply affected by inequality (Gqola, 2010). The point is that fusion of worlds, brought to bear by degradation, creates a different South Africa for a person affected by colonialism or the deprivation it left (Chatterjee, 2012). This context must, therefore, be considered when analysing the interpretation of media material, because, as the previous section argued, people are not affected only by the shame of colonialization and oppression but also by its very real material consequences (Gqola, 2010). Such analysis highlights that in order to understand the complexity of black people in the township of Joza continuing to support the leadership of a floundering ANC, it is important to pay particular attention to the way people make sense of messages in contextual environments.

### 6.3. Subaltern lived experience

This understanding is thus useful for the study because it ties the individual with social relations of power, or makes the connection between the micro and macro environments (Gray, 1995).

When adapted to media reception, this approach insists that, although people have some degree of power in the interpretation of media messages, the process of meaning making is also influenced by societal determinations (Moore, 1993). The assumption is that reality is largely understood using cultural meaning systems; therefore, truth for individual cultural members is understood in making, and it is made in everyday interactions (Fiske, 1987). This area of study is useful for such exposition because its conceptual focus is the relationship between the representational practices produced in media and the material experiences and location of people who consume it (Gray, 1995). More specifically, this study looks into the relationship between production and experience from the point of view of the marginalised.

Smith-Shomande (2012: 2) makes clear that this type of enquiry is about privileging the black lived space as a site of “critical interrogation”. This is important to note because what critical scholars point to is that previous iterations of communications scholarship and practice have tended to focus on production rather than lived experience (Morley, 1991). Besides the neglect of a particular race, one of the core problems faced by this perspective is that it has led to the overestimation of the power of production (Hall, 1980). This research counters that trend by starting off from the simple premise: if the mainstream media got it so wrong – how, then, were township subaltern audiences thinking about the Nkandla matter? Since it is clear that mainstream media missed how individuals in the townships were experiencing the Nkandla scandal, the research aims to address the omission of subaltern township audiences from mainstream media deliberations by centring their views.

Therefore, the focus on subaltern lived experience necessitates that we take a closer look at subaltern lives from a lens outside the mainstream media perspective. In order to fully understand the meaning marginalised groups were making of the Nkandla scandal, the study thought it best to understand the story from their point of view. This approach requires that instead of the outside-in perspective, we investigate the lives of subaltern audiences from the inside. Critical scholars argue that the distorted representation of subalterns in mainstream media representation that silences them by turning them into caricatures can be addressed only by centring subaltern experiences (Smith-Shomande, 2012). On the subject of centring neglected black audience activity, black literature dictates that we adopt an insider perspective because black people stop being stereotypes, caricatures and the ‘other’ when they are represented from their own point of view (Coleman and Cavalcante, 2012).

## 6.4. Ethnography

Qualitative research insists that people construct and reconstruct social realities through routine social practices and the conceptual categories underpinning them (Deacon *et al.*, 1999). Qualitative research is primarily used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, and is useful to uncover trends in thought and opinions (Straus and Corbin, 1998). As such, qualitative methodology emphasises that research must attempt to understand and describe the subjective meanings individual make in everyday life (Moores, 2003; O'Shea, 2004: 30). To this end, qualitative research is designed to be descriptive, rich and strive for an understanding of individual beliefs, concerns, behaviour and preferences (Lindloff, 1995).

This has led some researchers to argue that the qualitative design is the most appropriate approach to the research of people and cultures because it employs a holistic and inductive approach (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). This perspective is useful for the aims proposed by this study because of the need to understand human beings lived experiences (Lindloff, 1995). The central concern of the preferred tradition, also known as 'interpretivism', is to explore the ways that people make sense of or interpret their social worlds (Deacon *et al.*, 1999: 6). In line with this view, audience studies have long maintained that qualitative methods are the best, in principle, to understand the complexity of media consumption. This is because, as a socially constituted phenomena, media decoding is a constructed ritual that is determined by a mixture of socioeconomic factors (Lull, 1990).

As such, we are able to see that media consumption is an individual, collective and social practice that is not harmonious because audiences are positioned in different ways. This interpretive framework states that differences in media consumption are not just expressions of different needs, uses, or readings but are connected with the way in which particular social subjects are structurally positioned in relation to each other (Ang, 1996). Ang (1996) argues that what we call 'reading habits' are thus not a static set of behaviours inhabited by an individual or group of individuals. Rather, they are the temporary result of a never-ending, dynamic and conflictual process in which 'the fine grained interrelationships between meaning, pleasure, use and choice are shaped (Hall 1986: 10). Interpretivists, therefore, assume that human subjectivity is constantly changing and that audiences engage in a continuing struggle over programme interpretation (Hall, 1986).

To achieve the objective of conducting empirical research in a fluid environment, Ang (1996) suggests that we must radically contextualise media consumption. This means refraining from

conceptualising media consumption in isolation, or “as a series of separable independent variables having more or less clear cut correlations with another set of dependent, audience variables” (Ang, 1996). Morley and Silverstone (1990) clarify that the mundane fact that media are mostly consumed in intimate spaces, generally at home instead of a laboratory or a classroom, calls for the observation that media use cannot be separated from its environment. This is to say that the activity so often simplistically described as consumption takes shape only within the broader contextual horizon of a heterogeneous and indefinite range of domestic practices (Ang, 1996). As a result, Ang (1996) argues that the very notion of consuming media is broad, and thus what the activity entails and what it means cannot be predetermined, but depends on the influence of a plurality of interacting contexts.

This epistemological move towards 'radical contextualisation' in audience study was accompanied by a growing interest in ethnography (Morley, 1991). The move away from textual analysis in the investigation of media readings to audiences located in contextual environments moved cultural studies away from subaltern passivity (During, 1993). Ethnographic work has been seen as a good fit for audience research because, in drawing on the sense that empirical data is what we can perceive and experience in everyday settings, it points to the fact that reality is more complicated than theories can represent (Ang, 1996). As such, audience studies adherents argue that ethnographic oriented research is arguably the most suitable to unravel the minutiae of difference and variation as they manifest themselves in concrete, everyday instances of media consumption (Ang, 1996). In this regard, the ethnographic approach to media audiences is now recognized by many as one of the best ways to learn about the differentiated subtleties of people's engagements with media (Morley, 1991).

The methodology that emerged from this kind of inquiry favoured interpretive particularisation over explanatory generalisation, historical and local concreteness rather than formal abstraction (Ang, 1996). Therefore, from this perspective argued, ethnographic work entails a form of 'methodological situationalism', underscoring the thoroughly situated, always context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television and other media in everyday life (Ang, 1996: 60). Taken from qualitative research, the method maintains that all social knowledge is co-produced out of multiple encounters, conversations and arguments with the people under investigation (Deacon *et al.*, 1999). The purpose of ethnography is explained much by the name: 'ethno' (meaning people) and 'graphy' (meaning describing) (Lindloff, 1995: 20). It encompasses going into the field through observation and interviews in order to describe and interpret the practices of research subjects in their cultural

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contexts. The usefulness of ethnography for this purpose must be celebrated because of the methods ability not simply to describe a social setting, but also to interpret or make sense of what is seen and heard (Lindloff, 1995).

Ethnography is, therefore, useful to this study because the aim of the approach is to understand the lived experiences of media consumers and to “engage with the situational contexts in which the media are used and interpreted” (Moore, 1993: 32). Qualitative ethnographic research is grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting (Lindloff, 1995). This type of qualitative empirical research is usually carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with a small number of people, and favours ‘thick’ description of details rather than ‘thin’ surveys (Atkinson et al., 2001). To supplement the interviews, according to circumstance and the analytic purpose, researchers often turn to participant observation, and it too remains one of the characteristic features of the ethnographic research (Atkinson et al., 2001). In this regard, the researcher, to understand the interpretation of mainstream media by subaltern members of township people living in Joza, used observation and interviews to gain an understanding of the Joza township as the contextual environment in which mainstream media are interpreted.

## 6.5. Subculture

As has been argued above, to gain an understanding of the worldview of people, especially those on the fringes of society, the best way forward, is to be true to ethnographic practice. Qualitative research adherents have argued that ethnographic methodology are effective because they are able to take communities of audiences – such as family units, specific audience subcultures or fan groups – as an empirical starting point, treating them as sense-making cultural formations. In this regard, Halloran (1975) argues that effective audience work necessitates that mass communication researchers identify and map out the different sub-cultures and ascertain the significance of the various sub-codes in selected areas. This is the same route that anthropologists have for decades, taking up the task of describing and interpreting ‘other’ cultures as meaningful wholes (Ang, 1996).

With the above in mind, part of the task of this chapter, therefore, is to convert the theory of the previous chapters into praxis: the practice of collecting data from a group that is on the margins. The first step toward such illumination is to look closer at the methodological concept of ethnography through subcultural theory. Ethnography is enlightening about the proximity that is needed in order to see life from the point of view of those involved. Adding a subcultural

perspective to this understanding means to propose a model of audience study that moves away from seeing audiences as an atomised mass of individuals, but, rather, as a number of sub-cultural formations or groupings. Furthermore, this means seeing ‘members’ who will, as members of those groups, share a cultural orientation towards decoding messages in particular ways (Ang, 1996).

In this regard, audience ethnography is thought to be composed of clusters of socially situated individuals whose individual reception of media messages is framed by shared cultural practices (Moore, 1993). Using this framework is to say that a collection of young people in the township can be thought of as a subculture because they are framed by a shared cultural experience. Although collectivised, it is important to note that these shared cultural practices are further informed by factors that are derived from individual member positions within the class and social structure. As argued in Chapter Four, Hall (1980) points out that although the class structure does not determine consciousness in a mechanistic way, objective factors set the parameters of individual experience. This is to say that people are not mechanic in their sense making because individual biographical experience uniquely shapes the way in which they understand their situation, and the way they use meaning-systems set by cultures.

## 6.6. British subcultural studies

Departing from a neo-Marxist perspective, scholars at the Birmingham School Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), took the concepts of hegemony, structuralism, and semiotics as a set of grounding premises for the study of a variety of working-class youth formations (Williams, 2011). These scholars regarded subcultures as a reflection of the position of mainly working-class young people in relation to the particular societal conditions of the time (Hodkinson, 2002; Williams, 2011). Subculture was seen to arise from definitive circumstances, in a specific historical relation, and is in no sense accidentally produced. Subcultures were thus understood not in terms of psychological strain, but rather as forms of collective resistance to cultural hegemony (Williams, 2011: 28; Willis, 1977). Although far removed from South Africa, the studies of young people marginalised from the mainstream bear a resemblance to the study.

Adherents argued that youth subcultures functioned to resolve the contradictory societal position of working-class young people between the traditional values of working-class parent culture and a modern hegemonic culture of mass consumption dominated by the media and commerce (Hodkinson, 2002: 10). Cultural studies theorists believed that subcultures represent

working-class youth struggles to differentiate themselves, both from their parents' working class culture, and from the dominant bourgeoisie culture (Willis, 1977). Working class youths were quite clearly off the middle-class cultural grid, and thus had to face the limits and possibilities offered by their class culture (Crichton, 1975).

The British subcultural study was an attempt, therefore, to understand the life situation these youths found themselves in, and the structures that guided them (Willis, 1977). Development of the school of thought was an attempt to better understand the decisions made by this little understood segment of British society. Having observed these youth groups, subcultural theorists, therefore, made the point that the life world of an individual is a broad picture, and that human activity, such as crime or interpretation, can only be understood as a social activity with the actor placed in a total situation (Crichton, 1975). It is worth noting that it was important to British subcultural theorists that they pair any discussion of the life world of studied groups with an understanding of structures (Crichton, 1975). Scholars have thus argued that work, income, housing and education, "objective aspects of anyone's life-situation", act as the basic structures in this society that either constrain or propel success (Crichton, 1975: 168).

## 6.8. Culture of poverty

Working within cultural studies, Willis (1977) argued that disaffected youths (as we have shown township residents to be) can only be understood by realising the 'partial penetration' of their working-class culture. For subculture researchers, this meant an attempt to understand the limited agency of working-class youth in their endeavour to further themselves. In one of the more famous attempts to engagement with subculture, Willis (1977) demonstrated that disaffection and disenfranchisement created a different kind of praxis for those affected. The limitation of resources experienced by working-class youth led to the creative development, transformation, and reproduction of aspects of the dominant culture (Arnot, 2004).

In an attempt to oppose the authority of dominant systems, Willis (1977) argued that the working class culture of the youth he observed was characterised by a strong anti-subservience streak. Working class youth, therefore, subverted what they saw to be an authoritarian mainstream and middle-class education system. As a result, out of the limited materials, limited resources, and limited insights available to them, the Hammertown 'lads' Willis (1977) wrote about, developed a strong 'antischool' culture that facilitated their entry into working-class adult life.

Although Willis (1977) did not cover race in his discussion, his analysis of the class factors that led to a rejection of middle class values is easily transferable. It can be related to our discussion of a black underclass in the sense that the systematic segregation of black Africans leads to the creation of unique group identities that characterise underclass communities (Massey and Denton, 1993). Inadequate material and social infrastructure in black communities, characterised by overcrowding, social stratification and poverty, yields a marked increase in corresponding rates of criminality and delinquency in these communities (DuBois, 2013; Lin and Mele, 2013). With this noted, Critcher (1975) was quick to clarify, however, that the specifics of the argument were not that being at the wrong end of social structures gives rise to delinquency or rebellion. Critics argue that there is “no evidence of a correlation between poverty and delinquency or that the urban poor are either radical or violence-prone” (Nelson, 1970: 393).

The conservative theories that describe the urban poor as criminals or non-productive, or property-less people who live off the labour of other working people are associated with the culture of poverty approach. Conservative scholars took up Oscar Lewis’ (1959) supposition that basic values and attitudes of the ghetto subculture are internalised and passed down from generation to generation. Thus the thinking was that the poor acquire a poverty-perpetuating value system which breeds greater poverty. Despite Lewis’ (1959) empathy with the poor, in stating that the ghetto underclass is both an adaptation and a reaction to their marginal position in a stratified society, his culture of poverty thesis offered a scientific legitimacy to the poverty/delinquency approach (Bayat, 2000).

### 6.9. Survival strategy and social isolation

Similar to the critics of the culture of poverty thesis, and this study’s critique on production slant of mainstream media, Critcher (1975) argues that conservative understandings of society hardly consider social stratification when looking into individual behaviour. Critcher (1975) argues that the task of subcultural theory, therefore, was contrary to the implications of conservative scholarship, and maintained that people do not respond to their environment in such a crude way (Critcher, 1975). Subculture theorists argued that preoccupation with individual failure and the culture of poverty overlooked the dynamics of the poor’s everyday life (Bayat, 2000).

To counter the culture of poverty of approach, subculture theorists adhered to the thinking that individuals create, and have created for them, ways of thinking. In their everyday life, these

individuals, therefore, act, and embody ideas, beliefs, values, notions of right and wrong, which are in relation to the realities and conditions that they face (Crichton, 1975). Critics of the culture of poverty approach developed the survival strategy model that argues that although the poor are powerless, nevertheless they do not sit around waiting for their fate to determine their lives (Bayat, 2000). Rather, they are active in their own way to ensure their survival. Thus, to counter unemployment or price increases, the poor often resort to theft, begging, prostitution and other forms of social 'ill'. In this thinking, the poor are seen to survive and live their lives, even if their survival is at a cost to themselves or their fellow humans (Scott, 1986).

The argument then is that the underclass may develop cultural systems that are at odds with the mainstream because of their specific historical circumstance. This view is supported by cultural studies scholars who argue that culture must be understood as the way in which groups 'handle' the raw material of their social and material existence and thus not passive nor deterministic, but lived (Clarke et al, 1976). Culture in this respect, therefore, refers to the distinct patterns of life developed by social groups to give expressive form to their social and material life-experience (Clarke et al., 1976).

Liberal scholars argued that instead of determining behaviour or success, cultural values reflect one's class and racial position because they emerge from specific social circumstances and life chances (Wilson, 1987). Such insights highlight that some of the ingrained cultural characteristics (norms, values, orientations, and aspirations) associated with the underclass are largely due to segregation, limited opportunities, and external obstacles against advancement-which are determined by different historical circumstances (Wilson, 1987). The point such scholars drove home is that the limited aspirations or failure of underclass blacks are not ultimately the product of different cultural norms, but the consequence of restricted opportunities (Wilson, 1987).

The above articulated concept of social-isolation highlights the fact that the development of culture is largely a response to social structural factors, which include constraints and opportunities (Wilson, 1987). Furthermore, critics argue that an unprecedented mesh of social woes grips black communities to such an extent that the urban black poor suffer from a "tangle of pathologies" and live in "social isolation" from the mainstream of social life (Mele, 2013). Underclass communities are plagued by massive joblessness, lawlessness, and low-achieving schools, and therefore tend to be avoided by outsiders (Mele, 2013). Consequently, the residents of these areas, whether women and children of welfare dependant families or

aggressive street criminals, become increasingly socially isolated from mainstream patterns of behaviour (Wilson, 1987). Liberals effectively used the thesis of social isolation, not only to challenge the conservative arguments about culture and underclass behaviour, but also to explain why ghetto communities were so different from mainstream communities.

These liberal scholars insisted that the poor are ‘marginalized’ – economically exploited, politically repressed, socially stigmatized and culturally excluded from a closed social system (Bayat, 2000: 540). In this regard, Wilson (2013) argues that the black ghetto has become a much more dangerous, deprived, and socially disorganised place across the course of the twentieth century. Additionally, Massey and Denton (1993) write that as ghetto residents adapted to this increasingly harsh environment under a climate of racial isolation, they evolved attitudes, behaviours, and practices that further marginalised their neighbourhoods and undermined their chances of success in mainstream society. Massey and Denton (1993) further state that the very limited social world lived by ghetto residents intensifies the growth of ‘ebonics’ or Black English vernacular and reinforces the sense of an ‘oppositional culture’ that inverts the values of middle-class society.

### 6.10. Creativity and limitation

In light of the above, the value of the CCCS subculture approach is the fact that it is able to distinguish between subculture and delinquency, and has the ability to see subcultures in their own right as independent social groups (Williams, 2011). Furthermore, the CCCS scholarship stress on structure helped to minimise an uncritical glorification of working-class delinquency or creativity as complete independence from the greater social structure (Hall et al., 1975). Subculture theorists argued that, by forming subcultures, young people retained aspects of working-class culture, while also embracing consumptive patterns that reflected their position within the dominant capitalist society (Hodkinson, 2002). In this respect, consumption by the marginalised, unlike the elite, was thought to be characterised by active selection and appropriation – which assigned new subversive meanings to everyday objects (Hebdige, 1979).

Willis (1977) has suggested that in order to answer questions about the complexity of marginalised people, and the ‘contradictions’ of their culture, a deeper understanding of subjectivity has to be studied. Willis (1977) further suggests that this can be done through the notions of penetration and limitation. Penetration (a challenge to power) is meant to designate impulses that rise beyond the conditions of existence of cultural members and their position within the social whole (Willis, 1977). Limitation (a defeat or the victory of dominant power)

is meant to designate those blocks, diversions and ideological effects which impede the full development of these impulses (Willis, 1977). Such an understanding, therefore, implies that social groups make something out of their starting conditions – and through this ‘making’, through this practice, culture is reproduced and transmitted (Clarke et al., 1976).

In a further reference to structure, cultural studies theorists argued that this practice and the making of cultural life only takes place within a given field of possibilities and constraints (Clarke, 1975). Clarke et al. (1975) developed this point by referring to a Marx (1951: 225) quote, which is worth repeating here: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”. What is meant by this idea is that people can be creative in dealing with the limitations that are brought by the environment.

The penetration and limitation approach discussed by Willis (1977), therefore, is the sense that working-class youths penetrate culture by subverting it, but are also limited by it. Creativity and rationality must, therefore, be read against the complexity of engagement with the dominant system. This study makes a similar observation about working and underclass youth in the township in the sense that they take their culture and whatever is imposed to create something new, something which they can creatively use to survive. In addition, it is assumed that young people in the township do not ignore the old or the new, but manoeuvre around their circumstances, mixing both elements together. This notion of penetration, however partial it might be, is important to this study because it focusses on action in the world, and human agency in its own terms. As such, adherents believe that when human action is understood on its own terms, its penetration or what it seeks to achieve, it can be better grasped.

In this regard, Willis (1977) argues that researchers should, instead of assuming a continuous line in the class structure, think of radical breaks, represented by the meeting of different cultural forms. As such, Willis (1977) investigated the working class cultural pattern of achievement and failure as different or discontinuous from other patterns or classes. Willis (1977) explored the idea that working-class culture has its own processes, its own definitions, and its own account of what other groups conventionally registered as success. Willis (1977), therefore, demonstrated empirically that the working-class cultural pattern of the educational success and failure was different from middle-class patterns because it had its own logic (Arnot, 2004). As such, Willis (1977) argues that we must not think of the working class taking up

working class jobs as failed, or the working class simply taking employment where the middle classes do not want to, but as a people striving for jobs that make sense within their given life world or life situation.

This CCCS work is useful to the study because it was able to look past a focus on disintegration and delinquency, and focus on the inability of marginalized groups to fit into the mainstream. The lasting legacy of British subcultural studies is the understanding that marginalised people have the ability to use structural limitations to create cultural formations that provide alternative meaning systems (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). A valuable lesson that was taken from the CCCS approach to subculture, therefore, is that it did not limit the emergence of subculture to the inability to achieve social goals. To better understand the logic of the township participants, the researcher took seriously these insights that one would have to be open to the notion that everything that people did made sense when referenced to their material condition.

This insight is valuable because the mixture of creativity and limitation is useful in understanding the interpretation of mainstream media messages by people located outside the dominant structure. The rejection and use of mainstream media by people living in the township could be an example of people under very heavy limitations using social structures for their own ends. Subcultural theory is, therefore, useful for such a purpose because it is able to take the social stratification that we have theorized and convert it into a methodology for investigating social groups outside of the mainstream.

### 6.11. Criticisms

Subculture theories from CCCS prompted a slew of critiques sometimes called “post-subculture studies” (Haenfler, 2010). What emerged in the development of CCCS subcultural theory in the 1990s was the recognition that subcultural studies could not just be understood as psychological strain among working-class youth (the early CCCS work emphasised that working class youth rebelled against the tension experienced between their class culture and middle class). Through their theoretical emphasis on the solving of status problems, and on symbolic structural resistance, CCCS traditions presented an overly simplistic opposition between subculture and dominant culture (Bennet, 1999).

The Birmingham approach was, therefore, criticised, as noted in the theory chapter, for being overly deterministic, conceptualising subcultures primarily as reactions to mainstream social forces (instead of being in and of themselves modes of life and historical realities that people

live) (Williams, 2011). Critics highlighted that the role of the subculture members was restricted to the inadvertent labelling and strengthening of existing cultures (Hodkinson, 2002: 12). The neo-Marxist view of subcultures as spontaneous responses to structural conditions was denounced for denying members agency, choice or diversity (Hodkinson, 2002).

Critics pointed out that there was a relative neglect of features such as internal diversity, external overlaps, and individual movement between subcultures (Hodkinson, 2002). Theorists also called into question the notion of distinct, stable, coherent subcultures, recognizing that subcultures are fluid, often overlapping with one another (Haenfler, 2010: 7). Furthermore, critics noted that there was a tendency to imply that subcultures somehow originated through large numbers of disparate individuals all simultaneously reacting in the same way to ascribed social conditions (Bennet, 1999). In this regard, British subculture studies have also been criticised for underestimating the positive role factors such as media and commerce might play in the construction of such groupings (Thornton, 1995).

Post-subcultural understandings point out that the media are central to the construction of somewhat coherent subcultures through labelling devices employed when reporting on youth and youth scenes (Haenfler, 2010). Similarly, Cohen (1972) argued media response and representation of 'delinquent' behaviour actually helps to define it, communicate it and portrays it as a model for outsiders to observe and adopt. This revealed the malleable and interchangeable nature of youth culture as they are made up (Thornton, 1995). As such, it is worth noting that such insight helped the researcher understand that subculture can be used as a starting point and a tool. Therefore, the research used subculture definitions cognisant of the fact that youth subcultures "are not real things", but abstractions created to shape our understanding of collective activities (Williams, 2011:35).

### 6.12. Neo-tribe

Criticism of subculture signalled new ways of understanding how people perceive the world. Newer theoretical accounts suggested that in the twenty-first century media and commercial saturation meant that assertions of distinctiveness and authenticity had become out of date (Bennet, 1999). "Indeed, at the most fundamental level, there is very little evidence to suggest that even the most committed groups of youth stylists are in any way as 'coherent' or 'fixed' as the term 'subculture' implies. On the contrary, it seems to me that so-called youth 'subcultures' are prime examples of the unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterise late modern consumer-based societies" (Bennet, 1999: 605). This meant that subcultures cannot be

conceived only as coherent groups that come together to oppose the dominant culture. In this regard, scholars took issue with the Marxist interpretation of youth subcultures employed by the CCCS and its conceptualisation of subculture as existing outside and in opposition to the mainstream (Cagle, 1995).

Critics argued that the tendency to locate both media and commerce in an oppositional relationship to subcultures, instead of seeing them in relation to each other, has to be abandoned (Hodkinson, 2002). Post subculture scholars pointed out that the popular cultural sphere cannot be conceived in terms of subcultures opposed to the mainstream or one another. These theorists argued that there is no place for us and them, minority versus majority, or an all-encompassing culture in modern life (Hodkinson, 2002). Post subculture scholars highlighted the fact that groups exist together in an urban ecology characterised by shifting relations (Bennet, 1999). Although maintaining CCCS caution, this new take treated subcultures as something more than a series of successive moments of spectacular resistance (Williams, 2011). As popular replacement for subculture, the neo-tribe approach rejected conceptualization of groups as directly oppositional, and looked beyond an over-simplified us-versus them portrayal of subcultures (Williams, 2011; Hodkinson, 2002).

Critics contended that it was important to consider that neither resistance nor assimilation are ever completely achieved, and that people always resist and assimilate to some degree in their everyday lives (Williams, 2011). In this regard, Shields (1992:108) points out that in temporary and tribe like groups that emerge out of the homogeneity of the mass, “personas are unfurled” and mutually adjusted. Critics argued that there was a great deal of fluidity between the notion of class structure and the young people who inhabit it. This is because these individuals might move in and out of social categories with relative ease (Bennet, 1999). This is important to note because the researcher went into the field prepared to see the young people encountered as fluid. This understanding cautioned the study against any rigid typification.

Therefore, contemporary subcultures were seen as fluid, ever-changing hybrids of many styles and cultures (Bennet, 1999). Youth groupings that were traditionally theorized as coherent subcultures were better understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries of floating memberships (Bennet, 1999). This means that instead of the rigid dichotomy of the class resistance argument, the boundaries between subculture and the mainstream are not concrete, but negotiated by individuals and groups through an ongoing process of reclassifying certain tastes and behaviours (Williams, 2011).

### 6.13. Non-normative groups

Subcultural research has, since the 1990s, moved away from the study of marginalised groups or class groupings in favour of non-normative groups whose habits, styles, and practices have been deemed to be more appropriate objects of study (Williams, 2011). Adherents argued that group formation may involve either unwillingness (non-normativity) or an inability (marginalization) on the part of some people to participate in the mainstream culture (Williams, 2011). Emphasising pleasure, or, in our case the pleasure of connections between people born in the same locale, neo-tribes or non-normative groups might come together for the purpose of leisure, rather than political contestation (Haenfler, 2010).

Addressing the general decline of the number of young people who commit to subcultural identity, the study of non-normative groups is well positioned to examine the greater number of people who prefer a less rigid and more playful approach to group formation (Bennet, 1999). Cultural theorists agreed that, while class was monolithic as a social-scientific explanation for people's trajectories, the fields of consumption and leisure based networking now functioned as key resources for the development of meaningful identities (Bennet, 1999). This means that subcultures, were now regularly framed in terms of people's consumptive practices rather than their value orientations or means of earning an income (Williams, 2011). This point does not suggest that class, or race or gender are unimportant or that subculture theory should ignore social stratification. Instead, the point is that less stress has been put on marginalisation, as compared to greater emphasis on variance.

This slight change in focus, from marginal to non-normative identities, revealed that members of subcultures participate in these groups not because they are passive members of a group that is side-lined but active members of a group that understands that they exist on the side-lines (Bennet, 1999). This means that non-normativity frames subcultures in terms of agency, the agency of life lived by those outside the mainstream. These are people who have to make the best of a bad situation and thus do not necessarily subscribe to the rules that keep them at the bottom (Haenfler, 2010). If they do follow the rules set out, they find a way to live consciously outside of them, not necessarily to resist but find alternative ways to live.

In light of these insights, the research does not anticipate that people in the township are an organised group resisting mainstream media influence. However, the study does imagine that the harshness of their circumstance might mean that their value system is different or varies from the mainstream. This is to acknowledge that young people might be aware of their

standing and work to get around the limitations. In this regard, the township group under review can also be considered alternative, in the sense that they do not act in the way expected by mainstream media. In the face of such an undertaking, the researcher chose to look at youth in the township as an example of a non-normative culture because of the possibility that their relation to society allows them to build a unique culture with a varied outlook, which is due to the fact they are locked together in a deprived geographical space.

The aim, therefore, was to investigate how young people in the township, who are in the depths of an extremely marginalised environment, understand mainstream media as a non-normative sub group. This does not mean that young people resist the dominant culture or that they live their lives to fit dominant views, but it is a recognition that people in the township might be aware of their marginality and live accordingly. What this study is working towards is that critical engagement with mainstream media messages is not necessarily an opposition to the mainstream or living as an oppositional group that challenges the dominant system. What is on the table is that non-normative groups like township youth might make critical reading of media messages, which is a rejection of material that does not speak to their circumstances. The resistance or the 'counter' alluded from the beginning of the study is that township youth might be unconcerned with mainstream media because they subvert dominant discourse by ignoring it and by living a reality different to it. What this means for the research is that township youth can possibly switch off from media messages not because of political activism but because the messages do not express ideas that speak to their situation and life world.

#### 6.14. The Chicago School

We have taken further the idea of non-normative in post-subcultural studies and applied it to black people in South Africa. Black youths were expected to follow mainstream sensibilities by condemning the actions of the ANC and not supporting the party. The evidence suggests that they did not do so and, therefore, in our understanding they were deviating from what is considered 'normal' behaviour. The Chicago School is thus a good point of reference for methodological issues that deal with the study of people outside of the mainstream. The School's approach is useful to the study because it gives it a good understanding not only of how racial ideologies are constructed, enacted, and rearticulated by those in power, but also of how the non-elite groups selectively appropriate, contest, and transform racial meanings, to form non-normative identities and ideologies (Gregory, 1993).

In their studies of the changing dynamics of American cities in the 1920s, the founders of the Chicago School recognised that non-elite groups, minorities, immigrants, or the working poor are more susceptible to social problems and, are, therefore, more likely to develop alternative cultural methods (Williams, 2011). In this respect, Chicago School scholars considered the culture of non-elite groups as their sites of research because they were interested in studying non-normative groups within their context of working-class neighbourhoods, ghettos and slums where deviance supposedly arose (Nayak, 2003). For the Chicago theorists, subcultural analysis offered the tools that enabled them to see and understand people's social actions in their immediate cultural context. The scholars pursued the theme that when the perspective of subcultural actors is given primacy, deviance could be regarded as a normative outcome (Nayak, 2003).

Laying the foundations of Chicago School theory, Albert Cohen (1955) speculated that subcultures emerge when individuals with similar experiences and concerns come together to provide meaningful solutions to their problems. This supposition built on earlier work that posited that if a society works well it will provide people with goals and the institutional means of achieving these goals (Merton, 1938). Disjuncture between cultural goals and the ability of members to achieve these goals results in strain (Merton, 1938). This means that groups that have limited access to dominant cultural resources will try to solve their problems by alternative methods (Williams, 2011: 8). In doing so, by creating collective responses to social challenges, Cohen (1955) argues that social groups form a culture of their own, with its own norms and values.

The Chicago School conceptualisation of difference, understood as non-normative, instead of deviance or resistance, took the researcher's understanding further and allowed the study to maintain that non-normative groups do not necessarily counter the mainstream, but find alternative ways to cope with the lack of resources. This insight was useful for this study as it provided the understanding that young people in the township might choose to ignore mainstream media because it does not provide them with the means to achieve their goals. The shift of emphasis, from resistance to non-normativity, provided by the Chicago perspective was important going forward, because, instead of seeing marginalised groups as abnormal and contradictory of the mainstream, they saw them as adopting alternative styles to cope with the social problems they confronted. The Chicago School, therefore, enabled this study to build on the insight of the CCCS subcultural studies that the internal logics of subcultures differ from

the mainstream in the sense that the American strand of social study championed understanding subcultures in their own right.

Chicago School theorists postulated that interaction is a crucial dimension of subcultures because it is often the difference in shared meaning that cordons subcultural groups off from the larger society. Subcultural groups tend to develop shared meanings that not only make them unique, but marginal from mainstream culture (Williams, 2011). Therefore, when it comes to understanding alternative logics, symbolic interactionism was a key part of the Chicago School arsenal. The theory emerged in the early days of the Chicago School out of the social psychology of Herbert Mead (Deegan, 2001). Herbert Blumer (1986) argued that the relationship between individuals and society can be viewed as human interaction that is facilitated by language and the shared meanings of social objects. The importance of symbolic interactionism to our understanding of subculture is the insight that people act on the meanings, connected to cultural references, which they attach to objects.

The theory that developed from the Chicago School approach stressed the importance of the genesis of self through shared meanings in society and thus through the definition of the situation (Deegan, 2001). Therefore, when investigating both the actions of people and the justification they give for those actions, Chicago School theorists emphasised the need to look at the meanings they produce because people will act on what is meaningful to their world. This understanding of defining the situation has been described as a foundational concept within symbolic interaction theory and an important one within sociology. Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess (1921) write that a common definition of the situation is the understanding that is common; it is thus common participation in common activities (Deegan, 2001).

Park and Burgess (1921) thus argued that the definition of the situation is known among all participants because social concepts are things that we learn through socialisation (Crossman, 2017). Adherents maintained that without a definition of the situation those involved in the social process would not know what to do with themselves (Crossman, 2017). As such, Chicago School theorists argued that all moral life is dependent upon the definition of the situation because, once the definition is known, it sanctions certain actions, while prohibiting others. The definition of the situation, therefore, is what people use to gain an understanding of what is expected of them, and what is expected of others in any given situation (Crossman, 2017).

It is against the backdrop of symbolic interaction and the concept of defining the situation (people derive meaning from their surroundings) that Chicago School adherents insisted that

human society and civilization are a consequence of the coming together of diverse people in intimate association and cooperation that we call society (Crossman, 2017). Park and Burgess (1921) maintained that these societies are divided into classes or groups and the configuration and habitats of these classes were natural areas of the city (Deegan, 2001). This first generation of the Chicago School placed primacy on understanding people within their social structure within their groups. This first generation scholarship sought to investigate or make sense of cultural variations that existed in different ecological zones in the city, as well as social problems that arose when people from different zones interacted (Nayak, 2003).

Instead of competition or conflict, the founders of the Chicago School preferred to think of dense urban environments as a myriad of zones within a larger whole (Williams, 2011). The Chicago School's model was thus ecological in its outlook. The perspective adopted by this group of scholars emphasised that subcultures were to be found in class and ethnic niches within urban areas as adaptations to larger socio-economic forces (Williams, 2011). Gradually subcultures were seen as micro-communities, groups within groups, who came to share similar interests, life experiences and lifestyle areas such as music, fashion, politics, art, sport, dance and a whole spectrum of embodied social practices (Nayak, 2003).

As such, Park and Burgess (1921) thought that the natural areas were transitional structures in which social differences maintained themselves as distinct patterns in a larger, society (Deegan, 2001: 15). Although early Chicago scholars, including Park (1929), believed that subjects such as 'the homeless' man were 'outcasts' who lived in natural areas where their lifestyles were acceptable, this view was challenged within the School and the homeless unique position was highlighted (Deegan, 2001). Louis Wirth (1928) and others developed the Chicago School theory and depicted 'the ghetto' not just as simply another 'natural area' where distinct lifestyles can be pursued but as unique historical, cultural, religious and political contexts, different from the wider culture (Deegan, 2001). This is the important insight from the Chicago School thinking the study wished to take forward; the idea that 'natural areas' shelter distinct and unique lifestyles and customs that are more than just an extension of mainstream life (Deegan, 2001).

Furthermore, the Chicago group believed that these micro-communities formed in natural areas needed to have their 'natural history' or collective behaviour captured. Therefore, Park (1927) and his colleagues were interested in 'natural patterns' that could be analysed and typified for the purpose of observing social transformation (Deegan, 2001). Burgess (1932: iii) noted that

one of the major goals of Chicago School studies, such as Paul Cressey's (1932) analysis of taxi-dance halls, "was to trace the natural history of the taxi dance hall as an urban institution, to discover those conditions in city life favourable to its rise and development, and to analyse its function in terms of the basic wishes and needs of its patrons" (Deegan, 2001). Having identified that there are micro-communities within the larger groupings that have variant modes of thought and behaviour, Park (1929) believed that researchers had the time, privilege and the duty to thoroughly examine social behaviour. In order to fulfil this function, to collect the natural history sought to map social change through social behaviour, adherents made use of local ethnographies (Deegan, 2001).

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### 6.15. Conclusion

The preceding discussion brought to the fore the importance of the contextual environment in the analysis of meaning making. The chapter noted that critical audience scholarship has argued that communication studies and practice have tended to neglect the lived experience of marginal groups. Critics have argued that the omission of lived experience, especially of minority groups, in more textual forms of media study, has led to the overestimation of the power of production. The importance of understanding context and reception above production has been illustrated by audience studies approaches that argue that consumption takes shape only within the broader contextual horizon of domestic practices. To this end, Ang (1996), Morley and Silverstone (1990) contend that the fact that media are mostly consumed in intimate spaces, generally at home, means that media use cannot be separated from its environment.

This chapter has detailed how the research underway countered the trend to privilege textual analysis over contextualised audience work by starting off from the premise that mainstream media missed how individuals in the townships were experiencing the Nkandla scandal. In this regard, the chapter furthered the aim of the study, which is to address the omission of subaltern township audiences, by laying out the methodologic theory that makes it possible to centre subaltern views. Therefore, in order to understand the complexity of black people in the township of Joza continuing to support the leadership of a floundering ANC, it was important that the research pay particular attention to people making sense of the messages and their contextual environments. Ultimately, the task at hand was to note, for the benefit of proceeding chapters, that an investigation of the interpretation of media messages, by people, not only affected by the shame of colonialisation and oppression, but also its material consequences, needs to pay particular attention to lived reality.

As such, to fully understand the context, the chapter made a case for investigating the interpretation of lived reality from an insider perspective. Therefore, the focus on subaltern lived experience of Nkandla news media coverage necessitated that we take a closer look at their lives from a lens outside the mainstream media standpoint. Thus, in order to fully understand how people thought about Nkandla, the only option was to understand the story from their point of view. Instead of the outside-in perspective, this orientation required that the study investigate the lives of subaltern audiences from the inside. Taking its cue from critical race discourse, which postulates that those on the fringes of society should be understood in terms of their everyday life and not from the point of view of others (Smith-Shomande, 2012), this project sought to investigate aspects of underclass culture through a study of day-to-day living.

## Chapter 7: Interview findings and analysis

We may not yet have seen all of the postponed effects of colonisation; certainly many of today's racial anxieties in Britain, for example, may be traced back to Britain's colonial past and its historical relationships with its formerly colonised countries. If we are still grappling with the traumatic legacies of the past of colonisation, it is perhaps unsurprising that we have not yet necessarily come to terms with the more recent colonial and postcolonial traumas of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including such events as the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Algerian war, genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia, Israeli – Palestinian conflict, and the asylum and displacement of vast numbers of people around the world. (Ward, 2015)

### 7.1. Introduction

The study examines the interpretation of mainstream media messages by young people living in Joza, Grahamstown. The investigation was prompted by the failure of mainstream media to predict the ANC retaining its electoral dominance in the 2014 national general elections. Instead of falling to the margins anticipated, the ANC, in some areas such as Joza, outstripped its previous share of the vote. This research, therefore, asked why people living in the township had diverged so drastically from mainstream media prescriptions. As a theoretical departure point, the research considered that the variation of a black South African township voice is missed by mainstream media because of the sectors subscription to the idea of a unitary public, which conceals the multiplicity of publics in a fractured country. Furthermore, the research also considered that black South Africans might vote against mainstream media because they saw it as an oppressive force.

Therefore, over and beyond recognising the failure of mainstream media to forecast the fortunes of the ruling party at the ballot, the study sought to examine the possibility of the people living in Joza interpreting mainstream media news as an out group. In order to explain the gap between mainstream media expectations and the voting behaviour of people on the ground, the research has, therefore, traced the thought that the group in question exist in a sphere different from that occupied by mainstream media. The argument made in the theory chapters has been that it is interesting to consider the interpretation of mainstream media by subalterns or by a township public who are politically included in the re-imagining of the South African public sphere but excluded from participation in it (Mamdani, 1996; Chipkin, 2007).

## 7.2. Portrait of a township subaltern

### 7.2.1. Zoleka, 25

Zoleka was born in Grahamstown. She completed her senior primary school (grade four to grade seven) in Pedi<sup>1</sup>, before graduating with a matric at one of the township schools. The qualification makes her one of the few people I spoke to who had completed high school. However, like so many of the young people I encountered, she stated that finances were the biggest hurdle preventing her from further study. She informed me that government sponsored scholarship programmes were not popularly known when she matriculated in 2008. What would become a familiar sentiment shared by most respondents, Zoleka shared that had she had access to funds, she would have studied further. Instead of that route, after finishing matric, she wandered – trying to find an opportunity. She went to live in Port Elizabeth (a popular destination for Grahamstown locals looking for greener pastures) for two years. After that she moved with her cousin to Johannesburg, lasting only six months before deciding to head back home.

Zoleka and many other respondents repeated the point that jobs are extremely scarce in Grahamstown. She was not formally employed during the time we met. Regardless, she was no stranger to the world of work. She started working when she was still in high school, when she was living with her unemployed mother. Her father lived out of Grahamstown and did not support the family. The family had to therefore find alternative means. “What we lived on mostly is the income I generated from doing hair. So what I did was to make sure that after everyday school I do hair, so that I can get a bit of something. That is what sustained me. This is the money that also had to help my mother and my younger brother”.

To further supplement the income she made as a teenager, Zoleka also worked seasonally for the annual National Arts Festival, held every winter in Grahamstown. She informed me that she has worked at the ‘front of house’ department during the festival. Additionally, Zoleka has also worked in salons, and at Spur. “I worked long-term at the salon, I stayed there for a while. At Spur, they would call me to work during the festival most of the time. I also think that during that time I was focused on rugby (a non-paying extra mural activity) because we were playing provincial games. But now that I’m not working I’m always busy doing hair, almost every day”.

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<sup>1</sup> A small town 80 kilometres east of Grahamstown.

When asked about the Nkandla scandal, Zoleka said that the fact that Zuma built his house and renovated parts of Nkandla in his home town was not fair. She asked: “Why are they going to build something in his area? I think that what Zuma did is unfair. He thought only about himself and those closest to him and it seems that he is not concerned about the people. He doesn’t care about us. If he was developing people, it would be understandable. If he was developing the whole of KZN<sup>2</sup>, and then he moves on from there so that it’s equal, it would be fine. The way that he has done it is unsatisfying”.

She was adamant that when you become president, you cannot start with yourself because that is not going to make people happy. “You have to start by satisfying the people. You must take care of people, before you get to yourself and those close to you. What he did was extreme. What he did was also unfair. You can never be a public servant and start with yourself, and not think about people. He fixed himself up so that he can live comfortably. What does he want us to do? There are people on the street; till this day, there are hungry people who eat from dustbins. But Zuma never thinks to build something for people without homes. What does he say when he sleeps, having had a meal and there are people who go to bed hungry?”

“So it really affected me that he spent all this money on himself. I mean you have to ask what all that money could have done for people. Most of us could have been satisfied in many things. He could have built houses for the homeless or created so many jobs, or built orphanages or more schools using that money. As it stands, I don’t think that anything worthwhile or major was achieved. Many of us are not working, our parents are not working, where does he think we will get the money for things that we need, when he spends so much money on himself and his home? He could have started by listening to the people, to see if we agree with the project. We could have told him to start with job creation first. The story really makes me mad. What is more is that Zuma, with all these things, his many wives, his lingering charges, our dissatisfaction with him, we still voted for the same Zuma”.

Zoleka ended her answer to the question by pointing out that she gave Zuma a ‘second chance’ in the 2014 elections because she wanted to see if they (the ANC) could correct themselves. “When someone does wrong, they deserve a second chance. I wanted to see what he would do when given a second chance”. In giving the ANC a second chance, what Zoleka made clear was the fact that they were not giving Zuma a vote of confidence but standing by the liberation

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<sup>2</sup> KwaZulu-Natal. It is one of South Africa nine provinces, the province where Nkandla, the president’s home town, is located.

movement. “We voted for the ANC. We did not vote for Zuma, we voted for the ANC, and Zuma is part of that structure. People here subscribe to the thinking that they are not voting for Zuma but the ANC – Zuma can be voted out any time. When the ANC first came into power, it was led by Mandela<sup>3</sup> and they are voting for that. So I don’t think they will ever abandon the ANC. I don’t think that people will change their vote. People are not going to say that I am the ANC but I hate Zuma. They don’t care about Zuma. Yes, Zuma does do what he does, but the name, the ANC is important – because it was the party of Mandela”.

### 7.3. Colonialism of a special type

The preceding chapter postulated that young people in Joza can be understood as a non-normative group that does its best to work within its given limitations. As such, the disregard of mainstream media prescriptions by this group cannot simply be seen as resistance, but the actions of people doing what they can in a tough environment. With this in mind, together with the fact that the research is envisioned as an exploratory project, when the interviewees expressed socio-economic anxiety as one of the main factors for continuing with the ANC, the researcher thought to pursue this notion. Due to the unexpected nature of the finding, this section will review additional literature that helps address the socio-economic difficulties faced by those living on the margins of South African society. Inasmuch as Chapter Three offered a brief of this analysis, such insights are further developed here because it is only with an introduction of Sen’s (2000) freedom/development approach can the research further progress in its bid to understand the meanings made by this township group.

The insights show that in order to understand the responses provided by the research participants, and why people they continued to vote for the ANC despite the exposed corruption, it is important to consider socio-economic context and history. One of South Africa’s defining features, as discussed in Chapter Five, is the social heterogeneity engineered by the apartheid state to secure industrial growth (Chipkin, 2007). Rather than invest in a homogeneous culture, industrialisation in South Africa created a modern economy for white inhabitants by reproducing an agro-tribal order, which tied black South Africans to poverty stricken subsistence-agricultural enclaves (Mamdani, 1994).

This reality was expressed hypothetically by South African Marxists who theorised that apartheid can be understood as ‘colonialism of a special type’, which is to say that non-white

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela. Former ANC leader and South Africa’s first democratically elected president.

South Africa was the colony of white South Africa (SACP, 1962). The theory suggested that, on the one hand, South Africa invested in an advanced capitalist state and industrial society, with highly developed industrial monopolies and finance capital (SACP, 1962), while on the other hand, non-white South Africa had all the features of a colony with the indigenous black populations subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty and exploitation, and lack of democratic and political rights (SACP, 1962).

Wolpe (1972) argues that to guarantee capitalist exploitation, apartheid administration used institutionalised racism to maintain cheap labour by ensuring that black workers continued to partially subsist in rural production. By concentrating on the subject of the segregation for the purpose of skewed economic benefit, Marxist historians countered the liberal claims of contradiction between capitalism and apartheid by pointing to the ‘economic rationality’ of racism (Johnstone, 1970). Scholars argued that racial discrimination was central to the profitability of industry, and South Africa’s escalating growth rates throughout apartheid proved this assertion true (Wallerstein, 1991). Wolpe (1972) argued that apartheid mechanisms such as labour reserves and migrant labour were in a “functional” relationship with urban capitalist modes of production because the institution's oppressive measures underwrote the system.

Legassick and Wolpe (1976) have convincingly argued that the mining industry’s desire for ‘ultra-cheap’ and exploitable labour, on the one hand, and South Africa’s racist and discriminatory legislation on the other, demonstrated a ‘basic compatibility’. Legassick and Wolpe (1976) argued that the unfree labour market powered the gold mining industry, which in turn powered economic growth. Therefore, what the exponents of the theory suggested was that, rather than being dysfunctional to capitalism or antithetical to efficient growth, the colour bar, migrant labour and its institutions were well-suited. As such, race and class in South Africa converged to form an instrument, manifest in the colour bar, which enabled the formal use of race to serve the class interests of the white minority (Johnstone, 1970).

#### 7.4. Development and underdevelopment

The revisionist historians were, therefore, alert to the strong relevance of formal institutions in undermining the independence of black South Africans (Glover, 2015). For the gold mines to maintain their position as the driver of the South African economy, the systematic deprivation of black people of land had to occur (Legassick and Wolpe, 1976). The deprivation of land ensured that black people suffered an absence of choice, and were thus forced into low wage

labour (Glover, 2015). Successful migrant labour recruitment was based on nullifying social freedoms, which then allowed migrant labour to offer the only opportunity for young men to attain the required funds to marry and build homes (Glover, 2015; Hunter, 2010). What the insight offers is that the constraints engineered by social institutions had material effects which impinged on the choices people made (Glover, 2015). And, as we shall see later in the discussion, the limitation on individual freedom has consequences on the decisions people make, and subsequently their reading of the world.

Glover (2015) argues that the practical effects of colonial development in South Africa, which develops into the story of migrant mine labour recruitment, is a story of formal institutional mechanisms working in combination to narrow the range of choices and freedoms available to black men. In doing so, in limiting freedoms, the mining industry successfully embroiled black people in an exploitative wage system (Glover, 2015). In this regard, Colin Bundy (1988) and Roger Southall (1982) describe the shift from a pastoral economy to one of migrant labour as 'underdevelopment' and structural dependence. Bundy (1988) and Southall (1982) show that racial capitalism in South Africa meant that homeland regions such as the Transkei had to suffer a social and political decline that served to 'underdevelop' the region for the benefit of industry. It is thus, therefore, that the institutional measures of the apartheid system such as the migrant labour system in South Africa can be viewed through a lens of development, which speaks to the extent the system inhibited the development of black areas (Glover, 2015).

The underdevelopment of homeland areas is similar to the labour reserve policies of most township environments (Bond, 2000). Although Joza in Grahamstown did not explicitly serve as a labour pool for mine areas, it performed (and to some measure still does) a similar function for the surrounding farms and the previously racially exclusive city of Grahamstown (Mtotywa, 2016). An interview with Mrs Mtotywa (2016), an elder in the Joza community, shed light on the fact that the social crisis of overpopulation and unemployment in the township was worsened by the democratic dispensation post-1994. All the people who were previously restricted to the surrounding farming areas rushed into the township to search for opportunities. The problem created by the extension of freedom of movement was that the surplus labour needed to cater to the city overloaded, which caused a worsening of an already dire housing and unemployment crisis.

## 7.5. Development as freedom

The use of formal institutions to underdeveloped certain areas for the purpose of constraining the freedoms of people in order to create a cheap labour supply is brought into sharp focus by an application of Amartya Sen's (2000) conception of 'development as freedom'. Sen's understanding of development is guided by the belief that freedom is the choice to select and live a life one has reason to value. Therefore, Sen's (2000) theory - understood as a process of expanding the substantive social, political, and economic freedoms or capabilities of individuals - makes clear that the formal institutions underpinning the apartheid and migrant labour system were antithetical to development. This is because apartheid institutions were aimed at destroying the economic, social and political freedoms of black people (Glover, 2015).

Rather than understanding deprivation in narrow economic terms (for example, of the gross national product), Sen (2000) argues that it is productive to judge development by the expansion of substantive human freedoms or the extent to which people have the capability to choose lives they have reason to value. Human freedoms, therefore, have to be appraised in terms of their actual effectiveness in enriching the lives and liberties of people (Glover, 2015). In Sen's (2000) language, the expansion of human freedoms is both 'constitutive' of freedom (the end or telos of development), and also 'instrumental' in further securing and entrenching development.

Development and freedom, for Sen (2000), then consists broadly of two parts: firstly, freedom is concerned with having access to the 'processes' which enable freedom of decisions and action through the electoral processes which is especially important for the previously disadvantaged. Furthermore, access to processes of freedom relate to political rights (free speech and election participation), as well as civil liberties (such as freedom of movement and association), and the freedom or entitlement to sell one's labour and to participate in the market unhindered (Sen, 2000). Secondly, freedom is concerned with social and economic 'capabilities' or 'opportunities', like the capability to acquire basic education, and/or a skill or trade; the capability to secure primary healthcare and escape illness or premature death (Sen, 2000)

As such, if development is freedom and capability, underdevelopment is not only lowness of income, poverty and deprivation but having one's capabilities and freedoms constrained and frustrated (Sen, 2000). Development, then, requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny and poor economic opportunities (Sen, 2000).

**Commented [BC26]:** Meaning not clear? Link between what and what?

Deprivation must, therefore, be calibrated in terms of political, social, and economic 'unfreedoms' and the absence of opportunity and choice. Poverty and deprivation in this sense is the inability to acquire basic health, education or a skill, being unable to exercise political freedoms and civil liberties, or participate in markets freely and gain access to credit (Sen, 2000). Since development consists of the expansion of freedoms, unfreedom is the opposite of development because it hinders and forestalls this development.

Sen's (2000) capabilities approach to development, which is understood as a process of expanding the substantive social, political, and economic freedoms, can be used to understand post-apartheid South Africa. The approach is especially relevant to South Africa considering that the country has, since the ushering in of the democratic dispensation in 1994, been stuck with a dire need to undo the structural harm caused by colonial and apartheid policies. The approach is relevant because it allows an analytical lens that enables us to pierce beyond attainment of political rights. This is especially salient in the South African experience because there have been wide complaints in the country that the freedom acquired in the democratic transition was shallow (Msimang, 2016).

Critical scholars such as Gqola (2010) have argued that South Africans are free but not entirely free of apartheid, and critical analysis should strive to shift between apartheid and post-apartheid realities, and to see the two not only in terms of rupture, but also association. Chapter Three touched on the concept of elite continuity in South African society, the fact that the post-apartheid transition is characterised by a narrow absorption of black people into the elite and a continuation of deprivation for the large majority. Sen (2000) has written that this is a global phenomenon, where unprecedented opulence and prosperity, democratic and participatory governance live alongside remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression (Sen, 2000). Sen's (2000) insights touch on the theory discussed earlier, the fact that township people, as subalterns, live in two spaces at once. What the discussion comes down to is that post-apartheid South Africa still exhibits features of the old which limits the freedoms of impoverished black people (Mamdani, 1996).

In this sense, without collapsing earlier notions of social determinism and with emphasis on agency, Sen's (2000) notion of development as freedom further offers a useful lens through which to analyse human behaviour in a developing country. Not only does Sen (2000) argue that freedom and development need to be wide and substantive, but also offers insight into the fact that freedom is about offering capabilities to the previously oppressed. Sen (2000),

therefore, centres on agency and argues that agency is important for development because it is greater freedoms for people that lead to personal prosperity. As such, the idea offers valuable insight into human behaviour, the fact that people will gravitate towards freedoms, because those allow them to live full lives. Sen (2000) further argues that people engage in actions that will allow freedom, even in conditions of unfreedom. This is why young men from the Transkei chose mine work in Johannesburg because in conditions of deprivation migrant labour was the best possible route to personal development (Glover, 2015).

The same calculations have to be factored into analysis of the relationship between the ANC and unemployed people living in the township – who view support for the party as a ticket out of poverty (Mkhabela, 2016). In this regard, Sen (2000) writes that although people cannot change the past, they can shape the future by making reasonable choices that will benefit them. This means that people’s conception of their life world when it comes to development has a lot to do with not only political participation, but also economic emancipation. The freedoms people have, or the freedoms they are denied, are important to understanding a fuller picture of postcolonial subjectivity. Therefore, in order to further comprehend the interpretation of mainstream media by constrained individuals, we have to understand that they are people recently liberated, and are living in historically underdeveloped areas.

#### 7.5.1. Noxolo, 32

The nuanced nature of the loyalty that the ANC enjoys was captured by another participant, Noxolo, who informed the researcher that it is not easy to just abandon the ANC because she loves the party. Noxolo also noted that the ANC is the dominant party in Joza, stating that the ANC “is our party here in Grahamstown, and all the other ones follow.” Noxolo pointed out that the dominance of the party due to this wide allegiance in the area can also take the form of exclusion and bullying. The fact ANC is in power, the projects that are run in the community are controlled by the ANC. “So if I am going to cross over to the DA, that will be detrimental for me because people in the community know me and I might lose out on employment. Even though the projects are supposed to be for all community members, I know that if you are not an ANC member, you are not going to be included in ANC controlled projects. So, it’s difficult for us to leave the ANC because a lot of jobs come through the party. The voice of a person that is outside of the ANC is not heard”.

Regardless, she admitted that even though she loves the party, she also has ‘doubts’, but those are allayed by the history of the movement. “I sometimes think about leaving but then again

you think that the world today has changed because of the party. We are free because of the ANC. We can do things now because of the ANC. We can get free social services now because of the ANC. These are some of the things that make it very difficult for me to say that I am abandoning the ANC. We are free because of the party. We now have access to places that we previously had no access to. Our allegiance to the party is so strong that even when Zuma was facing rape charges in 2008, the vote increased, it did not decrease. We got freedom through the efforts of Nelson Mandela. So some of us are not voting for Zuma but the ANC because the person who was in charge of the party before led the nation in a good way. I think that I will be happy with the party if they would change this leader who is embroiled in so many scandals. The party as it stands is fine”.

Noxolo was born in Grahamstown. Her schooling was done in the township schools. She did not obtain matric, giving up school when she failed grade 12. “I wanted to finish school but the problem that I had is that I was informed that you cannot go back to full time classes after you have failed a supplementary exam”. Noxolo did not attend education institutions that provided for finalisation of matric because the required tuition fees were out of reach. Had she had the opportunity to further her education, she says she “would have loved to be a social worker because there are many things that I see and realise I would help if I could. There are people out there who are really poverty stricken that I would love to help”.

When furthering her education was no longer an option, Noxolo gave up on school and moved Port Elizabeth in search for opportunity. She came back three years later. She now lives at an area called Old Age Home (a description of the area follows in Chapter Eight). “I lived at home, at my mother’s house, but there was an argument -- family politics - and it was decided that I could no longer live at home. This was also due to the fact that I have two children. I had to look for my own place. So I informed the ward councillor because I noticed that there is sometimes space created when people obtain houses in the government housing developments like Extension 10. What you have to do is go to the councillor with your story, and if you are lucky they will allocate a house which has been vacated by the person that has received government housing.” She now shares a one-bedroom house with her two kids and their father.

To help support the family (the father of her children is also unemployed), she is a part-time street sweeper. As a way of explanation, she told me that jobs are scarce for young people in Grahamstown. “You find that even old people are getting jobs and working. There are so many young people who are sitting in the township without jobs. Some people are lucky because they

are getting something. Some people receive grant money for children, which helps them at least”. Her desperation and willingness to endure any job condition is expressed by the fact that 2016 marked the tenth year she was working doing the street sweeper job. And as long term as the job seemed to be, she complained that the employer did not pay well. “You find that when you need to get paid this month, they postpone that to the next month. We don’t get paid for January, we just work in January and only get paid in February. And even then you only get paid around the twenty something, not on the 15<sup>th</sup>, even though the contractors get paid on the 15<sup>th</sup>, which is also our contracted day of payment”.

The job that she does is for a contractor from Port Elizabeth that has an agreement with Makana Municipality for cleaning the streets around Grahamstown. The project also doubles up as a social development scheme. Their contracts are on a yearly basis and are renewed every year. “What does not change or rise is the money. We get R630 a month, and you work eight days a month. You have to report for work at seven in the morning and knock off at four in the afternoon. I work there because I cannot do otherwise, because I have to feed my kids. Most of the time I think about quitting the job but I think of the many years that I have worked there, and so I might be first in line if there are full-time positions. So I keep working there just so that I am on the register however difficult the situation is”.

### 7.5.3. Ncamisa, 32

Ncamisa is a 32-year-old unemployed Grahamstown native. She was born and raised in Grahamstown and has lived her whole life in the town. Her schooling was done in the location, but she dropped out in the middle of the ninth grade. She was forced to do so when her father passed away in 1998 at the end of grade eight. The many financial difficulties she encountered after her father’s passing led her to terminate her studies. “I was in standard seven. So I had many problems. I had to go to my brother to ask for school fees, and they would tell me to come back another time. Or sometimes I would not have school shoes, and you would find that I can’t attend school for weeks on end. So that affected by performance at school. All those problems convinced me that it was best for me to drop out”.

She now lives in Joza, in a house that belonged to her father and mother, who have both since passed. She is left with two brothers (although she doesn’t specify the number, she says that some passed away), and two sisters – who all have their own homes elsewhere. She shares the house with her two children. She told me she tries her best to look for avenues of income so she can take care of her children. She said that jobs are scarce in Grahamstown and, as such,

she was desperate for any kind of work. So far, the only opportunities she has had to work are part time in kitchens (as a domestic worker), and also as a security guard for Hi-Tec (a local security company) – but that job was a short part time stint during the festival. Despite the challenges or the scarcity of work, she said that one has to try because the R300 child grant money is very little. “It’s meant for your child. I don’t think that it makes much of a difference in my life. The way that I am living, I don’t see a difference because you have to buy porridge for your child, there is electricity, clothes, school fees. It is better that you find a job because the grant money just isn’t enough to sustain you. It just helps the child so they don’t go bed hungry

.Ncamisa is adamant that the money ‘looted’ by Zuma could have helped create jobs for unemployed people. “The story angered me so much that I thought about leaving the party because of Zuma’s many scandals. With that considered I guess that the corruption exposed does influence the way that I vote, because sometimes you are swayed by Malema<sup>4</sup>. He is honest and exposes the truth. But at the same time when they are doing all those antics in Parliament you realise that you are only awed by the antics. There is not much substance to the claims made by all those against the ANC. So you remain loyal to the ANC because you think that it’s the party of Mandela. You think back to the fact that your grandfather was in the ANC, so you must also follow suit”.

Even though Ncamisa stated that the corruption scandals are distracting and the corruption exposed makes her doubt the party, she maintained that she has remained loyal to the ANC. This is because, as she says, “we loved Nelson Mandela, and because we attained freedom through his efforts. We are now free. There was apartheid before, where you could not do certain things or hold certain jobs. We could not share the same public spaces with white people. If I am honest with you, I will never leave the ANC. I still trust the party to deliver and to make things happen for me. Houses have been built here in Grahamstown, in areas like Section 10. They have built toilets<sup>5</sup> in places like Vukani. So I can see that at least the party does do certain things. I have to trust the party more than the news. The ANC works for us, even though it has its faults here and there. Even if it deceives us sometimes by offering food parcels close to elections. At least they are providing something. You vote because you want

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<sup>4</sup> Julius Malema is a popular South African politician. Formerly the youth wing leader of the ANC, he started his own party in 2013 after he was kicked out of the ruling party.

<sup>5</sup> Grahamstown has a historical infrastructure problem pertaining to houses without toilets. For many years residents used the ‘bucket system’, where sewerage was collected in buckets by a truck.

to benefit at the end of the day. Unlike other parties, and we've seen this with the DA <sup>6</sup>in the coloured area, when the ANC promises something, like house, they deliver. They bring projects and jobs here and there. Believe me that is better than not having anything at all".

## 7.6. Nationalism as a vehicle for social change

What has been deduced from the above is the fact that democratic rights are not enough to guarantee the livelihoods of those who emerge out of oppression the worse off. The responses make clear the strength of Sen's (2000) thesis, with people strongly articulating that after the sustained unfreedom that was apartheid, their hopes lie with the liberation movement, which has brought both constitutive and, in many ways, substantive freedom. After political power was seized, the liberator, the ANC, was charged with leading the complete socio-economic rebirth of society through transferring wealth from the rich to the poor (Mkhabela, 2016). This was done through a developmental state, which would seek to actively guide economic development to meet the needs of the people (Kotze and Du Toit, 1995). Such an understanding of South African history makes clear that the development and change that the previously oppressed required was both sustained and substantive, as they sought development that goes over and beyond the extension of civic rights. Two decades in, after successful efforts to gain political emancipation, the ANC remains the vehicle for social change into which millions of people are invested to improve their lives (Mkhabela, 2016).

Chipkin (2007) explains that the dependency on political movements to uplift the majority is not surprising. This is because the birth of the South African democracy in 1994 came with the idea of freedom being intimately linked to political, social and economic transformation (Chipkin, 2007). In a country built on racial segregation, to countervail the effects of colonialism, the politics of the national democratic revolution and nationalist politics became a popular solution (Chipkin, 2007). The reading of South Africa as racial and economically exploitative was expressed politically in the idea of the national democratic revolution. The people were seen to be oppressed by an oppressive system that needed to be overcome through an inclusive state.

As a solution, nationalism posited the citizens, both white and black, as necessarily a member of a nation – as a bearer of some quality of the population (Chipkin, 2007). African people, therefore, emerged as a self-realised, 'imagined' collective, primarily in and through the

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<sup>6</sup> Democratic Alliance (DA) is historically a white liberal party. It is now South Africa's main opposition party, but suffers lack of support in black areas due to its image as a party for privileged white people.

process of nationalist resistance to colonialism (Chipkin, 2007). The alternative form of government to colonialism was democracy, and this form of government implied not just changing the state, but ushering in a more inclusive ownership of the economy, with all citizens sharing in the country's wealth (Chipkin, 2007). The goal was to unite all sections and classes of the oppressed for a democratic revolution that was envisioned to destroy white domination which came with political and economic exploitation (Chipkin, 2007).

In countries newly liberated from oppression, it cannot be ignored that nationalism was an important vehicle for democracy, especially in relation to colonialism and empires (Chipkin, 2007). In stark contrast to the exclusion which characterised previous administrations, in nationalist conceptualisation the measure of citizenship in the nation was the degree to which one is the bearer of the mark of national belonging (into the new inclusive imagined state) (Chipkin, 2007). Nationalism, therefore, played an important role in equalising members of the society, at least to the level of political rights. The struggle against apartheid was, therefore, not just a struggle against a racist political system, its laws and institutions, but at stake was the reconstitution of the South African people (Chipkin, 2007).

Therefore, those previously on the margins, those previously unfree, were free to be people inhabiting an open society. As part of this drive towards nationalism, the emergence of Pan Africanism in South Africa can be interpreted as the ideological interpellation of a new social subject for a new social project (Steenveld, 2004). The African in a democracy today was imagined as a new sort of being: an individual, free to belong or not to belong to any group they see fit (Chipkin, 2007). South Africans were thus reimagined as a world people, as an instance of humanity indistinguishable from anywhere else in the world (Biko, 2004). The mark of being an authentic African in this perspective was, therefore, the ability for people to see themselves in 'liberated eyes' (Chipkin, 2007).

#### 7.6.1. Sbulele, 22

Sbulele is a 22-year-old male who lives off 'piece' (part-time) jobs installing electricity. When explaining the story of where he grew up, he says that "he grew up here and there". From the time he was born, up until the age of 11, he lived in the rural area (unspecified) with his grandmother. He informed me that he did not know his parents, who, at the time he thought had passed away. Sbulele says that he lived a "hard life" in the rural areas, and was not treated well as a child. When he was 12, a lady walked in and he was informed that she was his mother. From there, he moved to Port Elisabeth with her. He stayed in Port Elisabeth with his mother

until he was 16 years old. It is in Port Elisabeth where he met his father for the first time. He would later move to Grahamstown.

Sbulele says that all this family uncertainty led him to make friends with gangsters and to smoke drugs. The drugs he smoked to relieve stress. He was moved to Grahamstown because his family saw that he was friends with the wrong crowd and was becoming addicted to drugs. He now lives with his two brothers and his grandmother. He dropped out in grade nine because, “my father has many children and he is the one supporting all of them. My mother doesn’t work. I left Port Elisabeth to come to Grahamstown to take escape the drugs, and to also care of my grandmother, my father’s mother. She is really not well, with a lot of ailments. My younger brother is still in high school. So my father could not support all his children. Since I am the oldest, I decided I must drop out of school to help the family”.

Although he has been out of school for a long time, Sbulele believes that you can never grow too old for education and would thus go back to school given the chance. “I had dreams to be the first person who makes it in my family so that the younger ones who come after me can follow my example”. Due to the fact that he was studying physics, life science, pure maths and economics, his dream was to be a rich and famous doctor. He said that he sees himself being a person who is in a position to help the poor. “There are poor people in the world, so I don’t want to be that person who refuses to help when I make it”.

His drive to help others is fostered by the belief that black people still suffer as a result of past injustice. In this regard, he says that racism is an everyday reality, and there is much of it in Grahamstown. He believes that life has not changed much in post-apartheid South Africa. Although he was shocked by the Nkandla story because there are many poor people around, it did not prevent him from following the ANC. Despite this show of loyalty, Sbulele agreed with the sentiments that was shared by many of the other respondents that the money that was used on Nkandla could have used to build for those in need. “Zuma doesn’t know how we live. We don’t have tarred roads here in Grahamstown. For example, they started building a road in Extension 10. The road was not completed and no one knows why. The money wasted on Nkandla could have helped with building roads here”. However, he stated that the fact that “Zuma went overboard in terms of money spent on himself will not divide me from the ANC because the reason I can walk town today is because of the ANC”.

### 7.6.2. Vuyo, 21

Vuyo is a young man, 21 years of age. He was born in Pedi and moved to Grahamstown at an early age. He now lives with his grandmother and uncle and a “few” young children, who include his younger brother. He lost both his parents at a relatively young age. The responsibility to care for his younger brother was left to him. He explained his decision to leave school: “When I saw that my brother lacked certain things, I needed to be a man and help out where I can”. Even though the adults around tried to provide for him, he saw that it was not enough. He noticed that they always ran out of basic items at home and that is when he decided to drop out of school. “I would go back to school given the chance because there are still things that I would like to know, in terms of skills”.

He says he liked economics at school because it made him realise that “you can do something for yourself, like start your own business”. “What I have always wanted to do with my life is to be a fashion designer. I’m always interested in the way people are dressed, and I take that further and consider what I could add.” He sees himself in the next five years owning his own business, which could be his own brand as a fashion designer. He said that he sees himself changing fashion and setting trends. Vuyo informed me that he sees opening his own business as one of the ways to curb unemployment, and a way to stop young people from falling into a life of crime. He spoke about his own personal experience of having lived a life of drugs and crime. By his own account, he fell into such a life because of “wrong influence”. Although he has attempted to redirect his life, moving away from criminality and drug abuse, he says that he is not satisfied with the life he lives because he still wants to go back to school and see what the future has in store for him. Vuyo emphasised his willingness to go back to school, saying that gaining an education is how he envisions changing his life because he will be able to acquire the skills necessary start his business.

His thoughts on the Nkandla scandal were interesting. He said that he was very shocked by the story because, “If we think about it, when we appoint someone as president, they are placed there for a reason. They are placed there by people who have hopes and expectations. People expect that he will bring change and prosperity, especially for the poor. So in all of that, with all the poverty around him, Zuma decided to go fix his home area, which is unfair”. Despite the disappointment, he said that it was difficult to consider alternatives because, “We vote for the ANC because our first President Nelson Mandela took us from the bottom, we were under the yoke of oppression. In the end he made us equal with white people. We feel hurt by the fact that this current president is not doing a good job but what we need to think about is where we

come from with the ANC. The reason that we vote for a black person is, I believe, because we don't want to go back. That is why we endure and vote for black people even though they also oppress us because they don't do so as much as white people would do".

### 7.7. Slavery to me/colonial memory

Added to the conviction that the ANC, as the leader of the national democratic revolution deserved support, is the sentiment expressed by Zoleka that she and many others continue to support the ANC because of a fear of a white political party reinstating apartheid. "What is said about parties like the DA for example is that when they come into power a white person is going to lead. And when that happens things are going to go back to what they were. We are going to be oppressed again. These are the things that we think about. So we don't want to try anything, to see for example how things might be if the DA came into power. People think that if the DA comes into power, it will bring oppression. White people will be there (at the top) and we will be their stomping ground. Most of the people in the DA are whites. They might have a black leader now, but we know that white people pull the strings. That is what white people do. They tell you that the manager is black, meanwhile they own everything".

Chipkin (2007) strongly argues that we need to see the political consciousness of the new black subjectivity as not necessarily tied to apartheid as an oppressed being but to postcoloniality as a free individual. Gqola (2010) takes the argument further, stating that black people are free but not entirely free of apartheid. As noted in the preceding chapters, the optimism (see Sparks, 1995) that marked South Africa's transition to democracy is flagrantly contradicted by the reality that confronts most ordinary South Africans. Seekings and Natrass (2005) contend that although many things have improved in South Africa since 1994, everyday life for most South Africans remains a struggle. Wasserman (2005) writes that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa is exposed by the urban geography of most cities, which exhibit sprawling wealth and modernity alongside devastating poverty. This is a world where some have the benefits of a first world country, whilst others struggle to make ends meet.

Despite sustained propaganda that has diminished the meaning of slavery and oppression, what Gqola (2010) makes clear is that the legacy of slavery and colonialism still permeates South Africa today. Baderoon (2014) argues that it is worth remembering that apartheid was built on the systemic violence, displacement, racial formation and institutions of social control that marked slavery and oppression in the South African colonies from 1658 to 1834. Slavery generated foundational notions of race and sex in South Africa. In fact, for 176 years slavery

was the central form of social and economic organization in the territories that would form South Africa (Baderoon, 2014). This period of forced labour was followed by the acute oppression that was colonialism and apartheid up until its defeat in the early 1990s. As such, Baderoon (2014) argues that if South African society is analysed closely enough, it is evident that the inward and outward signs of the legacy of oppression are everywhere to see.

Using postcolonial theory to look at slavery, colonialism, apartheid and postcoloniality as a continuum, Gqola (2010) argues that the slave memory or memory of oppression is sometimes mixed with expressions of freedom. Gqola explains that postcolonial memory is the study of a critical inventory possessed by the marginalised, which is often expressed as sense of freedom mixed with historical unfreedom. "Like the broader field of postcolonial studies, postcolonial memory assumes that all production is permeated by and implicated in relations of power. And thus investigates the articulations of this power as well as the ways in which it is negotiated" (Gqola, 2010: 11). As such, Gqola argues that, like many postcolonial understandings, postcolonial memory is concerned with colonial history to the extent that this history has determined the power structures of the present. In layman terms, this means that the present reality of postcolonial subjects is mixed with a visceral sense of the past.

The importance of our earlier considerations regarding the possible effect of oppression on the psyche of the black person, and, therefore, on interpretation is supported by Gqola (2010) who writes that slave memory is the unremembered connections between past and present identities. Writer and literary scholar Zoë Wicomb (1998: 100) has argued that the effect and the deep psychic costs of almost two centuries of extreme violence and brutality has been a psychic scarring which induces 'folk amnesia', or being born of 'shame'. In this regard, Courtman (2015) argues that the analysis of the psychological legacy of oppression found in works of Frantz Fanon is useful to understanding the effects of oppression on those it brutalised. Fanon (1952) explained that even though black people knew themselves to be human, they were injected with fear and inferiority complexes that prevented them from being fully human. This is to say that black people have been conditioned to live a double consciousness: a life of deprivation, but at the same time they have come to know a life of freedom (du Bois, 1903).

As argued in Chapter Five, the nexus between this history of oppression and its traumatic legacy on the present is crucial to our understanding of the way people interpret the world around them. What we therefore have to understand is that people make sense of mainstream media as liberated individuals that are not free of historic relations of power (see Chapter Five).

The spill over of historical systems into the present has been a dominant thread in this study (see Chapter Three and Chapter Five). Gqola (2010) writes that apartheid and post-apartheid are simultaneously connected and oppositional. As such, as a site of cultural displacement and continued struggle, Thomas (2000) argues the postcolony offers people chaotic, unique and revised definitions of self. Similar to Mbembe (2001), Gqola (2010) further argues that post-apartheid South Africa is, therefore, marked by ‘contradictions’, where its new constantly comes up against the old.

Therefore, the subjectivity of a South African affected by domination is, in a sense, a life of being between the past and the present. The multiple meanings conjured by being free but not entirely free rub against each other and shape lives in different ways (Gqola, 2010). In invoking the memory of Nelson Mandela to explain their continued allegiance to a ruling party that is clearly losing its way, what Gqola (2010) highlights is the fact that there is a great complexity in the idea that the postcolonial subject is free or liberated. Gqola (2010) argues that they are in many ways free, and in many other ways they are still tied to the shame, the inhumanity, the indignity and the continued oppression that characterises postcolonial subjectivity. What this ultimately means is that those that suffer from the indignity of the past will be sensitive to choosing social and political representation that will reflect and work towards their aspirations.

#### 7.7.1. Bongani, 27

Born in Mthatha<sup>7</sup>, Bongani, has lived most of his life between Grahamstown and Mthatha. This changed in 2010 when he moved to Grahamstown on a full time basis. Bongani matriculated from Mthatha High in 2007. He went on to study at Nelson Mandela University (in Port Elisabeth) but dropped out in his first year because of financial constraints. Like many, Bongani says that his biggest obstacle to reaching his goal was finances. His dream is to someday be a corporate lawyer, but his immediate short term plan is to “hustle”. Since dropping out of university, he says that he has been trying to make money whichever way possible, but adds, “within the boundaries of the law of course”.

Currently staying in Joza with his grandmother, uncle and his cousin, he has a daughter who stays with her mother in Mthatha. Bongani says he is eager to work, so much so that he is always submitting his resume everywhere he can. Amongst a range of factors, he singles out nepotism for the lack of employment. “Nepotism is a big thing. Even though we all want to

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<sup>7</sup> A town far east of Grahamstown. It is prominent as one of the centres of the apartheid era homeland areas.

work, it is sometimes useless to submit your CV because most of these places have jobs reserved for other people. Government encourages that people must try and be independent but as much as people want to, it is difficult to do so under the circumstances”. As such he disagrees with the sentiment that young people do not want to work and would rather be dependent because he says that it is not nice to be in the community and be nothing. “When you sit at home unemployed, dependent on your pensioner grandparent, it just seems like you have forfeited your right to be a human. You are not a person”. Therefore, Bongani says that he is not satisfied with the life that he lives because he has not achieved his dreams.

He tells me that he is looking for a job as badly as he is because he feels that that is the first stepping stone to living a decent life. He says that everyone, from the day they are born has a dream for their life, but, unfortunately, there are limitations which hold them back from achieving those dreams. “Everyone wants to improve themselves but the biggest obstacle are the problems they face”. Bongani maintains that he wants to change his life and reach the goals and dreams he was set out for himself, but it will take access to funds for him to be able to do that. He offered his previous employer at Just Property Group as an example of such hardship. He worked there for two years and then resigned because he was working in customer care and wanted to be an estate agent, which had the better salary. However, he could not make the move because he did not have a car. After the failed move, and due to a lack of growth and limitations, he went back to Grahamstown.

“Black people are frustrated in South Africa, and on top of that we are still carrying anger from the past. White people have not owned up to their mistakes. They have not so much as apologised. Black people still have a hangover from the past because some really horrible things happened. The psychological damage that has been done by white people on black people is immense. I have worked for white people at Just Property Group. White people will always remain the same, they will always see you as subhuman. So I don’t have trust for a white person when it comes to developing a black person. I trust a black person to do that. A black person may have their mistakes, but they know what to do because they come from the same situation. Helen Zille <sup>8</sup>can dance for black people. They can install a black leader but we know that that is just a façade. We are not stupid; we can see what is happening. So while they think that they can play those mind games, that is what makes me distrust them even more.

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<sup>8</sup> Infamous former leader of the Democratic Alliance. She took up dancing at DA rallies when the election of Jacob Zuma as ANC leader marked a populist turn in South African politics.

“The government we inherited might be corrupt, but the ANC was put there to uplift the people, and to rectify the wrong things that were instituted by the apartheid government. They were not put there to follow those wrong things”. This is why, he says, as a South African, he was really concerned about the fact that president Zuma spent R246 million on his private residence. “The amount spent was way too much. I would not have minded if the president needed about R50 million on security upgrades, but the amount spent on Zuma was inflated. The ANC could have given Zuma the R46 million on the side, and that would have been fine. The thing about spending money in South Africa, is that you have to consider that there are kids on the street hungry. Students are fighting for free tertiary education. So the other R200 million could have been spent productively on these priority issues”.

Like so many others, Bongani says that although he is disappointed by developments within the ANC, he does not see any other party that he can support more than the ANC because of the party’s foundation. To him the ANC has made too many the sacrifices to be abandoned at this stage. Furthermore, Bongani states that if Thabo Mbeki <sup>9</sup>had been given another term as the president of South Africa, people would not be doubting the ANC as much as they are now. Despite the recent hardships endured, he says that he cannot change the party because of the mockery and criticism emanating from a few people. Bongani ended our discussion by noting that even though he did not vote for the ANC in 2014 because of Zuma, he still supports the ANC and will continue to do so.

### 7.8. (Democratic) citizen and (nationalist) subject

Msimang (2015b) argues that the ANC has always understood the iconography of freedom and resistance. “Its list of fallen heroes stretches back a century: Pixley ka Seme, Chief Albert Luthuli, Lillian Ngoyi, J.B. Marks, Chris Hani, Oliver Tambo. Solomon Mahlangu... The ANC’s giants make Che Guevara look like a schoolboy and they look Thomas Jefferson dead in the eye. Their names stand out across the ages...” (Msimang, 2015b). On the strength of its history, the party has always projected itself as a humble servant of the people that brought an end to oppression and ushered in freedom (Mkhabela, 2016). The ANC’s track record, Msimang (2015b) further states, has been so strong that that people have believed in the ANC, in its power to re-make the world. Many have been willing to overlook the fact that the party

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<sup>9</sup> Former leader of the ANC. Mbeki succeeded Mandela when he stepped down in 1999. After two terms, Mbeki was succeeded by Zuma.

is morally imploding or that it has always been morally flawed, in return for its power to bring change (Mkhabela, 2016).

In this regard, Msimang (2015b) argues that the corrupt ANC is not the new ANC but the ANC of yesteryear. Therefore, despite its failing as an institution and as a collective of individuals, the importance of the organisation has always been the cause it championed. The party, as it has been throughout its distinguished history, continues to be a home to both “liberators and con men; both intellectual giants and corrupt thieves; both just and unjust” (Msimang, 2015b). This sense of imperfection that characterises the ANC, Msimang (2015b) argues, the sense of inbetween is an apt descriptor of post-apartheid South Africa. “While South Africa is not new, it would be foolhardy to suggest that it is completely old... Perhaps the ANC and South Africa are neither old nor new, but something in-between”. Msimang (2015b) suggests that the old and new South Africa exist side by side – which makes it easy to understand why people faced with the corruption of the ANC, will reach for its struggle credentials.

In a South Africa that still does not recognise some people as equal and fully human, the liberating potential and developmental politics of the national democratic revolution remains relevant. Chipkin (2007) offers that the best way to understand the fluidity of black subjectivity is to make clear that alive in one South Africa are two senses of subjectivity between the people as datum and the people as a political subject. In the first case, the term ‘people’ refers to an empirical collection of individuals in a given geography; in the second, it refers to a collective that is organised in pursuit of a political end (Chipkin, 2007). As such, in the South African nationalist imaginary, the nation is produced through the struggle for democracy, whilst in the liberal sense it is a datum. Chipkin (2007) argues that, despite the historical contiguity of nations and citizens, the political-theoretical distance between the people as a datum and as an organised collective cannot be obscured.

What must be clearly understood is that the nation for the previously oppressed, who form a people for political organisation, is in reference to the struggle for equality and exercise of that acquired freedom. The nation for the inhabitants means something entirely different. As noted previously, Chipkin (2007) argues that the black South Africans came to be defined and produced in and through the politics and culture of nationalist struggle. In the aftermath of apartheid rule, post-apartheid South Africa was left with the need to reaffirm the moral, cultural and political values of black South Africans (Steenveld, 2004). The postcolonial political identity of black people was therefore constructed as national sovereignty, or as being an

Commented [BC27]: ‘entirely’ perhaps?

authentic national subject (when compared to the non-being of the previously order). Therefore, when democracy is discussed as a form of new society, what comes into view is the reimagining of people that inhabit the political community. In all, what this means is that being an 'authentic' African national was contingent on being able to understand the racist power previously at work in apartheid and colonial taxonomies and seeing beyond those limitations (Chipkin, 2007).

In this regard, Chipkin (2007) points out that when democracy was attained, there developed a difference between those who came into the polity as national subjects and those that were defined by the incoming democratic state. This is because, even though they are both products of the national democratic imaginary, they answered the question of democracy differently. The democratic citizen (civil society participant in the previous order) was hailed through democratic institutions and acted according to long established democratic norms. This tradition tells the story of people asserting their autonomy through participation, free thought, and self-expression in the polity wary of government restraint. The national subject on the other hand was produced through a nationalist movement and supplemented by state bodies. The nationalist tradition tells the story of people who have been previously excluded from meaningful participation in the polity and the long struggle for status, not just as members of the polity, but as complete human beings (Steenveld, 2004).

In this regard, Chipkin's (2007) main criticism of the liberal order that operates in mainstream media is the fact that its unitary approach to social discourse is historically shallow. The term 'citizen' has often been mistakenly used to reconcile citizen and subject – without making a historically informed distinction between the two (Chipkin, 2007; Mamdani, 1994). As such, what may account for the mainstream media's misreading of subaltern groupings is the conflation of the citizen (a status largely denied to blacks, and as we have argued still inaccessible to most) and an authentic national and political subject (Chipkin, 2007). Chipkin (2007) argues that the two are distinct but such distinction was blinded by the haste to define South African's, after the overthrow of white minority rule, as a unified and single people.

Furthermore, Chipkin (2007) maintains there is a high price to pay for this simple formulation because it hides South Africa's long held heterogeneity. The result has been an inability to understand that black South Africans are both democratic citizens of the new South Africa and subjects of the old. This critical analysis of South Africa's dual worlds allows us to understand that instead of being tied to either subjecthood or democratic citizenship, constrained

individuals have a tendency to move between positions. It is useful to again turn to Thomas' (2000) definition of phenomenon as cultural displacement that can offer chaotic, unguaranteed, revised definitions of the self within wider political, geographical and cultural dimensions. What must, therefore, be noted regarding the study's discussion of multipositionality is that black South Africans often face a greater chaos that requires greater flexibility to move between all available positions.

#### 7.8.1. Philasande, 23

"I experience racism every day. So yes, I think that race is still a factor in South Africa. After 22 years of freedom, in my opinion, it is still a major factor. It might have disappeared in previous years but it seems to be coming back. For example, I work in the lab at Makana Brick. I have been busy with work stuff since January that requires that I do a lot of printing. Recently there have been complaints that I am using too much paper. I countered saying that the white ladies who work at the office use a lot of paper on personal things such as school projects for their kids. Whenever they do these things there is never a complaint, but one comes my way for doing work".

Philasande was born and raised in Grahamstown. He grew up with three other family members, both parents and his older brother. His father passed away in 2013. When his brother came of age, he moved to Port Elisabeth. A short time later his older brother sent his child to come live with them. "After that my brother sent another child. His first-born son later left to go live with his mother. So at a time, after the other relatives moved, it became my mother, my brothers youngest and myself. I also added to the family. I had a child last year, but my child does not live with us. He lives on the next street with his mother".

Philasande started his primary schooling in the township but moved and completed his primary school education in the coloured area. He came back to the township for high school, where he eventually matriculated. When he did not make the grade to attend tertiary institutions, to try and improve his matric results he opted for a finishing school in Grahamstown called Gadra Education. Unable to improve the results enough to obtain the required marks to attain enrolment at Nelson Mandela University, Gadra Education informed him of an opening for a part time job at Makana Brick. Out of the five people who went for an interview, he was chosen and has been working there since 2015.

"I am not satisfied with the life that I am living now. I can't criticise anything but I don't think that I can ever be satisfied by the life that I live now. I always want to succeed, so I think there

will always be something that I want to achieve. I don't intend to work at Makana Brick my whole life. This is just a start. So I have taught myself to look for other options. Since I was in high school, I have always wanted to get involved in nursing. It is the course I applied for at Nelson Mandela University and Fort Hare. Since I did not succeed in that, I told myself that I am going to save money so that sometime next year I can enrol for a paramedics course. At least it's close to the field that I wanted to enter. I don't see myself working at Makana Brick my whole life. It's just a foundation, a place from where I am trying to build myself. So in the next five years, I see myself being a paramedic, and if I achieve that sooner than that time-frame then I will look to achieve something else.

"I think that my friends and the people that I associate with are different and are a big influence in my life. They have been well taught at home or have received the correct upbringing. I won't say it's jealousy but since I see that my friends are progressing, going to university and such, I don't want, in a few years down the line, to see myself left behind. We discuss the fact that at the end of the day neither of us will want to be friends with people who don't have money. They are working hard at university in order for them to get good jobs. I think that pushes me too. I am thankful for the fact that my friends come from good homes and I also had a good upbringing. They push me to make future plans. Now I know what I have to do to change my life. And I want to make an orderly plan that I can follow step by step. My first step is to save so that I can pay for the paramedics' course. That is what I am working towards. I don't want to be side-tracked by anything".

Philasande says that he values that he has a job and can make plans for the future because he knows how life is when he is unemployed. "It was in 2013 that I had no prospects of working. It is better now that I have something at Makana Brick. I was here at home not doing anything. I would wake up just after my mother leaves for work at six to prepare my niece for school. I would go back to bed once he left for school. I knew the TV programming off by heart. So I would wake up and re-watch the soapiers that played the previous evening. Around midday I would go to the shop to buy the Daily Sun. Sometimes I would spend time with friends of mine who went to Gadra Education watching movies or chatting. That was the basic routine. It wasn't fun".

Even though he was unemployed in 2014, the coverage of the scandal did not influence the way he voted in the 2014 national general elections. "I voted for the ANC and Zuma," he said, laughing. "I voted for the party despite the fact that before elections we are always promised

houses and roads. Some of the houses have been built but not all. Similarly, the roads are half done. I continue to vote for the ANC because, even though I can criticise the ANC, I will never attempt to destroy the ANC. So I want the ANC to stay – for now. Let me give you another example to explain why I am sticking to the ANC. Areas like Extension 10 and Transit have been built while the ANC is in power. So at least in my home town I can see change while the ANC has been in power. I trust the ANC more than I do the other people because I think that those people don't do much for me. Yes, the party makes promises and sometimes they disappoint, but in the end even if the party makes 100 promises, they deliver on 40 or 45.

“So I trust the party more than any other organisations. The media, for example, just delivers the message, but the people that are going to implement social programmes are the party leaders. Everyone at my house supports the ANC. So I hear that Zuma is corrupt and such but that will not change the way that I feel about the ANC. My wish is for the ANC to continue to rule even if it is not doing a good job. I am not prepared to see another party come into power. The DA for example, is worse than the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)<sup>10</sup>. So as much as I don't want the EFF to come to power, because from what I can gather about the DA, from what I've seen on Facebook, white DA members have been saying racist things. So I don't want the DA or white people to come into power. I also think about the fact that they might bring back apartheid. Old people always say that if this country is ruled by white people again, we would die.

“There is a story that was covered recently in the news about a shootout between police and an assailant who was killed in the scuffle. The news made it out to seem like the police were wrong. Yes, the police were wrong because they killed a man who was on the ground. When the news covered the story they made it seem like he was running away from the police who were shooting at him. They did not cover the story all the way back you will see that the assailant shot the police first. People watching will say that the police in South Africa are cruel, not realising that that person killed was the one in the wrong. So I think that the news can be biased and oppressive at times by telling the news in their own way. Even in the coverage of politics, the news now is focused on how rude<sup>11</sup> the EFF is. I am sure that the EFF is not only famous for being rude. I am sure there is also something good that they doing for people, but

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<sup>10</sup> The Economic Freedom Fighters is a political party that was founded by Julius Malema after he was expelled from the ANC. It one enough votes at the 2014 election to become South Africa's third most popular party.

<sup>11</sup> Members of the EFF overlooked decorum in 2015 when they prevented Jacob Zuma from giving the State of the Nation Address in Parliament. Their subsequent removal from the chambers caused a national uproar.

we are never given that side of the story by the news. They are always ready for the EFF to be rude so that they can tell that story to hurt people”.

### 7.8.2. Lerato, 21

Lerato agreed with the sentiment that the news can be biased. “We are supposed to see the way that white people live too. They must not only show us”.

Born in Grahamstown, educated in the township, she attended Midlands College, a further education college in Grahamstown, but left without graduating. She says she did not finish because of financial constraints. Lerato had to drop out and go to Cape Town because she had family problems. When she went back to Midlands College after a year or so, she had an outstanding amount that she could not pay. Lerato says that one of her dreams now is to save enough money so she can pay for the semester she needs to continue with school. She would like to use the qualification to be an office clerk because the course she was doing at Midlands was in management assistance. Lerato informed me that she desperately needs a job because she stays with her mother, two aunts, their two young children and a cousin. The only person working in her household is one of her aunts, and the rest of the people are dependent on government child support money.

“I didn’t vote for the ANC in 2014. I continue to support the party, but decided not to vote for it then because I thought why should I vote for this cruel person [Zuma] who has not brought any change. The [Nkandla] story shocked me because you cannot spend that much money on yourself when there are so many people out there who don’t have houses. There are people who stay in a one-room house and there are seven of them. I thought it was selfish of him. So I took my vote elsewhere to see what another party can do. I was living in the Western Cape in 2014 so it was easy for me to vote for the DA. When we look at the Western Cape as an example, you can see the change that the DA has brought there. Most of the people in the Western Cape are working and they have houses. Yes, there are issues, but the main thing is that people there get jobs. Helen Zille has changed the Western Cape so I thought maybe she can do the same here. So I thought let me give them a chance. Maybe I will even do so in this province. Maybe the DA will make a change. I’m open to voting for the DA because even though, I agree that racism is still a factor in South Africa, I think we need to think about it more. We are still living in the time of racism. It’s a major factor in the Western Cape, but it’s a factor everywhere you go. We must also consider that black people now are our biggest

oppressors. They have been in power for the longest time but we are still living in dire conditions. There is no change”.

### 7.8.3. Mellow, 31

Similarly, Mellow, born and raised in Joza, has also ditched the ANC due to the many scandals exposed in the media. He said that the corruption scandals have had an effect on him because, when he started voting, he voted for the ANC. However, since Zuma took over leadership of the party, he has changed his vote. He says that he was really affected by the Nkandla story because “that was a lot of money to be used by a president who also has a salary, while people are sitting in the township crying to be skilled. Some of that money could have been used for good. If I was given R10 000 for example, I would have done something better for my life. I would change my whole life, with just R10 000”.

Mellow explained that he did not vote for the ANC in 2014 because of the many corruption scandals, and he used that vote on the EFF, a party he believes is “at least it’s asking the right questions. Corruption is something that happens with politicians, they are always mischievous. The ANC for example has been corrupt many time and we stuck with the party. Malema was there too, and he was part of the corruption. He left the ANC and with that there might be hope that he will bring change because he saw the corruption that the ANC was up to. So he might be able to speed up service delivery... So I changed my vote because I can’t see that someone is doing wrong and give him more power to do with my vote. I could leave the ANC because I didn’t attach myself much to the idea that the ANC brought freedom. In my mind, the ANC brought democracy. It brought the freedom we would have enjoyed since 1994. It is just a matter of us being able to enter the same spaces as white people; that’s it. Otherwise, there are still large differences between people”.

Mellow dropped out of school in 2005 while in grade 10. He says that he dropped out because he smoked drugs at the time. He also wanted to make money so he quit school to look for a job. When that did not work out, he spent a long time, unemployed, living in a backroom at his mother’s house with her and two sisters. After having two kids with his girlfriend, Noxolo, he was forced to find his own space. They got a house at the former Old Age Home (see Chapter Eight). He tells me that it is tough for him to look after his family because he is still without a job. The lack of opportunities is a challenge because he wants to learn the skills but does not have the money to do so. He informed me that he would one-day like to work as an artisan,

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doing jobs like bricklaying, plumbing, and welding. He says that unfortunately in Grahamstown there is a lack of technical schools to learn skills.

Mellow argues that one can say that “some people want to live on government on grants but at the same time the government disadvantages the youth by not investing in technical schools where people can learn skills that will enable them to be self-sufficient. It’s not like people are lazy, they have just lost hope<sup>b</sup>”. Since he has been unsuccessful at finding a job, he says that his dream now is to start a business. To that end, Mellow is saving up to buy himself a lawn mower, and is willing to see where that business is going to put him. If he can save the money to buy the machine that he wants, he said that he can achieve his goal of being a successful businessman. Mellow informed me he has many ways to change his life, but it is only a matter of getting that initial investment that is tricky. He says that he lacks the capital to alleviate his situation. If he could go back to school, or get some capital to start a small business, he could change his life. As such, he said that he is “not satisfied with the life that he lives because in South Africa, all we have received is democracy and not freedom. The freedom that we see are people at the top who are living a good life. There is no difference for us people at the bottom<sup>b</sup>”.

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#### 7.8.4. Wayne, 35

Wayne says he is equally unsatisfied with his life. “The life that we live is the life of slaves. When there is work to be done the head honchos know where to look. When victory is on the horizon, the people are forgotten. That means we are slaves. We are used to do the heavy lifting and don’t share the spoils. We are promised much and nothing is delivered because they want to get rich off us. The people at the top are always making money. [In anticipation of the local government elections, which were due to take place in a few months] People are going to come here in the next few weeks and promise to build us houses. They have been promising us houses for several years now. After we vote they will forget about us<sup>b</sup>”.

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Wayne was born in Joza, and educated in the township schools. He left after grade eight for Mossel Bay, but, unfortunately, dropped out in grade eleven for a job. He decided to do so because he saw that the situation at home was getting progressively worse. Wayne said that he was not looking for a job, but he decided to accept one when he saw that his family was struggling to make ends meet. He dropped out thinking he would come back later. He did not finish the last semester of school. He got a contract job for a year and half, which ended after the specified time. After the contract expired, he came back to Grahamstown. He then looked for a job that side, and most of what he found were short-term contracts. The only long-term

job he found in Grahamstown was as a machine operator at Makana Brick. Unfortunately, in the ten years he was there, he was laid off sick for two six-month terms. In the end, for health reasons, the dust created by the brick-making process made him sick, so he had to stop working in 2004.

Wayne lives alone at the former old age home. He says that he had a problem with his parents who both remarried. After the separation and establishment of the various families, Wayne says that he found that he was left out of arrangements. He did not belong to either family so he decided to go and make a life for himself in Grahamstown. He has two children, and so he has to try to make a few plans for himself so that he is able to survive. Wayne says that he gets worried being out of a job with December getting nearer because he thinks of his children. He wants his children to have Christmas clothes and be like other children. He tells me that he has a soft spot for children. As such, his dream job is to be a social worker and help young people in need. Alternatively, in the next five years, he would love to run a crèche, and take care of children.

“What further prevents me from achieving my dreams is the government we are under. The solution to all the things we are talking about is the government creating jobs. On the other hand, if you are going to get money you need an education but to get an education you need money.” He says that its money that prevents most things from happening. “The government is really regressive; they are not doing things to satisfy the needs of the people who put them there. They do not provide employment or enough opportunities for education”. Given the situation, the most viable way to change his life, Wayne says, is to focus on starting a business and forget about working because so many years have passed without success. “The problem is that business too requires a bit of capital first. You can’t just have it. In such a situation, it is very hard for a black person to be successful because we just don’t have the resources to succeed”.

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Commented [BC33]:

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Wayne further explained to me that “the problem with Grahamstown starts with the fact that black people have long been discriminated against. Racism is something that affected me back then, but it doesn’t any longer because it happens day in and day out. In the main we are poor and unemployed because we are black. Being unemployed has a big effect on our lives because you are implicated in many things in the community. It’s not nice not to work because you find that if something goes missing or something bad happens, people say it is those dogs that aren’t

working. Sometimes, you cannot blame the poor for doing what is necessary to survive. People do things they never thought they would do only because they are poor<sup>12</sup>.

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On the point about being discerning, Wayne said although the news is important to him, because it keeps him up to date and also carries warning about certain things, one “must also assess the facts and see how the details line up. The life that we live makes it necessary to be vigilant. I am not saying that the news lies but when they cover a person, I just think that sometimes, somethings can be discussed on the news and it is not the case. And sometimes, what is covered is actually true. So that is why it is important that you have to try and sense what is going on. You can’t just take it at face value<sup>13</sup>.”

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However, on Zuma, he did not think that the news was being unfair. “I think that Zuma is greedy. I focused a lot on the news that has covered Zuma. I have seen that Zuma is just looting the country. He is doing what the Boers<sup>12</sup> did all those years ago. Once you go that route nothing goes right because that one person who gets all that money is not going to do right by others. Spending that much money on Zuma’s house and not diverting the funds to a worthy social project means that we are stuck in one place. It also means that us black people will never be successful. I don’t vote anymore because I see that these parties are corrupt. The last time I voted was when I was in Mossel Bay because politicians delivered there. So even if they lied, at least they were providing social services. The ANC went door to door there delivering goods to people. Even when I got a job, I got it through the party. There is no such service delivery here, and that is a problem. It’s one of the reasons I have stopped voting. So the corruption that we see on the news does affect us, and make us consider our position. But, at the same time, we are also worried because the ANC fought. Mandela fought for this country for a long time. So I think that the ANC is still going because of his legacy<sup>14</sup>.”

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## 7.9. Reading Zuma

What this study can affirm is that when interpreting news about Jacob Zuma and the ANC, the black individual is not far from the politics of the National Democratic Revolution or a lived reality greatly affected by a history of oppression. Similar to the thesis of Marxist historians, the theory of the National Democratic Revolution ultimately identified the key feature of South African capitalism as a system of oppression which created deep inequality. Therefore, in a context of continued inequality, black people living in the townships especially remain strident

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<sup>12</sup> Boer is another name for Afrikaaner, the ethnic group that was largely responsible for apartheid.

adherents of the National Democratic Revolution, even if they vote for another black political party. For marginalised black individuals, nationalist politics and/or the government do not just represent the attainment of democracy, but the construction of a modern industrial economy that includes all (Chipkin, 2007). It is in this regard that the study has argued that in order to understand the interpretations made by township subalterns, it is best to analyse not only identities as national subjects but the fact that South African society is characterised by an acute brand of social division.

Race and class in South Africa converged in the colour bar to form an instrument that enabled the formal use of race to serve the class interests of the white minority (Johnstone, 1970). As such, an analysis of South African society needs to seriously consider race and class when seeking to make observations about the people. Mishra (2017) argues that the African American thinker, WEB Du Bois, diagnosed that “the problem of the 20th century would be the colour-line.” In du Bois’ view slavery had violently coerced Africans into a world economic system, and then global capitalism, binding together more people of different social and historical backgrounds, piled new economic inequalities on to older racial prejudices and discrimination (Mishra, 2017). Both forms of degradation were vital to the making of prosperous democracies in the Atlantic west and also made it arduous, if not impossible, for the degraded to realise the modern promise of freedom and equality (Mishra, 2017).

Due to South Africa’s vast inequalities, both historic and present, it is evident that black people support a movement or political process that has worked and continues to work for freedom. Given the state of their lived environments, the fact that they are still very far from the imagined future, many live a life that is affected by nationalist politics and thus live as national subjects. This is to say that black people, especially marginalised groups, are still invested in the former liberation movement and other pro-black political parties to bring about basic development (Mkhabela, 2016). The liberation movement has always been the best bet to modernise and equalise societal relations (Mkhabela, 2016; Chipkin, 2007). The task of the democratic state, therefore, was to overcome the historical differences in providing a roadmap for the liberated nation. The liberated state was thus meant to be the driver that was to bring about a modern industrial society that will benefit the poor. Such a nation or society, therefore, has certain “empirical measures: the degree to which people have jobs, houses, transport and so on” (Chipkin, 2007: 109).

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In a situation where a vast majority is historically denied participation in public life, the question the study has had to contend with is how to analyse the interpretation of mainstream media in a situation where the news media might be part of the problem. Chapter Two attempted to lay the contextual background for such exposition. The argument that has been implicitly drawn out in that chapter was the possibility that black people could continue to support the bumbling presidency of Jacob Zuma because he is black. However, it seems that the responses that have been considered here paint a slightly different picture. The responses suggest the fact that, rather than disregard mainstream media as an oppressive force, marginalised black people, living in the township, live in a manner so vastly different from mainstream media that its concerns and prescriptions can be ignored. More importantly, they continue to support the ANC because the party promises to improve these conditions.

Therefore, unlike the support shown to OJ Simpson in the United States, the data seems to suggest that township subalterns living in Joza do not support the presidency of Jacob Zuma simply because of racial solidarity. Chipkin (2007) argues that such an argument is circular and proffers a different standard of measurement for a black president. Chipkin (2007) argues that as much as blackness signifies solidarity, it no-longer denotes a static social position (in the racial capitalist relations of production) or a psychological condition. What Chipkin (2007) says about blackness is that, unlike during apartheid, its measure is not resistance to a totalising power, but the extent to which one can live as a free individual. Therefore, unlike black in the black consciousness sense, where black people undertook certain concrete particular actions like resistance, its measure today is greater than political emancipation (Chipkin, 2007).

Due to its history of economic exploitation, the true measure of blackness today is the extent to which individuals are free to pursue economic prosperity (Chipkin, 2007). Following this logic to a post-apartheid political subject, this means that a government, which is black, is to be supported, but only to the extent that it takes certain actions to reverse the legacy of apartheid (Chipkin, 2007). Therefore, as much as the nationalist politics of the incumbent government ended racial discrimination, what is also expected is that the material inequalities left by the previous order are to be redressed. Therefore, what matters here then is a certain epistemology, which follows the belief that “I support the government because, through a process of reasoning and verification, I have come to the conclusion that it is truly reversing the legacy of apartheid’ (or I have the belief that that will)” (Chipkin, 2007: 104).

### 7.9.1. Amanda, 23

“I voted for the ANC because it brought freedom for us and my parents have always loved it. If Mandela had never fought for black people who would not have the things that we have. So I did not vote for Zuma, I was voting for the ANC. I am not sure if I am going to vote for them again because the scandals keep piling up. However, I have not found another viable candidate. I thought I would vote for the EFF but then again I think that Malema is very rude, so I’m not sure how he is going to treat us. I might give my vote to smaller parties, just for the sake of voting. The DA is not an option because it has too many white people. It might be true that the ANC or a black government hasn’t done much to change our lives but I think that if a white government were to come to power it might be worse. So white people might be funny to us and have their racist tendencies but you know that there is nothing more they can do. But if they were to come to power I think we would live more precariously than we do now. For example, you can be in a line at the till with a white person and you can see that they are undermining you just because of the colour of your skin. So if they were to come back to power how would things be?”

Born and educated in Grahamstown in the township, Amanda graduated from Water Sisulu University in 2015 with a Diploma in Marketing. She has struggled getting a job after her studies and is currently unemployed. She tells me that she tried to go back to university for another degree but her parents could not afford to pay. She says she doesn’t qualify for government funding because they don’t pay for postgraduate studies. “So I was advised at home to look for a job so that I can fund my own studies. I have not been successful. What I can see myself doing now is to volunteer for whatever company just for experience. Maybe when I have the experience it will make it easy for me to get jobs in the future”.

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Amanda stays with her two parents and three younger brothers. She also has a child who stays with them. Her father who is a driver at the municipality is the sole breadwinner, and her mother is a part-time domestic worker depending on the availability of work. She said that she would like a job at as an office clerk or to be in marketing. Her ultimate dream is to find a good job so that she can “build a house for her family, buy her father his dream car to thank him for putting her through school”. She would also like to save money for her child so that he does not have to go to the same schools as her. She would also like to take care of her brothers by putting them through school because her parents will struggle to do so.

Similar to other respondents, Amanda pointed out the lack of jobs in Grahamstown as an obstacle. “The things I wants to do require money, and since there are no jobs, I cannot achieve what I have set out to do. The government child support money that we are supposedly after is nothing when raising a child. A child has many needs and R300 is nothing. Sometimes you are sorry that you have a child because that would free you up to do other things. So we want employment and we try but we don’t ever get anywhere”. Due to the hardships, she also added that she was not satisfied with the life that she lives. “There are still many things that I want to achieve but don’t have the money to do so. I want to be able to afford the things that I want so I am not satisfied with my life until that happens. I cannot rely on my parents forever”.

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### 7.10. Alienation and calculation

Using Chipkin (2007), the study has so far has argued that black people have used the National Democratic Revolution to reimagine themselves as free beings rather than oppressed individuals. This means that many of them have invested their electoral fortunes in the ANC in the hope that the incumbent black government will use state resources to better their livelihoods. The comments above show that more than resisting power (whitist media), people are attempting to make the best of a bad situation. As Chipkin (2007) points out, the blackness that we have attempted to analyse here is one that is not only in a constant effort to subvert oppressive power, as was the requirement during the heyday of black consciousness, but also working for economic emancipation.

Therefore, as free individuals, black youths are free to reject mainstream society as an adaptive response, which results from their own rejection by that world. Discussed above is the fact that the collected responses point to the fact that black youths might disregard mainstream media prescriptions because the sector is far from understanding their lived reality. As we have discussed, post-apartheid South Africa has many people living on the fringes of society. There are many subalterns marginalised and prevented from taking part in the ‘new’ South Africa (Msimang, 2016). Therefore, although this group seeks the rewards which life in an industrial consumer society offers, what this rejection has resulted in is the sense of a need to find a political party which reflects not just their political identity but also their economic aspirations (Small, 1983). Most turn to the ANC as a driver of nationalist and developmental policies.

This group’s adoption of cultural norms and practices associated with liberation movements (the ANC or otherwise) is thus a calculated decision where they associate with a political dispensation that seems to care for their wellbeing. Although they might doubt the best

intentions of the ANC and other elite groups in society, their continued affiliation and lack of complete rejection of mainstream society shows us that these individuals are far from utterly rejecting mainstream society. This is what is meant by multiple identities. The term means that people combine cultural aspects from white and black society, different classes, and other social distinctions. When blocked or restricted from participation by race and capital, rather than taking up a new set of objectives in life, this group demand the right to equality of opportunity to fulfil their material aspirations through the existing channels of mainstream society (Small, 1983). They make calculated decisions about the best routes to a life of prosperity that might have been promised but is hard to reach.

Sen's (2000) insights and the interview data tell us that people who are provided access but denied participation will use their agency to subvert the system. The subversion in this case was not denying the ANC a vote, but rather to ignore the pronouncements of mainstream media (as the elections proved). This is not done because black people see the media as racist and therefore are obliged to defend Jacob Zuma, but rather because, for some individuals, support for the ANC still offers the most credible avenue for black people to advance materially. What this chapter notes is that it is important to understand material circumstance in order to fully grasp the way people interact with messages. In comprehending the above, what the researcher has learnt is that black township youths in Joza ignored mainstream media messages prescriptions and voted to keep the ANC in power because it is their belief that the party is best suited to serve their long-term welfare interests.

#### 7.10.1. Simphiwe, 35

Simphiwe informed me that he believes that the money spent on Zuma was too much and he did not agree with what happened. "Yes, it does happen that politicians are corrupt but we cannot allow it". As such, the corruption exposed by the media has made him think deeply about his vote. He said that he voted for the ANC in 2014 but he was not voting for the ANC to say that it was right. "It's a matter of people saying; if not the ANC who else is going to govern? People fear parties like the DA because they think that they don't have a history with the organisation. This is why people are able to look the other way when the ANC does wrong. People support the ANC even when it does wrong because of the history of the ANC and what it has done for them previously. I am also like that. I think that Zuma has had his mistakes but whoever else we place there is bound to have their own. That is why people then think that instead of wasting their vote on someone else, its best to stick with the party you know. But I

also believe that many people are watching the ANC closely and noticing that it is not following the constitution”.

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Simphiwe was born and raised in Grahamstown. He shares a house with his aunt. His mother is elsewhere in the township with his sister. He attended school in the township and a small farming town called Riebeeck East, close to Grahamstown, where he attained a matric certificate. Lack of finances disallowed him from studying further. Had he had opportunities he would have gravitated towards being a mechanic because he grew up around a workshop. With a situation as dire as his, he tells me that it is difficult to imagine where he will be in the next five years because life it has not changed for him a while. “I don’t know how things will change in the next five years. I don’t have a job right now. In order for me to do what I want to do or to achieve my dreams I can only do that with a job. If I could have a job, I would be able to say these are the things I am going to do to reach my goal”.

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### 7.11. Conclusion

Analysis of the interviews conducted with young people in the township of Joza demonstrated that black South Africans in this specific locale continued to support the ANC, not because of racial solidarity but due to the fact that the party offered the best ticket out of the depravity of their condition. The desperation for employment in Grahamstown is reflected by events around the country. As South Africa enters its third decade of democracy, the socio-political environment is becoming increasingly volatile as inequality deepens (Friedman, 2015). The country has high unemployment rates, and protests against a lack of basic services are an almost a daily occurrence (Runciman, 2017). This means that the politics of the National Democratic Revolution, which promised the overhaul of an alienating and exclusive system, remains highly appealing to a class of people at the very bottom of South African society.

In such a context of high inequality and continued limitations on economic emancipation, what the responses from participants has revealed is that people use whatever resources available to advance themselves. As such, we have to understand that people will possibly ignore mainstream media prescriptions, and continue to vote for the ANC because the party offers the promise of development programmes and a historical legacy of advancing black people. In this regard, Amartya Sen’s (2000) capabilities approach has been useful because it has the ability to shift the analytic focus so that human development – or its opposite, deprivation – is placed at the centre. The importance of Sen’s (2000) capabilities approach for the analysis has been the fact that its agency-centred conception of development shows the effects of formal

institutions on the agency and developmental prospects of individuals, and thus their response to those restrictions. Without collapsing our earlier argument against social determination, the next chapter, argues that a good way to see human beings is as capable agents. The chapter seeks to paint a deeper picture of the social milieu in which the respondents act.

## Chapter 8: Ethnography findings and analysis

One day, after more than a year living there, he decided to accompany some Piraha men deep into the jungle, and to his surprise he discovered a whole other side to their existence and language. They acted and spoke differently; they employed a different form of communication, talking to one another in elaborate whistles that clearly replaced spoken language, making them stealthier in their hunting forays... Suddenly something became clear to Everett: his decision to confine himself to village life and simply to learn their language was the source of his problem. Their language could not be separated from their method of hunting, their culture, their daily habits. (Greene, 2012)

### 8.1. Introduction

After conducting my last individual interview with Mellow, he mentioned that they spend their days playing dominoes at a nearby house. I asked to observe them for a few days, and was permitted me to do so. It has to be added that this was a strictly male space and my access to it was aided by my gender and relationship built in the interview stage. My familiarity with the township, Joza to be specific, where I had visited family members many times before, and the ability to speak the common language, isiXhosa, were added advantages that allowed my immersion in the environment and with the people. Therefore, although this male space has limited insights to offer, my motivation to go further, as the interview period had made me realise, was because the researcher has a sense that there was more that could be observed beyond what respondents could answer, and what I could ask. Having been informed by Morley's (1991) understanding that interviews are best supported by observation, I had a sense that what the interviews touch on but cannot fully account for is the notion of multiple subjectivities and the complexity of everyday life in the township.

In this regard, media scholarship that argues for the usefulness of observation and ethnographic work was instructive. Ang (1996) postulates that media consumption practices are dynamic and complex, and their complexity can only be captured by 'radical contextualisation'. Successful interpretive work must, therefore, recognise that media consumption is an ongoing set of popular cultural practices, whose significances only takes place in the "complex and contradictory terrain, the multidimensional context, in which people live out their everyday lives" (Grossberg, 1988: 25). Ang (1996) concludes that media consumption or engagement with media texts is a shorthand for a wide variety of 'multidimensional behaviours' and

experiences. The philosophy spelt out by Ang (1996), which informed the data collection methods used in this research, argues for a non-deterministic contextualization of interpretation.

Therefore, in order to fully understand the interpretation of individuals, the research had to explore in more detail the life-world of the participants and the wider socio-political reference points they refer to. This insight elaborates on the importance of a consideration of context which is tempered by a realization that people are not socially determined nor are they free floating atoms. In this regard, scholars of alternative social systems have argued that we cannot understand cohesive social units without understanding the individuals who comprise them (Skarbek, 2014). Therefore, contextualisation is not only about gaining a broad social picture, it is also about understanding individuals within their world in order to gain a better sense of their motivations.

Consequently, in order to further contemplate the statements articulated in the previous chapter, the study needed to radically contextualize the world in which the respondents live. Ang (1996) explains that radical contextualization means an end to conceptualising media consumption in isolation, as a series of separable independent variables which have clear-cut correlations with another set of dependent variables. This insight informs us that the activity, often simplistically described as media consumption, takes place within the broader contextual horizon of a heterogeneous and indefinite range of domestic practices (Strelitz, 1994). This is to say that we need to understand the meanings audiences make within the context of the “multidimensional intersubjective networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in concrete contextual settings” (Ang, 1996: 70).

## 8.2. The old age home

My first foray into the field to observe the life of my research participants was, as already mentioned, after the conclusion of the individual interviews. The interviews were initially designed to be longer-term projects that would provide the researcher with an opportunity to interview and observe each individual participant over a seven-day period. What I gathered from the early respondents was a resistance to being interviewed at their places of residence due to, what I could surmise, a lack of private space in the township home, and the lack of rapport between myself and participants. This then meant that the interviews could only be traditional question answer sessions at a venue organised by the researcher.

**Commented [BC44]:** I don't see a reason for this term to have capital letters as this is not, I assume, a proper name for this place but rather a generic description of it.

This arrangement changed halfway through the interviews when I met Noxolo and Mellow who shared a house together and allowed me to conduct the interviews with respondents they had reached out to in Extension Two. My collaboration with Noxolo and Mellow, although fortuitous, proved productive. Noxolo had been one of my first respondents – sourced through the snowball technique. After the conclusion of our interview, I drove Noxolo back to her house and she invited me to meet her two children. Mellow was at the house watching television. We struck up a conversation, and since I was short a few young men in the interview schedule, I asked Mellow to participate, and to recommend a few more people from his area. After conducting the interviews the next day, he mentioned that talking to me was a welcome distraction from the usual routine of playing dominoes.

I arrived at the former old age home, where they stayed, the next morning. The area is located in the greater Ward Two designation, which, is one of the poorest areas in the township of Joza, and in the whole Makana Municipality. The social standing of the area said much about its situation and the quality of life in the area because, in general, life in the townships of Grahamstown is quite dire. Furthermore, what was also peculiar about its location is that it is a street away from one of the more affluent areas in Joza, Extension Five – built in the apartheid era for working class blacks. The street dividing the two areas is the main road that takes you past distinguished landmarks such as the Department of Social Services, Department of Health, Nombulelo High School, Upstart Youth Centre, the police station, the Indoor Centre – all the way through Extension Five to the freeway. Most of the above listed service centres are clustered in a small area next to Ward Two and Extension Five.

Therefore, in such a location, and under its circumstances, the old age home sticks out like a sore thumb. However, considering the affluence of the location, it makes sense that this is the area in the township where an old age home was built. Those who know the previous arrangement say that in its heyday, the old age home was similar to a gated complex, with 10 to 15 similar and enclosed houses, whose one point of entry was manned by a security guard. Now it was an open, neglected and bushy area with half-demolished houses that are said to be a haven for delinquent behaviour. From what respondents told me, it could be gathered that the regression of the area cannot be attached to a single source.

People who know the history say that the houses were half demolished when the pensioners were moved to different post-apartheid RDP<sup>13</sup> developments. The democratic government that took over post 1994 with its RDP strategy planned to build houses for people in other areas, and maintenance of an old age home was not on the agenda. As people were relocated to the RDP houses, half of the two-unit house occupied by the relocated tenant was demolished to prevent new occupants from taking over. This intervention was not successful. A mixture of relocation and ageing created an opening, and the open houses were taken over by the younger relatives and those in need. The vacant two unit houses, with an internal toilet, were a luxury and those without homes and were seized by those desperate for shelter. Both Noxolo and Mellow say that they obtained accommodation in the area after their family grew too big and they could no longer stay with their parents.



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<sup>13</sup> Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is a South African socio-economic policy implemented by the ANC government in 1994. The aim of the programme was to address the socio-economic problems brought by apartheid by alleviating poverty and addressing the massive shortfalls in social services.

### 8.3. Chief's house

The dominoes were normally played outside and only indoors when the weather was bad or when people wanted to play into the late afternoon and evening. The house that was used to play dominoes belonged to Chief. The house has a small lounge area, with a two double couches, the kind used in the late eighties with the wooden frames and velvet wrapped cushions. Most of the back rest cushions were missing so when seated inside the house you had to sit up straight. The single rocker couch was the only seat with a full set of cushions. Most players preferred this seat because it was obviously the most comfortable in the room and had the added benefit of warmth on cold days. It must be noted that this was the one seat in a house with an ever revolving array of people, which Chief did not occupy much. Of the two doubles, one was out of order and the other so badly worn that a plank was placed underneath the cushion to keep it stable. On one occasion, Spy, a regular at the house, laughed so hard, he rocked back and the plank supporting the cushion subsided and he sank to the floor.

To accommodate the multitudes that came in and out every day, make-shift material, such as beer crates, an old bar stool, wooden boxes, 20 litre tubs, were utilised as seats. A small rickety coffee table was used on which to place a big square board, which was also used outside, to play the dominoes. The carpet looked eons old, and was seldom swept. Chief did not look the type who regularly cleans the house. In fact, in my time there, which was everyday visitation to the house for a month, he cleaned only once. Although the house had a lived-in quality about it, the lack of cleanliness betrayed the fact that the life lived there was not the structured township working-class life I was used to.

The two windows in the lounge area were both broken, and the hole in the one was covered with pieces of cloth. The other windows, on either side of the door, were left with gaping holes in the middle. I could not imagine how cold it got in the middle of the night when the Grahamstown winter got into gear. On a few occasions, during the day, the temperature was so low inside the house that we played dominoes with thick jackets on. The bedroom area was three steps away from the wall where the lounge began. The doorway separating the two areas was always covered by a thin raggedy sheet. The size of the space looked just big enough for a double bed and nothing more. Not wanting to intrude, I did not have the opportunity to see what that space looked like but I had a feeling that it was messier than the living area. It seemed that the bedroom was also a storage room and a make-shift kitchen. The bathroom was also a

storage facility filled with broken appliances and odd bits. It was not in use and everyone had to go outside to urinate.

What I also noticed early on was that the house did not have a TV. Although other houses in the area did, and people watched various programmes from time to time, what became apparent to me after a few days of observation was that the news was not a formal activity that was prioritised. This is not say to say that people were out of touch because there were various options to obtain news, such as radio news on cell phones. It just seemed that the people involved were not overly eager to get the news on a regular basis. The guiding activity in Chief's house was playing games like dominoes, smoking all manner of substances and conversation. The house had an air of community and fun about it. The games facilitated conversation about events that happen in the community and nationally, and in this space these events all become one mesh of conversation. Instead of a flood of news from mainstream media sources, everything here had a particular relevance to the time and activity in which they were engaged. Thus the one or two items that were introduced by individuals who felt compelled to do so were often prompted by something around them. Therefore, stories I often heard in the space were stories of relations, about events that happened close to home and situations that directly affected the individuals involved.



#### 8.4.1. The third place

Some of the respondents referred to Chief's house as Moses Mabhida stadium. The venue referred to is one of South Africa's premier football stadiums that was built to cater for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The respondents might have imagined the house to be a stadium because it was sparsely furnished and, as such, conducive to a group of people coming together to enjoy various games together. To gain a better understanding of the situation, it was necessary to refer to a theory not covered in the initial and speculative theoretical discussion. Oldenburg's (1989) notion of the third place proved useful. Oldenburg (1989: 37) writes that the third place is characterized by simplicity, and the lack of fanfare because in the minds of those who frequent them, third places are "simply a social event for everyday life and need not be anything more". Third places are, therefore, establishments that maintain relatively low profiles in appearance, where pretension through appearance is minimal or plain (Foster, 2013). It was clear to me that Chief's house fulfilled the function of a third place. The house then represented a space in the location that hardly has social spaces for unemployed young men to come together and pass time by playing board games, making conversation, building

camaraderie, smoking marijuana and doing various other drugs. These were activities that were clearly used to pass the time much quicker than being alone. The third place environment that was Chief's house was therefore a 'vital outlet for connection' in a township situation where there is endless waiting for opportunities that may never come (Oldenburg, 1989). The coming together and building of associations at the house was important because that activity allowed people to pass time together. Having been immersed in the physical discomfort of watching days pass without much to do, I noticed a week or two into the observation how handy a distraction the activity was for decreasing the boredom that was life in the township.

Oldenburg (1989) further explains that the third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work. Third places become collective grounds for the free association of individuals (Forster, 2013). Steinkuehler (2005), writing about multiplayer online gaming in American youth, supports Oldenburg's (1989) thesis, stating that a third place can function as a novel form of informal sociability. Oldenburg (1989) thought these spaces necessary because they are establishments in which one can unwind, and not feel as obligated as one does when faced with the pressures of work and home (Forster, 2013). In our case, these spaces are where people go to seek refuge from the pressures of unemployment and home. As such, Oldenburg (1989) summarised third places as ideal and necessary spaces that are contextually and socially different from an individual's first and second places: home and work (or lack thereof) (Forster, 2013). The defining features of third places that were identified by Oldenburg (1989) are as follows: neutral ground, leveller, acceptance and participation, conversation, accessibility, regulars, low profile, homely and a playful mood.

#### 8.4.2. Conversation

One of the distinguishing features of third spaces that this research can attest to is conversation. Oldenburg (1989) argues that conversation is the central characteristic around which the third place pivots and is the primary reason for its existence. The centrality of conversation relates well with the leveller characteristic of the third places, because its spirited and uninhibited conversations are eagerly pursued by all involved (Oldenburg, 1989: 29). As a leveller, the third place is a space where an individual's rank and status in the workplace or society at large are of no import (Oldenburg, 1999). As such, conversation in such a space is encouraged through games such as dominoes, cards, or billiards (Oldenburg, 1989). This was the case at

Chief's house, because there were constant dominoes and cards games played, and the games facilitated plenty of conversation.

What I noted in my first few days with the group was that they spoke easily about all manner of subjects. Although it was difficult for me to follow the conversations at first because of my lack of context, I could hear that the conversations were broad and personal. The conversations were at times commentary on the game, but most of the time about various issues. Like any other conversations, the talk moved unstructured throughout the day with subjects prompted by various things. Passers-by were a frequent starting point. One conversation started when one individual commented about the 'niceness' of wood loaded on a donkey cart making its way past the dusty road. Another participant said they were nice but fickle, and only good for a braai rather than cooking a cow because a cow needs much thicker logs. This led to an expansive discussion about firewood, which, eventually led to a conversation about golf and the danger of snakes on the courses.

Apart from their random and unstructured nature, such conversations allowed people to express multiple viewpoints about a whole range of topics. I also noticed that the conversation spread good-will by being the source of friendly banter and laughter. There was a lot of joking, which speaks to the playful nature of the environment, but the jokes were also insightful in the sense that they were not made at the expense of the next person on the street. What I gathered listening to many of the conversations was the individuals recognised their low status and thus did not engage in bad-mouthing other people. They spoke often about their own experiences, and what they have seen and done.

The only acrimonious talk I heard was when a man driving a Mercedes Benz passed the game. Someone called him a woman, and that comment sparked conversation about the advances that he has made towards other men. Surprisingly, considering the high rates of homophobia in the township, the conversation was not as spiteful as I would have imagined. One participant said that the gays tell you that they will not tell anyone if you engage in sexual activities with them. People laughed at this but were not disgusted by the comment. They also laughed at one guy who said if you want to try it out you must just turn off the lights so that you will not see the other person. The openness of this conversation is not to say that the group is homophobic, nor that they are not, or that poor people are open to alternative sexualities. It is merely to reason that their low status might mean that they are readily accepting and not quick to judge.

### 8.4.3. Fluid space

As a gathering spot for games and conversation Chief's house combined the last three features, in that it acted as a neutral ground that was homely, playful and a place where individuals were free to come and go as they please. Oldenburg (1989) argues that third places are characteristically homely and they have an air of ease and warmth. In essence, third places are considered neutral ground for those who, particularly in more densely populated areas, are vulnerable to negative environmental characteristics such as violence, over-crowding and unemployment. The third place provides a relatively safe environment (or one that is free of violence from members) where anyone may enter and leave without consequence and without any undue social pressure (Forster, 2013; Oldenburg, 1989).

What I could gather was that Chief's house fulfilled such a function. Acceptance and participation in the space were not contingent on any prerequisites, requirements, roles, duties, or proof of membership (Forster, 2013). In the course of my stay with the group, I noted, on more than one occasion, that there was a constant flow of people at the house. As such, in the initial phase, it was difficult to keep up with all the faces as people disappeared and then others appeared. People popped in and out; some did not stay long but the numbers were constant. There was always a group of about 10 or 11 young men involved in different activities together at the house. The fluidity of the space made sense given that most were unemployed, and some were still actively searching for jobs or engaged in short-term projects. If the membership was formal, it could have been difficult to allow for multiple tasks and job hunting.

The extreme fluidity of the setting was demonstrated by an incident where one of the regulars, Wayne, was interrupted (by someone from outside the group) while playing a game of dominoes. The interruption led to a fight, and Wayne had to stop playing and handle the situation. When he returned, life and the game had continued without him. He had to wait his turn and announce his availability for the next game. The incident made me realise that any available member is the player supposed to play. This demonstrated the looseness of membership. The setting is loose, and in that regard that it has no formal membership. If you leave, you lose your place, and life goes on. No one speaks for you, no one waits for you.

So continuous are activities that even when Chief was away on a job, the games and conversations at his house continued without him. Thus, as collegial as the space was, it was also defined by no set membership, but constant movement. There is no set place for anyone because there is no guarantee that people will be available on a day-to-day basis. Even though

many of the regular people are available most of the time, the norm was an allowance for looseness of structure. This goes to show how limited and valuable work is in this environment, so much so that it dictates how people come and go. Therefore, if Wayne, or another member of the group was not around for whatever reason (work or family commitments), no one worries or goes searching because not one is pinned to stay. Everyone chooses to join in because they have to time to do so. If you do not have the time or inclination, play continues without you.



#### 8.4.4.1 The Regulars

Despite its loose structure, Oldenburg (1989: 32) notes that visitors are attracted to a third place because there are regulars who give the place its character, who “assure that on any given visit, some of the gang will be there”. Forster (2013) writes that the regular group of patrons who frequent the third place add to being the heart of the social environment by welcoming all. Oldenburg (1989: 32) states that such regulars dominate not in a numerical sense but in an affective sense; “setting the tone of conversation and the general mood of the place”. Identifying the regulars that fulfilled this function at Chief’s house was not an easy undertaking because of the changing faces and the conversations that were deeply coded by familiarity.

In the first few days of the observation, I noted some of the respondents spoke and joked about attending school together. Some of them spoke about having gone through manhood initiation together, which is often an indication of an age cohort. The relations were thus very familiar and intimate, and a great deal of camaraderie between the players was unmistakable. Therefore, it appeared that despite the changing faces, everyone seemed to generally know each other well. I also surmised from conversation that they had all lived in the area for a very long time. This made it difficult for a newcomer to know which name was associated with which story. So, in the beginning, even though I followed what was said on most occasions, I did get lost in the conversation a few times. But, soon enough, a picture of the regulars started to emerge, and that would allow me know the characters involved or the scenes described.

#### 8.4.4.2. Kevin

The characters are interesting not only because of their inherent sense of self, and what they add to the space, but because the variety of person that exists in the space, by virtue of its open spirit. Kevin was a good example of third places as levellers, or spaces of equalisation between individuals not so equal. I noted in the field that Kevin was a testament of the fact that the activities undertaken in this space can be a bridging of gaps between different classes of people. While many were visibly (in terms of dress and what was confirmed in conversation) very poor, it was also evident that others like Kevin came from relative affluence. Their situations differed. But in Chief's house, they came together as unemployed and found pleasure and some measure of meaning in playing games and making conversation together. The board games played facilitated such association and, in a sense, played a role in denouncing social distinction because during play all could be equal.

Life in Chief's house was about exhibiting skill and joining in conversations sparked by those feats, which then built community. The more I lived among them, the more I felt the burden of life in the township, and the pleasure brought by the community built around the games. The more I stayed the more I understood the importance of this alternate space occupied by those living a life of extreme deprivation. The dominoes gave the player a sense of knowledge, skill, power, and self-assurance. Players banged the board as they placed the domino chips. They were joyous in celebrated victory, they loudly laughed at losers and soaked in the bragging of the winners. Additionally, being hard games to master, the dominoes and card games are good for inclusive play. No one person, no matter how skilful they are, could dominate the game. This ensured that the game did not get stale, and this was vital to the longevity of the space.

While Chief and many others are visibly born poor, a fact that was confirmed by the many stories of poverty they told, Kevin came from a more stable working class home. As a way to explain his association with the group he readily admitted to squandering opportunities at school (he dropped out of university on his own volition). During my observation period, it became evident that Kevin was taking an extended break from a life (from the expectations placed on those in his position who have the means to further their education). As such, although he lived in the more affluent Extension Five, he was a regular at Chief's. When I conducted the individual interview with him, he said that if he could go back to school, he would, and maybe this time he would be ready for the experience. So he struck me as a person who was at peace in the world created at Chief's house. I got the sense that his home environment pressured him to succeed in some way, which might have meant he had to be someone else. At Chief's house he was at ease because the rules were relaxed. The space accepted him more than any other – with none of the pressures he might have faced at home or school.

The more I observed the more I realised that as easy as the life at Chief's could be, Kevin was still a bit of an outsider. It seemed that he sat in a world that accepted him because it was its nature to do so, but he was still out of place. One of the younger guys, Busta, often taunted him for smoking Chicagos (a cheap brand of cigarettes smoked by the poorest in the township). Busta would say that Kevin was changed because he never used to smoke Chicagos before. On another occasion, Kevin had a stack of documents with him. Another regular member of the group, Philz, grabbed the papers from him and saw that they were job application forms. With a certain sense of acknowledgment for the fact that Kevin is fated to find a job and therefore leave one day, he said, "you will find a job but first he must walk" (which meant that first he had to suffer). Therefore, even though this world accepted him because it is the norm, it was not wholly free of judgement, considering that everyone knew that he was in the best position to get a job or change his life somehow. This made him an outsider in this world because it judges people who do not take opportunities.

#### 8.4.4.3. Bola

Bola is probably the best example and the embodiment of the critical way in which people who waste jobs and drink away opportunities are viewed. He was sometimes also called teacher, and I suspected that this was because he was a former teacher. He lost the job many years ago due to substance abuse. The regulars also informed me that he also comes from a family of

teachers. His mother is still a practitioner and now has the responsibility of looking after him. From what I could gather, every small amount that he manages to get from his family is spent on substances of various kinds.

There is an oft repeated story that Bola had it all when growing up. He had the flashiest clothing and the best lifestyle because, unlike many others, he came from a solid working class family. His brat pack lifestyle reached such heights that he is purported to have been drinking buddies with the late South African songstress, Brenda Fassie. A story that he confirmed was that at the height of his hedonism with Fassie in Cape Town, he got so intoxicated he tried to walk from Cape Town to the Eastern Cape. He was found outside of Worcester, 100 or so kilometres from Cape Town, incoherently blabbering to himself. Some say that is when he started showing signs of being 'out of order', a state from which he has not recovered.

Like Kevin, one can sense that Bola is accepted and liked, but he, more than anyone else, is taken with a tinge of disapproval, because he chose to be at the bottom and stay there. His small frame does not help his standing in a violent and physical world. Added to that, he is a heavy drinker and, unlike Chief, he also smokes the 'pill'<sup>14</sup>, and the two substances are a heavy dosage which knocks him out. The combination of all these aspects makes him 'unproductive', a term I started using in the field to refer to members of the group who hardly brought resources into the space and were very dependent on other members for support. The combination of all these factors often made Bola the butt of jokes. Despite all these factors, my strong suspicion was that his biggest flaw, in the eyes of those around him, was that he squandered opportunities, and this lowered him significantly in the hierarchy.

#### 8.4.4.4. Chief

The owner of the house, Chief, is materially speaking on the opposite end of the scale to Kevin and Bola. He came from an impoverished background. People like Wayne, who knew Chief well, often told the story of Chief as a young boy frequenting factory rubbish dumps around Grahamstown looking for any sealed left overs. Now in his early forties, he probably had the least amount of prospects of doing anything more with his life. He had been a security guard in his younger years but that had dried up for him. Other than seasonal National Arts Festival jobs, he was in the category that Statistics South Africa deems discouraged work seekers.

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<sup>14</sup> A highly addictive drug that is popular in South African townships. It is called the pill because it is mainly sold in the form of a tablet.

It has to be noted that in his lack of opportunity he is the perfect example of social alienation leading to alcohol and substance abuse. I noticed in the field that Chief's substance abuse was the reason he cannot have much of a stand when sober, because he is constantly in a state of drunken stupor. Although at forty years old and a senior in life by Xhosa<sup>15</sup> township standards, he had little to show for it. As such, the younger ones liked teasing him. Despite the flaws and his unproductivity, and although he is often mocked, one got the sense that the mockery was often well-meaning attempts to try and put him in line, and to hold him up. What I surmised was those around Chief recognised that he had lost his way, but he came from such a humble background that they could not blame him. So as flawed a senior figure as he was they liked him and respect him. I got the sense that those around him knew that deep down he was a good guy. If you were to take away his house, which was often his only material contribution he made to the group gatherings, I think that Chief's value lay in the fact that he was a warm and entertaining person who liked everyone around him to have a good time.

#### 8.4.4.5. Black

Black was similar to Chief in the sense that he was constantly high or inebriated. He partook in every smoking session and also drank often. He gave me the impression of a man consuming himself, killing every available piece of himself. It seemed like he was closing shop, clearing all stock, until there is nothing left. His days were spent looking for a smoke and spacing out. On one occasion I watched as he woke up from a high (drug induced state), to one of the younger guys, Polo, preparing to smoke mandrax pills. He gingerly got readied himself to smoke again. It was not long until he was spaced out once more in the same spot.

The story goes that he was a playground bully when growing up, but now he is mellowed out by drugs. Although he might be verbally abusive from time to time, people told me that he was not as malicious as he was in the old days. Although worn out or slender now, his physique and his confrontational attitude confirm that he might have been a bully in his time. This was pointed out when he held one of Bland's (an old man who lives in the area) vicious dogs by the mouth. Despite the dog's spirited attempts to wriggle free, he shut its mouth hard with one hand. After a while he let go. The dog squealed and angrily lashed at him. He sat there, high, and watched the dog run away. A few minutes later when he walked to the bathroom, the dogs ran away from him in fear. Someone noticed that the same troublesome dogs that randomly attack all who walk by are scared of Black. Black was an illustration of how physical strength

Commented [BC45]: ???

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<sup>15</sup> Xhosa is the ethnicity of a majority of people living in the Eastern Cape.

could compensate for a lack of economic productivity. Because he was feared by the younger members of the group, his low productivity did not make him a target for ridicule.

#### 8.4.4.6. Mbaj

Mbaj, who is probably in his late 30s, painted a picture of a man determined to reform despite the rubble. He was one of the few people who was born at the old age home. He told me that only four people out of the nearly thirty that have claim to the houses were actually born there. He told of life in the 'home' when he used to live here with his family. In the family house, which he now owns, the three children used to sleep in the kitchen because there was only one bedroom. His parents, who are now deceased, used to occupy the only bedroom. His two sisters are married now and have moved into RDP houses in other areas of Grahamstown.

Mbaj was well known for drinking binges that went on for months, but when I met the group, he had given up alcohol. At the time he was focused on being sober and getting back his security guard job he had lost three times due to alcoholism. He asserted that, given a second chance, he will not lose the job again due to drinking. He told me he wanted to go back to his security job because it at least offered him R4000 – R5000 a month. He said he hated the fact that he was now dependent on piece jobs that offer no stable wage and often rendered him unable to purchase basic necessities like paraffin. His house is dark because he cannot afford to pay the amount needed to clear his outstanding balance with the service provider. He said that he decided to quit alcohol for a while because he grew tired of asking for alms from his family and did not want to be dependent on people. He kept saying to me in conversation that he wanted to be his own man.

Mbaj was good friends with Mellow. He was evidently more at peace when Mellow was around and had more conversations in his presence. He seemed to like the respect that Mellow commanded, and the respect that he had for other people. Therefore, what Mbaj also revealed was the tension between the looseness of the structure and traditional Xhosa concepts of manhood (discussed below). One could see that, although he liked the group set up, he came from an order that upheld the need for a man to stand up for himself and be respected by other men. His thinking was still influenced by the belief that one needs to be respected through financial success and independence. In a situation where respect was hard earned and easily lost, he commanded respect, because, although, there was a great deal of sharing in the space, and he often shared in the resources, he showed a measure of restraint and independence. By keeping to himself, Mbaj did not allow the younger members of the group to taunt him. I

gathered that he was desperate for a bit of capital because we wanted to maintain this respect. Unfortunately, by the time I left the observation site, the National Arts Festival was over. Mbaj had failed to get the security guard job he was holding out for, and was on a binge.

#### 8.4.4.7. Flash

The striking feature about Flash is that in the group of about 20 people that I met and had prolonged relationships with during the period of observation, he was the only person with a well-paying full-time job. He worked at a local school, Nombulelo, as a part of a NGO extra-curricular learning programme. You could gauge when talking to him that he was an activist at heart and passionate about social development. This kind-natured and pedagogic self was present in the way he related to people within the group.

Flash grew up in the township and continues to live there. He spent a lot of time at Chief's house because he told me that the guys are his friends and he enjoys their company. It seemed to me that he was conscious of the fact that he offered a moral and material compass, or the trajectory out of squalor. He shared the story of Mathuse with me this one time. He said that Mathuse went from a brick layer to social worker. One day while on the job as a part-time bricklayer he saw an advertisement for scholarships. The department he was building, Social Development, was recruiting matriculants. Mathuse applied and obtained the scholarship. A few years later, he now has a house and a car. Flash maintained that Mathuse was an inspirational story like him. In this respect, Flash knew that he was an example for the young ones to see where education could take them. I sensed that he gravitated towards the group because his activism told him that his mere presence could offer some light to those who cross his path in such a space. In return, I think members of the group appreciated having a person in a different position as a regular. They showed Flash an extraordinary amount of trust and warmth.

#### 8.4.4.8. Wayne

One person Flash spent a lot of time with was Wayne. John Wayne was the name he went by in full. Although I cannot be sure, from what I could gather, the Hollywood angle came from the fact that he was a smart, articulate, funny, and quick thinker. Wayne was someone adept at using humour and a fair degree of bravado to diffuse situations. He was also full of stories, and knew a lot about what was going on in the township. If Mellow was the more practical, hands on guy who was good at carpentry, Wayne was the dreamer with business ambitions. He would talk to me many a time about the dreams he had for the shebeen he had starting at his house. It

made sense that the people he was close to, Flash and Kevin, were levels above him because Wayne saw himself further than his predicament. It seemed that Flash had taken the role of mentor and teacher to Wayne. Flash would therefore counsel him on a range of subjects. For example, this onetime Flash warned Wayne that he must stay clear from dating school girls. He also discouraged him from drinking whilst handling business. Flash would often say “That is not what a business man does”.

Wayne often reminded me of a quote from a football documentary about the ambitions of soccer players from impoverished areas. The analyst said of these youths: “Soccer is always a battle between who you are and who you want to be”. In this respect, one can argue that Wayne lived the life of a successful businessman and that of a broke man in hopelessness circumstances. In fairness this was very much the life of two worlds that was lived by everyone else. People had a life they dreamt about, and a life they lived. I guess the difference between the dreams and ambitions of marginalised people are those better off is that for the former their dreams hardly ever crossed their reality. Wayne was thus a hard reminder of the frustration of holding onto one’s dreams, of wanting to reach them, but being very far from the levers that make them possible. His stories of success seemed to be a way of acting out his alternate, of him constantly living it out. What I also came to appreciate by spending time with him was that, in a situation so characterised by limitation, it was hard not to dream. To illustrate the bare-knuckle nature of survival in the township, Wayne said to me one time: “This is another world my friend. You know when you try date a woman, she might ask you why you are dating but you are not working”.

#### 8.4.4.9. Leeds

Leeds was interesting because although he lived in the old age home area, he hardly partook in the gatherings. He came to Chief’s house from time to time but did not play any games or drink or smoke with the group. I thought it important to draw out his character because he allows the study to avoid the idea that everyone in the area gathered at the house to partake in the camaraderie or delinquent behaviour. When I asked him why he does not associate with the group, he said that he is always out on short-term jobs. This sounded like a diplomatic answer to me and I suspected that the group was not his reality. An avid church goer, hard worker (I worked with him at a part-time National Arts Festival job as part of the research), he is on another end of the continuum. He was not content with passing days playing board games. He was, therefore, active in his job seeking, even in the context of scarce jobs.

Leeds struck me as a person always on the hunt for a piece job, and when none was available he was occupied by some other duty, be it church or another association. Although he drinks, the personal structure or routine that he kept, the connections that he maintained via church, etc. allowed him to be more active in his job search. I noticed that his wider network meant that people called him for painting and for other sorts of odd jobs. He told me that as busy as he is, he does sometimes unwind, but with different people from different areas. It was clear that Leeds avoided the drug induced ease of Chief's house. My best guess was that he did so not because of religious inclinations, but because he is on a different path, the path of being a poor but 'decent', skilled, clean, church going young man. This is to live poverty in the township from a different angle. You could choose to do the drugs and play the board games or you could choose another path. And there are many like him in the location who are not entertained by drugs. People like Mellow and Wayne, are variations of this.

#### 8.4.4.10. Mellow

Mellow was also distinct, not only because of a stable home family situation (the nuclear family he is building with Noxolo) which is different from most in the group, but also because I could see his attempts to live beyond the limits of the environment. At the time of observation Mellow lived with his girlfriend and two kids. And so, unlike many others, he often had household responsibilities to attend to (but it helped that he lived next door to Chief). One on occasion, his eldest daughter (six years old) came to fetch him because he was needed at home. This was after he had spent the morning at his house constructing a dog house on the behest of his girlfriend. It seemed that spending time at Chief's house was refuge from those responsibilities. He told me that he works and works and goes to the house to "chill" with the guys. Chief's house was, therefore, true to form, a place to be free of responsibility, both those of home and society.

It must be noted that women were never quite as free of responsibility as the men. This is because when they did have a chance to relax together, they always had to do so while tending to responsibilities which include taking care of children and household chores. They also have the responsibility of keeping order or the men in check. Women thus have to be the sober heads in the house because the homes with children depend on them keeping stability. From what I saw in the field, although some drank alcohol, women hardly partook in in the substance abuse. And when they did drink, they did so mostly on weekends. Mellow was one of the beneficiaries of the responsibility of women, because a stable girlfriend meant a stable home life. The homes

without women were often no different from Chief's, which is to say they operated outside the norm and were often disorderly and full of substance abuse. There are a few homes where couples abuse substances together, but in most situations the women keep order and contribute to income.

The desire to be an upstanding citizen meant that Mellow had to make a conscious decision to extract himself from some situations and be productive. He told me in the interview stage of the research that he had quit smoking drugs several years ago. His sobriety might then have given him a measure or distance from the substance abuse which allowed him to be more proactive in his job hunt. He was then able to be a member of the group but not partake in all activities, like the drug abuse. Mellow then answered any concerns about the initiative of young people in the township. He had moved into the area when his family grew too big. When he moved in his front yard was a rubbish dump. He spent months cleaning it up. After that task was completed, he decided to erect a fence around his house to prevent further littering. The work of erecting the fence took longer than he expected because he lacked material. So he had to stop often and save up for the materials he bought from second-hand hardware shops.

Despite the challenges, the finished job was a work of solid craftsmanship. The pillars are all thick and sturdy, and evenly spaced out. The enclosed yard area was quite big, probably half a rugby field. Despite, the size, the work was a testimony to his ability. The wire between the poles did not sag, but was evenly stretched out. A few days after I started the observation, he finished the job by constructing a gate. He started slowly, from early in the morning, by sawing planks and nailing them together. Soon enough a gate was up, complete with barb wire on top and hinges on the side that allowed the gate to swing.

What impressed me is that, while he did this, the games at Chief's house continued. The work, which spanned almost a year showed determination to build a life. Mellow's yard displayed the ability for a person to remove themselves from the group, from the game and the smoking, to do whatever other activities are necessary for them. In this regard, the task he completed added further insight to my earlier discussion about the fluidity of the space. Individuals come in and out because they are not stuck in a museum of playing dominoes and smoking. The space understood that people have other responsibilities and thus are not always available. Chief, for example, had a part time job constructing big temporary tents when he was called. He was also able to hold onto the National Arts Festival seasonal work when the time came. Bola also had a seasonal job at a factory.

The playing of games and the sitting around were things people did when they had the time to do so, when time was abundant and no other opportunity presented itself. In other times, they had other things to do given the opportunity. What I grasped from this was that their world was closed off, not because they want it to be so. Their world is not something that has locked them in so much so that there is no other life. What I observed about the respondents was that they were a community of people that was built from the rubble of half demolished houses where no self-respecting middle-class person would live. They played dominoes and smoked together because those activities allowed them to pass an abundant amount of time together. Sitting comfortably on a couch, watching people walking in and out of Chief's house one day, Wayne randomly turned to Mellow and said, "Mellow, we live a good life". It was at that moment that I realised that out of the ruins of torn down houses, they have made a life here and built a community.



## 8.5. Heterogeneous time

As much as the discussion might have proceeded to view the gathering at Chief's house in positive terms and as the ideal described by Oldenburg (1989), it is more nuanced and complex than that. It was clear to me that as much as Chief's house was an informal meeting spot that fulfilled a civil democratic function of gathering and information sharing, it was also a prime location for the intake of drugs. Judged from the outside, such activities might have made it appear that Chief's house was a rampant drug den rather than a harmless third place. Having taken a closer look, I want to argue that as much as Chief's house was a hotbed for 'delinquent' behaviour, it also played other significant roles in the lives of those involved. This then means that it is possible for the space to be all things at once, a drug den, safe haven, meeting spot, games centre, drinking place, etc.

Allowing the movement away from the utopian ideal of a third place is the work of Foucault (1984), which postulates that utopias are sites with no real place because they are spaces that have an inverted relation with real places. Utopias represent society in its ideal form, whereas societies are much messier than that. As reviewed in Chapter Five, Chatterjee (2003) argues that real spaces or postcolonial societies are heterogeneous and unevenly dense. Pattilo (1998) similarly argues that social organisations do not exist as an absolute value, but represent a continuum, the ends of which are complete chaos or utopia. Therefore, Chief's house was, it would seem, the order that is found between the two ends of the spectrum (Pattilo, 1998) as a space with extreme delinquent drug abuse, and a safe space from social alienation and physical assault.

Similar to the points made by Fraser (1992), Foucault (1984) argues that real places (heterotopias) exist at the very foundation of civilisation as counter-sites that invert the utopian ideals held by society. Foucault (1984: 3) maintained that as "simultaneously mythic and real contestation, in which we live or a counteraction of the position that people occupy these spaces, heterotopias, are outside of the norm but in constant relation to it, and are thus a sort of mixed, joint experiences." Foucault position was, therefore, slightly left to the one held by some cultural studies theorists who argued that popular culture is structured by the opposition between the power-bloc and the people (Dahlgren, 1997). This view holds that the power-bloc consists of a relatively unified, relatively stable alliance of social forces – economic, legal, moral, aesthetic on the one hand - and the people on the other hand which constitutes a diverse and dispersed set of social allegiances constantly formed and reformed among the formations

of the subordinate (Dahlgren, 1997). Foucault (1984) thought of the contestation less as a fixed binary and more of an inversion of systems.

### 8.5. Deviance

One of the principles of heterotopia that Foucault (1984) highlighted is the principle of deviance. Foucault (1984) argued that heterotopia is a place where the behaviour of individuals is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm. One can argue that the substance abuse I observed at Chief's house is outside what is considered normal in South African society by any measure. Therefore, together with the positive aspects discussed earlier, which include shared alternative space, safety, and support, individuals come together at the house to abuse a variety of substances. Foucault (1984), then, gives us a sense that Chief's house is a real place, because when the history of structural violence in the township is considered, such poverty-stricken gathering spots cannot be ideal spaces of collectivisation devoid of ill. This is why the sense of mixed systems captured by Foucault's (1984) notion of heterotopia is important because it allows us to see the complexity of real places, which have the ability to have several incompatible sites in one. As was noted in Chapter Five, Mbembe (2001) argued that the above is not surprising in the postcolony because these societies are pluralistic and have an ambivalent nature. As a result, people who inhabit such spaces adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires, which means that people here can thus diverge from the expected social norms.

Having noted the tension between power-blocs, between social groupings and larger social systems, Cohen (1972) argues that deviance, in a sense, emerges and is stabilised as an artefact of social control. The individual employs his deviance, or a role based upon it, as a means of defence, attack or adjustment to the problems created by society. Taking from Fiske (1987), Assefa (2005: 69) argues that socially alienated youths have the potential to use delinquent behaviour to subvert dominant ideology by losing their socially constructed identities and therefore the structure of domination and subordination. The point is that, although outside the mainstream of accepted activities in the township and South African society in general, the use of mandrax and marijuana were, nonetheless, accepted in the space. In Chief's house they had a place and an order. Rather than being invisible, as most drug users are in Xhosa society, the smoking process was an intricate affair that lasted the whole day, and sometimes went into the night.

The process of smoking, with its system of first and second smokers (explained below) seemingly had its own rules and norms. It sometimes led to robust arguments about the

technicalities of whose turn it was to smoke. It was after repeated observations that the system started making sense. The mandrax were smoked with a bottle kop (head), which is a broken mouth piece of a glass bottle. Part of the preparation was to crush the pill using the back of a teaspoon. The powder was then spooned with the sharp tip of a knife, and scattered onto the marijuana stashed in the wider end of the bottle head. In order to smoke, individuals covered half the mouth of the bottle with a thumb. This allowed them to inhale the marijuana smoke created by the burning of the marijuana by a second participant. The second smoker used two match sticks to burn the marijuana, which, combined with the deep inhalation of the first smoker, turned to a fluorescent red with each pull. After a few drags, the bottle neck is given to the second smoker who did the lighting for what is called 'second pulls'. The process is then repeated, starting with the second smoker.

Rounds and rounds of smokers would come in through the day and night. Those that came later would add fresh marijuana to the bowl used up the previous group. They would ease into conversation in the house by cracking a fresh pill to scatter onto the weed. I was interested that it was hard for other members of the group to be judgemental because those who do not smoke mandrax, benefited because they would take a bit of marijuana from the stockpile and smoke a joint. Some evenings the house would be a cloud of smoke. Smokers would grimace from the pain of inhaling hot smoke from the bottle neck. Despite the pain, they would smoke to the point that they forget their train of thought. Some would pass out mid-sentence with drool stretching from their lips. Alcohol sometimes had a similar effect, with weekends leaving drunken bodies strewn on the grass and gravel.

## 8.6. Social (Dis)organisation

Based on the above recollections, it would be easy to argue that the substance abuse in Chief's house was a form of social disorganisation, which is defined as "the inability of a community structure to realise the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls" (Sampson and Wilson, 1995: 45). However, Mbembe (2001) encourages us to think more broadly about postcolonial contexts, maintaining that, although they are chaotically pluralistic, they nonetheless display an internal coherence. Skarbek (2014) argues that the best way to understand the internal coherence of non-mainstream systems is to recognise that they are inhabited by rational people. This he calls the rational choice approach to social study, which has two elements: people are self-interested, and they respond rationally to cost determined situations (Skarbek, 2014).

Therefore, when assessed critically, social organisation is argued to be goal-oriented, and refers to the collective efforts of communal actors towards a common end (Pattilo, 1998). Pattilo (1998) uses the goal orientation of social organisation to explain that communities who might appear disorganised may sometimes be organised differently. This is to say that communities who lack essential ties to public forms of social control such as the police, government and social service agencies might appear disorganised because they find novel if not unconventional ways to cope with the social strain (Pattilo, 1998). Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argue that stable low-income areas often develop organised criminal subcultures where the neighbourhood structure is characterised by close bonds between criminal and more conventional elements.

In such locales, the drive for neighbourhood stability can foster the formation of an alternative opportunity structure based on organized crime, which benefits both criminal and law-abiding residents (Pattilo, 1998). In most instances such arrangements develop in these neighbourhoods only because of “the pressures generated by restrictions on legitimate access to success and goals” (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 171). Similar to the impoverished individuals at the centre of this study, Skarbek (2014) writes that incarcerated criminals lack social institutions that promote social order and economic activity. Due to the limitations, these individuals tend to maintain order using alternative, if not criminal means. Similarly, low-income neighbourhoods that have weak internal economies and lack sufficient connections to mainstream employment, and cannot rely on the same institutions that law-abiding citizens rely on to meet basic socio-economic needs, often create alternative structures (Pattilo, 1998; Skarbek, 2014). Alternative structures, are therefore, created by the marginalised to subvert the impediments that prevent the attainment of social goals. This means that undesirable and unconventional behaviours might be an attractive option for a significant number of residents who have to deal with the pressures of social alienation.

### 8.7. Discipline and productivity

The discussion so far has considered the fact that the drug usage witnessed at Chief’s house might seem abnormal. However, when a more critical lens is applied, one can argue that such unconventional behaviour is often taken up by individuals in situations where the weakness of social structures requires the creation of alternative systems. In such a fluid and paradoxical situation Skarbek (2014) points out that accepted norms are not a highly rigid or held as inherent belief, and thus are not fixed. Rather, the norms that develop emerge and change over

time to help people coordinate social interactions in difficult conditions. Therefore, in order to understand urban youth cultures, we have to move beyond the conventional and mainstream indicators. As such, social norms must then be assessed as a means instead of an end (Skarbek, 2014).

McDonald (2013) argues that the capitalistic productivity model of selfhood that assumes that the only social order is one constructed around the work-place principle of discipline, sacrifice and duty is too rigid and simple to apply to more complex areas of the world. McDonald (2013) argues that we need to adopt a new model of social norms, one which is structured to acknowledge the risk non-working individuals deal with in terms of challenge, initiative, decision making, competition and extreme deprivation. This new paradigm of individual action and self-creation is characterised by uncertainty, weak roles, and a culture of personal and intimate communication. McDonald (2013) argues that being the first generation to have to negotiate a transitional and polarised period, young and middle aged individuals in these contexts experience a weakening of the place and roles of institutions.

Due to the fact that the place of social institutions in postcolonial societies is weakened by the distance subalterns experience when it comes to the mainstream, the alternative for the marginalised, the unemployed, in our case, is the ability to enter into relationships with the each other, rather than obedience and fulfilling prescribed roles (McDonald, 2013). Young people in these situations break the normal rules rather than abide by the old orders, and in this case it is by using drugs excessively and by coming together as different age groups to subvert the Xhosa notion of segregated cohorts. Theorists working in 'traditional' Xhosa societies have highlighted the perceived breakdown of the principle of *ukuhlonipha* (respect) (Lambert and Wood, 2005). *Ukuhlonipha* in Xhosa society regulates inter-generational as well as all other hierarchical social relations (including marital and age-differential peer relations) (Lambert and Wood, 2005).

Before continuing to explore the tenuous ties the young people in the township have with social institutions, it is worth noting that the above is also a reflection on Foucault's (1984) notion of heterotopia. On this subject Foucault (1984) wrote: "heterotopia begins to function when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time". This period institutes a layering of the social order because traditional ways are mixed with new emergent methods (Foucault (1984). South African history scholars have demonstrated that industrialisation and the rapid institutionalisation of migrant labour, in response to the demand for mining labour at the end

of the nineteenth century, had profound effects on the traditional black homestead structure. This process of history destabilised the organisation of rural agricultural production and gender and inter-generational relations (Beinart, 1982; Mager, 1999).

The erosion of traditional African ways of life by adoption of western lifestyles, and the increasing lack of employment, resulted in the contemporary situation where African elders lament the moral corruption of African youth (Lambert and Wood, 2005). In a world characterised by weakened social structures that do not allow the rigidity of previous social arrangements, it is understandable that the old-guard perceive young African male to drink excessively, abuse drugs, and are involvement in violence and criminality (Lambert and Wood, 2005). One example of exactly such a situation of an elder enforcing traditional mores was Bland, an elderly man who lives in the area. Bland would from time to time join the group for a drink. Although, he also displayed a tendency to break the very rules he sought to enforce by drinking with men his junior, on one occasion he refused to sit with Busta (one of the younger members). Busta, at first, refused to leave because, I presume, he was not used to being asked to do so in what is usually an accommodating space. One could see that Chief was caught between two places; on one end the traditional order required him to follow Bland's lead, and on the other Busta was a productive regular visitor to the house, who brought in resources for smoking. Under pressure from Bland, Chief, eventually gave in and asked Busta to leave.

After the incident I noted that Bland displayed the traditional respect I would expect in any Xhosa environment. The reason that the earlier discussion on colonisation and the tie between respect and productivity is important is because, by destroying the traditional economy, colonialists forced men to work menial jobs to maintain their families and traditional standing (Lambert and Wood, 2005; Glover, 2015). In a postcolonial situation characterised by a scarcity of jobs in the formal economy and increased depravity, the result has been that traditional systems have been stretched because their definitions of productivity no longer hold up. Older men such as Bland were, therefore, in a position to enforce traditional rules because he lived with his wife, works as a vet for an NGO and has three cows. This is to say he has sources of income and therefore can afford to go according to old structure of productivity and seniority. He could thus take a stand because he did not need alms from the younger members, or rely on the group social structure for resources.

Therefore, although, there is a tacit adherence to the principle of respect, which is in keeping with rigid hierarchy of manhood practiced in Xhosa settings, the space exhibited, above all

else, easy relations between the participants, and a greater acceptance of behaviour outside of the norm. At the same time, the space displayed a high sense of freedom from most societal restraints; as such younger individuals are allowed to smoke with those much older and often talk back quite brazenly. The younger members spoke back or stood up for themselves often and backchat the older men frequently. I noticed that they especially did not like questions about school and attendance. It was as if someone was putting them on the spot, and they acted very hostile to a question about school. One incident that I recall was when one of the younger men, who smokes mandrax, was jokingly questioned about school, and he said that the older person asking him about why he was bunking should focus on the dominoes, and that what was taking place there was dominoes and not school. The incident showed that Chief's house was an alternate world that allowed for looseness because it was a world created to counter the rigidity of the old structures.

### 8.9. Carnavalesque

The above discussion points out that formal institutions and traditional codes are less valued in real spaces such as Chief's house, and in similar township settings because those forms of social organisation are not viable means anymore. Traditional codes are therefore subverted by those that are used in this space. I noted in the field that it was difficult for members of the group I observed to be rigid in a situation where the old structures had broken down. Chief's house was thus an alternate world with ties to the old structure but a place that was something else entirely. It was clear that, unlike the traditional Xhosa structure, and hierarchical capitalistic structure of productivity, the senior members could not command as much respect as they 'normally' would because the nature of everyday relations in the space operated differently. The rules were lax because the older men sometimes depend on the younger members for support. In classic allegory, they resembled a band of merry men, together in the forest, far from the crown and court politics. In such an altered state, far from what is considered normal, they have to make new rules from the old, and from everyday sufferings.

On this note, Mbembe (2001) insists that the disorderly nature of relations in the postcolony reveals not its rejection of mainstream society but an intimate relation to it. This thought is taken further by Bakhtin (1941) who, in exploring how people cope with a rigid, stratified and oppressive social structure, argues that the medieval idea of the carnival permitted the alteration of social order (Mbembe, 2001). The carnival is then a space where individuals are temporarily excused their usual behavioural expectations and are free to act as they please (Bakhtin, 1941).

The carnival is characterised by suspension of the hierarchy through inversions, debasements and profanations, which bring about the equality of all human beings because barriers of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life are overturned (Davidson, 2008).

For Bakhtin (1941) then, the carnival is a space where the rules, regulations and expectations of social customs are temporarily suspended or overturned. During carnival time, life is subject only to its own laws, which is to say, the laws of its own freedom (Davidson, 2008). As such the carnival is a place where people are free to be playful and free of inhibition. The carnival is also represented as a space where social hierarchies dissolve or become inverted, where the sacred and the profane are mixed, and riot and disorder prevail over certainty and stability (Nurse, 2010). Individuals here are free to pursue a different order from the one subscribed in normal society. Instead of rigidity of normal society, the carnival turns everything upside down, and so the usual rules/expectations/roles that apply normally fall away (Nurse, 2010).

Mbembe (2001) argues that the postcolony is similar to such a carnivalesque space because, like the carnival, it is associated with riot, disorder and pandemonium. Due to the dense nature of the colonial space and the degradation brought by its history, it becomes a place where eccentric or strange behaviour is welcomed rather than condemned, and individuals have licence to behave in an uncensored way, unlike in 'ordinary' mainstream life (Mbembe, 2001). The space created by such challenging social orders is one that is undefined and ever changing because new arrangements have to be made all the time (Chatterjee, 2001). Lawlessness is the law; disorder is the order. Chatterjee (2003) argues that the political society in the postcolony is a space where the boundaries of action are ill defined, and are thus constantly in the making, which allows for greater scope for what is deemed 'acceptable' behaviour.

#### 8.10. Domain of drunkards

The community created at Chief's house is one that takes advantage of such a space, the rules of order are upended and a new, unrestricted and tentative social arrangement is realised. It is only after recognising the novelty of the social order, and its significance to those that partake in it that the researcher was able to grasp that such alternative systems do not mean 'stupid'. Rather, when understood on their own terms, they are rationale systems with a logic that is affected by their surrounds (Skarbek, 2014). Therefore, over and above the undesirable element, what the loose structure maintained at the house with its heavy drug use illustrates is the effectiveness of the group setting to generate basic items for communal use.

Skarbek (2014) argues that in order to understand the prison social order – of which norms are an important part – we need to understand what problems arise that the norms attempt to solve. Skarbek (2014) writes that, due to the fact that prison inmates are denied access to the mainstream economy, they tend to create their own order. According to this literature, those who are denied an opportunity to participate in the mainstream economy will find other means to make a living. Their attempts will therefore replace the false unity of the dominant system with a lived unity in contingency, which creates a zone where a new system is possible (Nurse, 2010). People in such situations are able to eliminate barriers between people created by old hierarchies, and replace them with alternate visions of mutual cooperation and equality. This understanding can be applied to the analysis underway.

The discussion has already covered the fact that the post-apartheid South Africa is plagued by myriad social problems, one of which is high unemployment. What I witnessed in the field, once I looked past the non-normative nature of the life in the space, were the attempts to move beyond such limitations. In a situation where every small thing was scarce, everything became a currency and part of the economy of the space. Small everyday materials were very valuable: matches, cigarettes, pockets of marijuana, rolling paper, pills (mandrax), food, etc. What could be obtained was shared. Therefore, maintaining a group setting made it easier to guarantee a constant supply of material because the responsibility to earn or acquire money or resources was also shared. The more fluid and accepting the space, the greater the resources because more people could contribute. Due to such measures, the drugs were constant; they come in regularly with different people. With each piece job done, whatever it might be, the income was spent on drugs and other supplies. This arrangement meant that there was a constant pool of resources. The participants put the little money they had together and substances were made available. Chief was an obvious beneficiary of the system. The communal aspect guaranteed that those who went without resource had something to smoke everyday – sometimes to the point of abundance.

The substances are so abundant at the house that one of the regulars, Spy (not listed above), said one day that if a person were to be a person stationed at the door to take stock of what is consumed, it would amount to a car instalment. The rest of the guys agreed. That statement illustrated that there is a recognition of the significant amounts of money that were used in the space. In response to the statement, when I asked Mellow whether they had thought of starting business together he said they had. Although the idea was sometimes discussed, Mellow admitted that in the end they often did not follow through. I took this to mean that although

there is creativity in creating alternate spaces, this resolve is often expressed as in disorder and excess, instead of socially acceptable behaviours like starting a business. I realised that what I was witnessing, therefore, was a form of life whose defining feature is festivity – a life lived, not through the lens of practicality, but as festive and fun.

The space was, therefore, not simply a deconstruction of dominant culture, but an alternative way of living, based on play and pleasure. The pleasure, from what I could surmise, was excess. When considering the concept of the carnival, we can see that such a space provides a positive alternative vision to the grimness of the present realities. By being at once real and ideal, universal and without remainder, the carnival space constructs a utopia of abundance and freedom (Davidson, 2008). In this regard, Mbembe (2001) writes that the domain of drunkards in the postcolony is thus characterised by the loss of any limits or sense of proportion. Taking from Foucault (1984), who argued that heterotopia is an overcompensation, Mbembe (2001) notes that the postcolonial space and its mechanisms are invested in a surplus of meaning because of the fact that they take from a variety of sources all at once. As such, Mbembe (2015) argues that the postcolony is characterised by a distinctive style of improvisation, a tendency for excess and a lack of proportion. Mbembe (2001) writes that the purest expression of control in situations of disorder is conveyed by a total lack of restraint, as privation is turned to plenty, and vigorously consumed.

This is what I noticed happen at Chief's house. The group setting allowed for an abundance in an environment surrounded by deprivation. However, the little money that is often obtained by each member was, more often than not, used on drugs and alcohol and seldom on food or positive business ventures. People like Chief and many others drank and smoked the whole day. They would go on drinking binges, especially during the weekend, that are only halted by the dryness of the week. It was not out of the ordinary to see a drunken body passed out on the grass on a Monday afternoon, a casualty of the abundance of the weekend. Some would miss work and lose jobs because of substance abuse. Some lost their health but still continued. Chief, on more than one occasion, failed to pitch for a job because he woke up drunk. One time, he told me, he had to stop work early on a Monday because he was vomiting from drinking the night before. This is to say that people in the space had a tendency to overdo and thus exhibited the loss of limits argued by Mbembe (2001).

### 8.11. Grotesque subversion

Scholars argue that in the carnival debauchery and vulgarity readily go hand in hand, and the marginalised often express a sense of diversion from mainstream strictures by overdoing what it considers negative (Davidson, 2008). I want to argue that the excessive drug use is part of the improvisation of the space, and it is part of its (dis)orderly character. The grotesque and the obscene are two essential characteristics that identify postcolonial regimes (Mbembe, 2001). The grotesqueness in the carnival is seen as the abundance and large amount of food and drink consumed by the body. By doing so, need is upended by collective organisation and turned into abundance. “The essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Birth and death always go together - The very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character. This principle is victorious, for the final result is always abundance, increase” (Bakhtin, 1941: 62).

This transgression and the disruption of expectations (being a have-not) is celebrated. Positive aspect of this degradation, dismemberment, degradation, downward motion, which may be thought of as disgusting, are thought of as positive (Nurse, 2010). In this regard, Bakhtin (1941) writes that it is through the negative and the ugly that the beautiful emerges, because it is only if something dies, can it spring up to new life. In depicting excess, the carnival celebrates incompleteness, transgression and the disruption of expectations (Nurse, 2010). As such, the carnival often performs subversion by showing a kind of symbolic degradation aimed at bringing elevated phenomena ‘down to earth’ – to the material, bodily or sensuous level (Nurse, 2010). The essential principle of grotesque realism, writes Bakhtin (1941: 19), is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity”.

The point of the discussion is not to glorify drug use, and paint it as liberating, but, as pointed out, when under extremely oppressive conditions undesirable behaviours, made grotesque, can be used to subvert the order and to live a life alternate to the mainstream. The grotesque is, therefore, a good vehicle for us to investigate the choice of substance abuse in a postcolonial township setting as a tool of subversion, instead of other possible avenues for emancipation. Having spent time in the field, what I grasped was that the drugs were often used to gain access or rearrange a world that is out of reach. They were used and abused in order to deal with a debilitating mode of domination. In such a context, the drugs allowed people to invent their

own rules. Similarly, literary scholars have convincingly argued that the substance abuse indulged by the Drum writers<sup>16</sup> of the 1950s was a way to deal with the social alienation experienced by township residents denied social mobility (Chapman, 1989).

What the Drum writers manifested in their colourful language and larger than life personalities were the contradictions between identification with a specific local reality and the desire to find universalising and transcending image of experience (Chapman, 1989). In a space where the aspirations were frustrated, many of the educated African class turned to alcohol to cope with their marginalisation. Wynter (1992) summarises this phenomenon as such: the poor cannot be contributors to the process of production and thus deprived of their labour power become frustrated with the inability to consume and thus turn to substances to stifle their feelings of worthlessness. Such a reality often leads to disillusionment and alcoholism. Can Themba, one of the famed Drum writers, admitted to using alcohol to dull his despair, saying that he buried his life “under a load of Sophiatown bottles” (Themba, 1961: 49).

Modisane (1986: 39), another Drum writer, reflected in his autobiography that “people in Sophiatown drank for one reason only – to get drunk, as, for them getting drunk was a purposeful destruction of the pain of their lives, a drowning of themselves in this orgiastic expenditure”. Modisane (1986: 39) further wrote that his peers used drink as a way to break out of the strictures of apartheid, and to escape in their own terms. It is written that most of the main drum writers lived a lifestyle that was defined by drinking hard (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed (2017) writes that their maxim was “live fast, die young and have a good looking corpse”. The one anomaly of the group, Eskia Mphahlele, once said that the group had a ‘kamikaze attitude’ towards alcohol (Snyman, 2003). Chapman (1989) summarise the antics of the Drum writers saying that the drinking should be seen as a desperate defence against the forces of economics and politics of the time which cared little for the quality of township life.

## 8.12. On Violence

Heeding the warning by Bakhtin (1941) that not every carnivalesque act is emancipatory, it is important to note that the freedom of the carnivalesque subaltern township space comes with a certain vulnerability. As we discussed using the insights provided by Mbembe (2001) and Foucault (1984), a heterotopia is not utopian, and it is never a single order, but a space with several logics operating in the same context. Therefore, the consideration that has to be made

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<sup>16</sup> A now famous group of writers known for their literary Journalism and hard drinking in the 1950s and 1960s.

Commented [BC46]: Is this the correct word here?

is that, although the alternative social world created by marginal young people may present stability (McDonald, 2013), the society as a whole might present a contradiction to those efforts. Therefore, the freedoms generated by the group at Chief's house may shield participants from the adverse experience of the township, but it does not completely negate the vulnerabilities to deprivation of life lived on the margins.

In order to proceed with the discussion, and to further understand the motivations of the individuals in question, it is important to briefly contextualise township life. Rabkin (1975: 24) writes that although the nature of South African townships varied, it was often characterised by "almost total lack of amenities". According to (Mangu 2012) the situation in townships has not changed much with many residents living a life of poverty in overcrowded conditions. Overcrowding, together with the absence of amenities and regulations contributed to the unenviable high rate of crime and violence in the township (Rabkin, 1975). Rabkin's (1975) discussion touches on the complexity of violence in the township in the sense that social repression was physically manifested. The violence of social alienation, which includes violence to the mind, discrepant schools, unemployment and housing discrimination and racism, often led to a situation where the township is smothered in physical violence (Rabkin, (1975).

It was, therefore, not surprising that violence was an ever presents possibility in the township of Joza. The violent loss of life was a regular occurrence, an ever present threat, and a constant reality. The notes taken in the field reflected the regularity of violence in the township. Many of the stories I heard from individuals involved violence. On one weekend two regulars of the group were beaten up, Kevin and Mayor. Another weekend Chief's neighbour, an older man called Popeye, who lives with his wife in the connected unit, was ransacked and stabbed at home. Violence in intimate spaces was also on the offering, with gender based violence not far off. One of the regulars, Spy, caused a stir one night when his girlfriend ran away from him to Chief's house crying and bloodied. I heard about the incident the next day when a few guys relayed the story disapprovingly. The streets also presented random acts of violence and, seemingly, fights were unavoidable. I was at the shop with Philz one day, when he was accosted by a younger boy which led to a scuffle. When it was broken up they both vowed to finish the fight and threatened to use weapons the next day. After that, all Philz could talk about was his readiness to fight this guy when they next meet. Another member of the group, MG, summed up the difficulty of life in the township, saying that fights are not only life threatening but also pose the possibility of a prison sentence.

As random as the violence appears to be, we need to understand that larger social injustices and failed policies that led to system of inequality contribute to a culture of violence that is a tragedy for all. The roots of the modern culture of violence in South Africa have to be traced to colonialism and apartheid in South Africa where the compartmentalization of the colonial world was maintained by force (Fanon, 1952). The upkeep of the centuries old order of two systems required the subjection of black people to extreme coercion and their confinement to economically unproductive township areas that acted as labour reserves for white capital (Legassick, 1974). This order, Fanon (1952) insists, is carried into the postcolonial reality. The postcolony is also made up of a series of institutions and a machinery which, once they are in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence (Mbembe, 2001). Because the colony and postcolony are both birthed in violence, and subsequently maintained by it, it is therefore easy to understand that violence becomes endemic to the postcolonial condition (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006).

Therefore, in a world saturated by violence, where violent acts happen at random, violence becomes banal because, as Arendt (1963) points out, violence is banal because its ubiquity makes it more difficult for human beings in the twentieth century not to be implicated or addressed by it. What this means is that violence has become so thoroughly normalised in modern society it is considered normal (Hariman and Lucaites, 2012). To talk of the banality of violence is thus to consider the ways in which exposure to violence makes its accommodation and normalisation all too easy (Hariman and Lucaites, 2012). This is what Mbembe (2001) refers to when he argues that violence in the postcolony, that it is so commonplace, it is ultimately banal. Banality carries the dual recognition that ordinary people adjust to violence and deprivation and necessity, so much so that they can become accustomed to almost anything (Hariman and Lucaites, 2012).

### 8.13. Ultrareality of township life

An important element that the discussion will turn to is the absurd reality of township life. Writing about the war and hate crimes committed by Nazi soldiers, Arendt (1963) wrote that there is a danger to the normality or banality of violence because, in a saturated world, violence is so common that it is stupid or devoid of logic, and so needs no explanation. This means that such a space allows the breeding of more violence because no logical account is required when horrors are committed because people are not surprised. Arendt's (1963) argument is

transferable to the postcolony in the sense that violence is so common in the township that it becomes normal and people are not surprised by its occurrence.

As I pointed out earlier in the discussion, when we touched on pleasure, life in Joza can be miserable, but through intoxicants, and the abundance of these materials, it is made exciting, safer and bearable. Drugs, therefore, can be used to reimagine the violence and the alienation. However, in doing so, Mbembe (2001) writes that people have the power to be excessive in their exercise of creative abuse. As such, it has to be noted that this grotesque situation can be a double edged sword. Snyman (2003), for example, argues that the Drum writers used alcohol to cope with the tough situation, but they were, in essence, destroying themselves. With its negative effects flagged, I want to argue that the grotesque drug abuse is a way of subverting the normal order because people take their lack of access and make it excessive. The grotesque and the obscene thus can be used as a means of erecting, ratifying or deconstructing particular regimes of violence and domination (Mbembe, 2001). Derision for restraint can be used as subversion, which can be a way of differing with the strictures imposed by mainstream life.

Bakhtin (1941) portrays the carnival as an expression of a 'second life' of the people. Through the grotesque measures of the carnival, people can resist or voice concerns against the dominant culture by subverting its main principles, such as restraint (Bakhtin, 1941). In a world that denies them the fullness of life through subversion, people often turn the rules of mainstream society on its head, into a world where they can be the decent human beings they want to be. Although they might abuse drugs, and act in a way that might be interpreted as vulgar, one can argue it is through that drug abuse they can reclaim their humanity. It is when drunk or high that these heavily restricted township dwellers are able to reimagine the life they live as exciting and fun. It is through the drugs they can overlook the physical and emotional violence of the township and see a world beyond the limitations.

The Drum writers again offer a good example. Much like multi-modal post-apartheid township dwellers who live in a world of possibilities brought about by political liberation and the deprivations of postcoloniality, the Drum writers were the paradoxical product and part of an oppressive socio-economic structure and also of infinite possibilities that were brought by resurgent resistance movements (Snyman, 2003). The life and times of Drum writers such as Can Themba has been described as writer intellectuals trapped in the ambiguous reality that was township life (Snyman, 2003). In a world full of violence of different orders, as noted in the field, there is so much violence in the township, that a way to make sense of it is to live it

as a fiction or fantasy (Snyman, 2003). Therefore, in order to make sense of it all, and to make the emotional and physical violence of this life a manageable aspect of their lives, people relegate violence to a hyper-realistic fiction.

Snyman (2003) argues that the literary achievement of Drum writers such as Can Themba, who fluctuated between fantasy, escapism and harsh urban reality, was the ability to both create and reflect on the unreal reality of urban township life. Snyman (2003) further notes that the work of the Drum writers has been lauded for illustrating how boundaries between fantasy and reality can fade in such a way that a new multidimensional reality comes into existence. Modisane (1986: 88) had the following to say about their experience: “I directed my energy to my writing, determined to use it as a weapon for gate-crashing into the worlds that rejected me; my writing showed a studied omission of commitment, the histrionics of tight fisted protest, and in my first published short story, *The Dignity of Begging*, I created a satirical situation in which I sat back and laughed at the worlds which rejected (me)”. Therefore, the often comedic ultra-realism of township life that Drum writers depicted created a kind of escapism and simultaneous resistance to apartheid (Snyman, 2003).

The argument proceeds further by arguing that the dwellers of the old age home are similar to the Drum writers in that they used substance abuse as a way to reframe a harsh reality – making it dramatic, fun and therefore all the more bearable. As noted, the marijuana and the alcohol made it easier for those involved to see the fun of life, making the harshness life more enjoyable. What I noticed in the field was that when men go to the tough menial work often acquired by people in their rank, they drink or get high. When sitting in the sun the whole day, absorbing the tediousness of the lack of opportunity, they drink. Some people told me there is little hope that their life would change and they were thus resigned to the reality at hand. The substances, therefore, made the reality of the life not just bearable but more interesting. The alcohol or the substance itself become an activity because people have something to do together other than sit. Chief got drunk one time and randomly ran next door to help a man that was demolishing a shack. We watched and laughed as he drunkenly ripped the zinc sheets from the wooden frames.

This was an example of what I had seen many times in the township, men raising their spirits using alcohol and other substances. I noted that I did not think they used alcohol because they were depressed, but because they needed an upper that allowed them to see what is in front of them in a new and interesting way. Living in the township then could be likened to living in a

fishbowl; you are so numb to things because they happen repeatedly that you need something to help you reshape the reality. I noted in the field that the drinking and drug usage were not escape mechanisms, because you cannot quite escape the environment you are in. Rather, what the substances allowed was the creation of different fictions or realities. Mbembe (2001) writes that the unreality of postcolonial life is such that it easily lends itself to the production of fables. I heard many stories about being drunk and stories about the extraordinary obstacles that were overcome when people were in their element.

I also noticed the drugs allowed a person to play different characters, or constantly be engaged in a performance piece where the person involved is always on show. When thought of abstractly, the life lived in the township seemed akin to the drama of *The Truman Show*, where a person's life is a lifetime of performance. In making this surreal life more interesting, what I deduced about the substance usage was that the drugs made the world liquid. The drugs made the environment alterable, and allowed you to change it by doing something - be with friends, have a good time, be a hero. This is comparable to a situation where one would 'normally' be, a victim of circumstance and stuck in the unalterable reality of poverty of township life. The drugs made things exciting and thus time would pass more easily, and the life was less strenuous. For users, I observed that the substances allowed one to alter an immovable world, and to add excitement and intrigue to what should be a pitiful life.

The notion of the surreal ultra-reality of township life was also prompted by a brief interaction between Spy and Bola one day. Spy was making fun of Bola who had been high, and thus seated, motionless on the coach, with a big smile on his face, for a long period of time. Spy pointed to him and said that Bola was watching everything that was happening at the house on television. This was to indicate that Bola was so high and happy that he seemed to be having an out of body experience. This moment sparked an interest to explore the sensory element of life here - how life in the township is so unreal that its events often seemed farfetched, and best suited to fiction. Everything seemed grotesque, in the sense that everything was exaggerated or "odd, unnatural, bizarre, strange, funny, ridiculous, caricatural" (Davidson, 2008). So bizarre was the life in the township that the longer I stayed the more it appeared to be a reality that was beyond belief. This is why it was understandable that when intoxicated, people 'watch' the situation around them, instead of being overwhelmed by it, they are rather entertained.

One of my observation days particularly highlighted the sensory and hyper real element of life in Joza. It was a good while into the observation, after the first month, when I had built a good

rapport with most of the regular members. Due to the familiarity with them, the participants would allow me to accompany them to different places, mostly the store, and on drug runs. On one such occasion, I found myself in Spy's room smoking, and laughing at adverts on television. Spy's house was a short five-minute walk from the old age home. On our way back from the shops, we passed by his house, and for one reason or another, there was a reason for us to enter. His shack was at the back of his grand-mother's two-bedroom house. The property was no different from the houses in Ward Two, small, dilapidated - standing as reflections of the deprivation of the area. Regardless, his backroom shack was surprisingly spacious and firmly built.

With the TV in the corner, across the bed from the bench we sat on, the marijuana smoke and the lack of light in the room made the whole experience feel like we were in a private movie screening. There two windows, both covered with curtains, restricted the sunshine coming in. The bed that formed the bridge between us and the television looked comfortable, as if it would swallow you. Above the bed were pictures of South African personalities like the rapper AKA, and politician Julius Malema, and other celebrities. The room was also decorated using old computer discs pasted to the wall.

I was in the room with Kevin, MG and Spy. I listened as they spoke about many things, including people from around the area who buy work, the scarcity of jobs, training colleges, their desire to go train to be paramedics, police officers, fire fighters, traffic officers. They spoke about the possibility of at least earning R10 000 a month and living a good life. The longer we stayed, darkness of the room, smoking, chatting, watching television, the less movie theatre it seemed and the more I realised how much of the outside world we had shut out. The television brought another world, action movies, drama, comedy. I could hear the township in the background, women calling children, cars, dogs barking. Although we had shut it out, it was also very easy for that world to come to you, for a person to knock and come through the door. The experience in the room was therefore an experience of the sensory and organic nature of everyday reality. We could choose to partake in township reality, to step outside, and talk to people, or we could continue to shut it out and be in this dream state where the outside world is a far away planet.

#### 8.14. Tuning out

To grant a measure of reality to what can be an unreal life, Wellman (1968) argues that people often choose to live the reality of their lives wholly differently from the mainstream reality that

invalidates them. Wellman (1968) writes that most adherents of the liberal democratic sphere see young men and women who spend their days 'sitting in the sun' as 'social dropouts'. They are often thought to be uninterested in 'making it' or they do not want to achieve anything. Most such people, those on the fringes of society, flunk or are kicked out of school, and are thus believed to have no intention of matriculating (Wellman, 1968). Ignoring the structural deficits that were highlighted in Chapter Six, liberal ideology assumes that if young men make more effort to find a job and learn the skills required for jobs (which means staying in school longer), they too could become fully-fledged, working members of society. The assumption then is that if they were to make more of an effort to learn the ways of the liberal civic world, they would make it in life (Wellman, 1968).

In this regard, education theories have argued that the above are examples of a deficit approach to society because they view the cultural ways of being of many communities of colour as deficiencies to be overcome (see Lee, 2007). The dominant cultural practices demanded by schools and many social institutions are often in line with white, middle-class norms and literacies (Lee, 2007). Those that fall outside those norms are seen as less-than and unworthy of a place in society. Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches is to eradicate the cultural practices many students of colour brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices (Paris, 2012). Black youth are indirectly told that, in order to get a job or fit into the mainstream, their appearance would have to be altered or they have to change and fit it. When these youngsters fail to do as expected, to find a job, to finish school, etc., the only conclusion that is deciphered is that they do not want to 'succeed' (Wellman, 1968; Willis, 1977).

This is to reiterate the points made in Chapter Six that more conservative perspectives in society view the failure of marginalised people to find employment and to integrate as a fault of their own instead of a fault of structure. The data shared in Chapter Seven also speaks to this problem. Although shackled with heavy financial burdens, in most instances, my interview respondents highlighted that they take job possibilities very seriously. The young people interviewed spoke about having been actively and earnestly searching for jobs. Some were still doing so, while others were now disillusioned. From what I could surmise from the interviews, their desire for work was not the problem. As the young people have pointed out, the real problem was what society demanded. It asked that they make it at all costs, that they fit in, dress the part, speak the part, while ignoring their lack of education and society's lack of jobs.

With these challenges disregarded, the lack of employment is often blamed on the individual instead of the society (Wellman, 1968).

Wellman (1968) writes that when faced with this impossible path to 'success', young people subsequently reject the determination mainstream society projects onto them by simply ignoring what is required of them. Instead of making such efforts, they play games like dominoes or they engage in delinquent behaviour. What essentially takes place, as Chapter Two and Chapter Four pointed out, is a daily struggle between white, middle-class ideals of conduct and behaviour, and a black community response to that challenge. Therefore, these young people responded to the challenge the way that oppressed black communities have always to white threats to black self-respect, by using subtle forms of subversion. Wellman (1968) argues that historians and sociologists have pointed out that slaves built into their rituals subversion meant to counter the loss of self-respect that was the result of enslavement. In the same vein, Wellman (1968) states that young unemployed black youth accept the terms of democratised citizenship, but they do so on their own terms. They covertly talk back to dominant mores by 'tuning in' when they needed to and 'tuning out' when such modes were not beneficial to them (Wellman, 1968).

The play of dominoes that I observed at Chief's house gave me a picture of people that had a similar relation with the world. They could engage with the township and the greater Grahamstown space when they chose, and at other times they could choose to turn their backs on a world that has turned on them. Together with the drug abuse, I noticed that the game of dominoes was used frequently as a device to 'tune out'. The game not only passes time but gave the participants something to focus on, something to build interaction and conversation around. Because no one player is able to master the game, the players win a few games each, stay on a bit, but mostly they go round and round, with everyone getting a chance to play. So in this round about world with constant rotation, you see the world and comment on it, and you also zone out of the world and concentrate on the game. Instead of focusing solely on the street, watching life pass, watching others better off pass, you can watch them with one eye, the other on the game. Instead of your full gaze on others, and their gaze on you, you can turn your back slightly and concentrate on a winnable game.

As I have previously pointed out, it would be easy to liken this game-play and the drugs to escapism, but it is not that simple. The game (and to some extent the drugs) allows a control in a life that seems not controlled by you. This was evident by the self-assurance that players have

when they greet those who pass when playing. On one occasion, a police car drove past. As it made its way towards the house, you could see that the police officer's attention was on the group of young men sitting outside Chief's house. When it were directly across from us, the officer waved, and the group simply waved back. The self-assurance of the group was vocalised by Mellow, who was seated and in a game, and who responded vocally: "molweni madoda amakula" (good day big men).

I am not sure that another group of men who were idly sitting would have greeted with such confidence, but the jovial spirit of this group created by the assurance of no wrong doing, and being engaged in activity, made it possible for them not to second guess themselves and think that they were being sniffed out. The board game, therefore, replaced the lack of activity created by unemployment. At the risk of being accused of equating playing the game with finding a job, I want to argue that the men were given a sense of purpose and self-respect by the game. They therefore displayed a sense of confidence when greeting passer-by's, who, in some instances, looked to be in better standing than them. They could say hello with confidence because they were not a group of men out of conversation, staring at the sky, and kicking each other at the feet. This was a group of men engaged in activity who were relating to the world in their own terms.

I noted in the field that it seemed that the men turned their backs on the world not because they sought to isolate themselves but were rather taking a position to counter the disrespect brought by a lack of employment. The men, therefore, seemed not to care much for a world that did not care about them, and rather focussed their energies on building their personhood. This is an idea expressed by Biko (2004) that the South Africa that dehumanizes a black person will be shunned by them, and they will opt to build a country that recognizes them as people. The lively world of dominoes must thus not be seen as a world created with the intention of isolation, but rather as a parallel world that allows purpose in difficult circumstance. The substance-fuelled existence and domino play becomes a world in which the participants are able to live an active if not fuller life. This is a world outside the mainstream order they are outcasts from, but one that is in constant relation to the mainstream.



### 8.15. Calculation and subaltern theory

The purpose of subaltern studies was to redress the focus on elites in various academic disciplines of history (Guha, 1983). The group believed that the historiography of Indian nationalism, for instance, had long been dominated by elitism both colonialist and bourgeois-nationalist (Guha, 1983). Such historiography suggested that the development of a nationalist consciousness was an exclusive and elite achievement (Guha, 1983). This sort of writing, therefore, was argued to be unable to acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by people who are independent of the elite. Guha (1983) claims that what is left out of the class outlook of such historiography is a 'politics of the people', which, he believed, was an autonomous domain that operates independently of elite politics. Spivak's (1988) critique of subaltern studies clarified that the autonomy of the subaltern groups as not a binary opposition is diverse, heterogeneous and overlapping. The point conveyed is that no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an ideal subaltern subject that is entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks (Spivak, 1988).

The above observation of the play of dominoes and card games confirm the subaltern understandings, that the game play is a rejection of the world outside of the dominant one, but also in relation to it. The world is rejected because people cannot participate in it, but they are always looking for ways to do so. The ANC and their relation to the party in the political society is a way to gain entry into a world they are denied access. Wynter (1992) argues that in the wake of decolonization and the extension of civil liberties to black people, the jobless have been made to pay the price for social transformation by bearing the weight of the deviant in society once exclusively preserved for blacks. Spivak (1988) writes that the oppressed, under the auspices of accumulated capital, have no unmediated access to levers of power. Therefore, for the poor, gaining such access has essentially become more difficult after liberation because, in an increasingly digitized world, they are seen as surplus to the requirements of labour (Wynter, 1992).

This in a sense is the double oppression facing the urban poor; in a deracialised civil society space they become victims of the powers of the old colonial elite and the new nationalist elite. This double oppression is very evident in the context of Ward Two, or, specifically, at the old age home. When some of the participants spoke about social issue they broadened racism to include other black people and to also use it to describe xenophobia. This speaks to the insights they have gained from being at the bottom of the rung. They spoke many times to me about the nascent power of black people to oppress each other. It was very clear to me from the first day of the data collection during the interviews that they were well aware of oppression from black people, and they also know well oppression from white people. They lived between the immense economic power held by a minority white elite, and political power held by the black elite who are buffered by a mobile working and middle class grouping.

When I had gained entry into their world, I found myself thinking about the fact that I had driven so many times past the housing complex and been struck by the oddity of the half demolished houses. I had always thought of the place as that of the destitute if not the surplus of society. I thought the state of the area, including the demolished houses, said a lot about what society thought about the people; they are seen as used items that can be thrown into such a dump. They are thrown here, taken when they are needed to work, and thrown back. These people had no real identity, invisible people, social outsiders who are half human and who live in half houses.

Spivak (1988) argues that between dual systems of oppression the oppressed subaltern disappears into a violent shuttling between subjecthood and citizenship. The place of disappearance is silence, a non-existence and beyond it is a place between subject and status (Spivak, 1988). In her famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Spivak's (1988) preoccupation was to show how the experience of being an Indian women and the choice to commit widow suicide was one that could not be explained by either colonial or nationalist accounts because it is deeply related to the experience of being an Indian woman. Wynter (1992) argues that consciousness means to be a particular type of organism, or a subjective character of experience. To be black, she argues, is a particular type of experience that is characterized by a double consciousness, the problem of being human and subhuman at the same time (du Bois, 1903). Lost in the hegemonic telling of history, Biko (2004) writes that there is a positive and conscious experience to being black people, and part of that experience is a value for the life lived, and the drive to strive for better.

What I observed about the **old age home** the longer I stayed was that, despite its half demolished structure, the inhabitants seemed satisfied, at the very least, by the fact that they had their own space. Many of them were able to move out of home and establish themselves in the area as independent people. Therefore, the houses might not have looked like much to an outsider, but to those on the inside, they were symbols of independence and personhood. They were symbols of people attempting to build a decent life. The ruins were a complete community for them: kids ran around the houses, playing until late evening. Men came back from work or odd jobs and played golf on a miniature three hole course they had constructed between the houses. So I realised that to pass by here is miss the fullness of life that is lived here and to mischaracterise this place as a place where no life can exist. It is a place that can be easily adjudged as a location for half-lives, a senseless place with people who have no life because they do not have the things that normal society has to make a life. They do not have 'proper' houses, they are not educated, they do not have full time employment etc. They do not have material things, and so in the mind they are half people. Their houses are non-normal and so they must be as well. As Wynter (1995) makes clear, our generalizations make it easier for us to relegate people to a category of non-normal or non-being.

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### 8.16. Calculation

When in the zone of non-being, as the Drum writers did, people will tend to turn their attentions to spaces where they will realise their humanity or the fullness of their life (Snyman, 2003). Guha (1983) maintains that the domain of politics of the people is not a space where people take spontaneous action, but calculated premediated actions because the quality of their lives depends on such actions. Writing about prison life, Skarbek (2014) argues that the high stakes of gains, in a highly restrictive environment that is prison life, means that there is little room for spontaneous action; every decision has to be carefully calculated. Similar to the idea expressed in the previous chapter of a materially measurable freedom, people respond rationally to a world that is in flux in terms of costs and benefits (Sen, 2000; Glover, 2015). The above section has demonstrated that the less beneficial a scenario is to people, the more prone they are to concentrate on something else with greater benefit (Wellman, 1968).

Such insights were verified in the field. On one occasion, Wayne said to me that when you are not working you have to be flexible. He went on to say that he is willing to vote for any party that will improve his condition. He is just waiting to hear the right things. His comment confirmed that when relating to both the civil and political societies, people calculate the

benefits to be gained against their material circumstances. In accordance with a very complicated history of the country, they often recognise that the political society as their best shot when it comes to developmental support.

Another participant, MG, echoed Wayne's words about flexibility when he said that he follows a political party that will do things for him. MG said that when it comes to politics, he thinks ahead. By this he meant that he listens to a manifesto or a rally, only to hear what benefit is to come. It is only once he has ascertained what benefits he can accrue that he makes a decision on for whom to vote. Therefore, people in the township might be oppressed and resigned to a tacit acceptance of the systems, but that does not restrict their ability to play with the system. Part of that play is to use the little capital and leverage they have in the political society to make demands and to gain benefit. What can happen, therefore, and this is confirmed by the interviews in the previous chapter, is that people can turn their backs on civil society when it comes to voting and concentrate in the world of political society where their meagre electoral capital can accrue some sort of benefit in the mainstream world.

This section has explored the calculative nature of life in the township, where life can at times come to resemble a game of dominoes, with people always calculating any advantage they can get. One of my early notes in the field indicated that people were quick on their feet. This notion of quickness is manifested in the township lingo, which is about reading between the lines. Things are said in no particular way and you have to read it as quickly as you can or you might lose an opportunity. That is the norm. It is a realistic and abstract life, all at the same time. This ability to read things quickly is shown by the game of dominoes because it needs constant calculation. You need to be on your toes. You have to be able to count the number of cards in the game. If you are able to predict and calculate how many sets you have and what the probability is that other people will play the cards you anticipate, the more likely you are to win. So the feeling I got when I played, and this is why I lost often, was that people were able to predict my moves because I could not count and block. To stay in the game people had to be able to do the maths required. They needed to think a step ahead.

The stories of experience also speak to the ability to think and react quickly to situations. One of the regulars, MG, related a story to me about when they scammed a drug dealer. The long and the short of it is that, together with two friends, one of whom was related to the dealer, they started stealing marijuana from the dealer's secret hide out. When this was found out, he has taken in by the dealer for interrogation. When asked where they got the marijuana, he said that

the dealer's cousin, his friend, had given them the stash to sell. He tells me he presented this version of the story because if he revealed that he knew where the secret location was, then he would be liable for further punishment in future should anything else go wrong. So he could not confess to knowing the location, and, as such, he got off with a warning and a threat of a beating should it happen again.

Another story was told by Mbaj, who had spent a great deal of time as a security guard. The stories he relayed of his guarding days demonstrated not only the harshness of the job but also the mental fortitude it required. Mbaj told me that when guarding something you have to play it safe. You cannot be a Samson and want to fight all that you encounter. If you see something wrong, you must radio for assistance. If you must, you must run away from the danger. You must never put your life in danger, he told me. Both these stories made me aware that township life was such that you constantly needed to think, evaluate situations and make decisions quickly in order to gain advantage. It may be argued that life is such in many other places, but this quality here was expressed in its own unique way. The importance of the insight is that people outside of the mainstream cannot be denied the dynamism of conscious and calculative lives just because they inhabit the periphery.

### 8.17. Alternative mediation

The small margins of error that are available to people living in conditions of adversity means that people are highly attuned to their environment (Skarbek, 2014). As discussed earlier in the chapter, in the event of weak social systems and governing structures, alternative systems have to be established for social cohesion (Skarbek, 2014). Assefa (2005) writing about a similar phenomenon of an Ethiopian video viewing houses attended by young men noted that the spaces provided shared cultural places for the dispossessed. Through their unconventional qualities, such spaces therefore provide an alternative to the alienation and hierarchy of the mainstream. As such, normal rules do not apply in these alternative spaces because they have to be recreated to serve a different order. The previous sections discussed how Xhosa notions of respect between age groups, and capitalistic notions of productivity are loosened to allow, not just a third place, but the pooling of resources.

The contemplation of alternative spaces, through a communications lens, allowed the researcher to understand that it is not the media or the technology that is important, but what that communication technology can be used for in constructing interpretive frameworks (Assefa, 2005). Having spent four months living in Joza for the research (and five more as a

student), I came to realise that as much as this was a study located in media analysis, if I was to understand interpretation as a culturally imbedded process, I had to go beyond a media centric outlook. I had to quickly comprehend that making sense of the media was more than the constant use of a piece of technology, or how people engaged with that technology, and was more about the life people lived relative to the social institutions they encountered, including the media.

Since this insight is obviously non-media centric, it allowed the study to argue that the media is but one of the many tools that are used in such alternative spaces to make sense of the surrounds. Such a view also means that we have to take on board McDonald's (2013) argument, discussed earlier, that in an era characterised by uncertainty, weak roles, and a culture of more personalised communication, we need to adopt a new model of individual action and self-creation with regard to the dynamic nature of the lives of unemployed youth. Addressing the need for a new approach in communication studies, Morley (2009) similarly argues that we need a novel paradigm that allows a more integrated analysis of communications, which places technological advances in historical perspective, and is able to account for media use in perspective.

Having made it clear from the onset that the concern of the research goes beyond a single medium, Livingstone's (2009) insights steer the research forward. Livingstone (2009) argues that our interest must be the process of mediation, primarily because the process reveals the changing relations among social structures and agents, instead of narrowly focussing what we can learn about individual media sources. The focus on social process means that our definition of communication includes not only the study of instruments for transmitting information but also the material and social relations of the day (Morley, 2009). In this non-media centric context, Morley (2009) recommends that communications must be analysed in terms of how infrastructural networks of different types or the material location of audiences enable (or inhibit) different modes of activity for different sections of the population. This model of communication is characterised by an interest in both media institutions and the use of the media. In so doing, the model transcends the narrowly media-centric focus on the technologies and production end of information transmission (Morley, 2009).

This non-media centric form of communication analysis is termed 'alternative mediation' by Willems (2014). A key advantage of the concept of alternative mediation is that it refers to the dynamic process of communication as compared to static understanding of institutions

(Willems, 2014). Alternative mediation, is, therefore, is able to capture the non-media, interpersonal and embodied ways in which groups of people are able to operate outside the mainstream media institutions (Willem, 2014). Livingstone (2009) explains that this means that the media and communication studies are able to move beyond the traditional dualism of mass and interpersonal forms of communication, and broadly encompass new, interactive, networked forms of communication, whose influence may be traced across multiple spheres of modern life (Willem, 2014). This new paradigm of mediation subverts the thinking that the media have, to some extent, taken over the role of provider of information and moral orientation that was once played by social institutions like family, friendship groups, school and church. Furthermore, this orientation also challenges the thinking that the media has become society's "most important storyteller about society itself" (Hjarvard, 2008: 13). As such we can understand that the people encountered in Joza had other influences besides the media, and thus were able to divert from the mainstream thinking because they were drawing knowledge from elsewhere.

With the above insights in mind, we can, therefore, assess an over reliance of the power of the media to sway people in countries gravely divided by history to be an overestimation of the power of the mass media. Livingstone (2009: 5) argues that the best description of the current situation is 'mediatization', where political institutions and communities are increasingly dependent on and shaped by mass media but nevertheless remain in control of political processes and functions. This form of 'mediation' allow us, then, to recognise that social and technological changes have transformed both mass communication and interpersonal (or face-to-face) communication in the communication field, resulting in diversified and hybrid processes of mediated communication (Livingstone, 2009). As such, Willems (2014) thus notes that verbal and interpersonal forms of communication have been crucial in the engagement the disempowered have had with power in the African postcolony.

The above insights are key to understanding the bearing the ethnography and observational work has on media research. Although I went into the field looking to observe people and their media use, went I left I was convinced that the future of reception analysis lies outside of observing media, and in observing human relations. The media is thus one aspect of those relations, if not a tool that facilitates those relations. Due to its imbedded nature, communication, therefore, cannot be understood outside of human relations. In this regard, the observations recollected in this chapter are often a great deal outside of communications. Some sections have little to do with communication; however, much of what has been relayed helped

the reader understand why the respondents chose not to pay attention to mainstream media prescriptions. They were often so consumed with the task of living a very harsh reality that they had no time to entertain mainstream media stories which did not speak to that reality.

One of the first things I noticed in the field, as reflected in the description of Chief's house, was the lack of interest in news and general media technologies. This was not to say that media technologies were scarce or inaccessible, but that they were not the centre of attention. I noticed that the houses (owned by the young men observed) that do have a radio or television set, hardly had the devices switched on. The few times I can remember a communication technology being ever present in the space was when cell phones were used in the house to listen to music (seldom for radio used to listen to news). Therefore, news in the space, especially at Chief's house, did not 'break' as much as it filtered through. When I learnt about the passing of Mohammed Ali (in June 2016), I was in a shebeen<sup>17</sup> with one of the guys buying beers, and the news was on the sports channel. There was barely time to register the information before it was time to attend to more pressing matters.

I got a sense from watching television with the participants, twice only, that the world of mainstream media is another world completely. My sense of the matter was that the lack of engagement with the news was not because people lacked access, but because they live a different life. They live a life that is not 'directly' affected by stock markets, political manoeuvring and other mainstream concerns covered in the news. The tuning out discussed in the previous section applies here because it is evident that people turn their backs to information that will not provide material benefit. This sense was solidified when an old man who lives in the area asked for a ride. On the way to his destination he asked me if I knew that Malema called Zuma a blesser<sup>18</sup>.

I was surprised by this piece of news. I had not heard it because at Chief's house no one had brought it up as a topic of discussion. What I realised when I reflected on this was that to my participants this piece of news about political shenanigans did not matter much. The news I often heard in the space was focussed on the life around them: piece jobs, political party promises, etc. Conversations and news about blesser did not do much for this group, and thus easily ignored. Therefore, the most valuable information here was that which would bring concrete results. I left the field with more than a suspicion that mainstream news and its

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<sup>17</sup> A drinking hall.

<sup>18</sup> Colloquial term, made popular by social media, which refers to the phenomenon of old men courting young women by buying them gifts.

pronouncements were often relegated to the margins here due to the fact that the information they provided did not do much to further the everyday life of the group observed<sup>19</sup>.

What this crystallised in my mind was that the political society is a lived experience; it is thus an experiential and sensory world. Therefore, its mores, connections and its communication platforms tend to be lived experiences too. As such, then, when conditions do not allow people to engage with the dominant media, when it is un-relatable and not useful, people turn to other forms mediation such as human interaction (Willem, 2014). This then enables the transmission of stories and perspectives not through the formal but informal channels (Willem, 2014). Willems (2014) argues that people on the margins often adopt non-normative modes of engagement such as conversation and humour to get around any restrictions, or to be able to relate on a more familial level. As will be demonstrated below, in such an environment news can also travel in an interpersonal way, rather than solely through technology or traditional news platforms.

In this sense, the news here is the people and their relation to their circumstance. This brings me to the fact that I observed in the field that the news that affects a person's life directly will eventually filter through. For this purpose, the most effective way I saw for the most relevant news reaching people was through other people. I noticed that information travels frequently through people, and is passed from one person to the next. On one occasion I found that the men observed did not get information about a job project in Grahamstown via the traditional channels or mainstream media. When I accompanied some of the men to a recruitment workshop for part time jobs during the National Arts Festival, I noticed that without a shred of advertisement there were hordes of men at the gathering. The information was all spread via word of mouth.

This is to say that news about important issues to them, news about jobs or vacancies, filters through. News about fights, and government development projects, and political parties making promises, filter through. It seemed that concrete information will always be carried into the space. Abstract information, on the other hand, did not have the legs. The news that brought something tangible was the news that was most immediate, and the news attended to. In this regard, people know about the news they are supposed to know, the concrete news that will make a difference in their lives. The concept of useful news filtering through was proved by a

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<sup>19</sup> See Malila et al (2013). Young black interviewees in that study expressed a concern that, although they find mainstream media useful, its coverage often does not relate to their everyday lives.

national soccer cup final one Saturday afternoon. Different people kept coming into the house to report the score. At one stage, Philz and I were at the shop and we asked the shop attendant for the score, and went back to the house and told people. This is the concrete news mentioned above. What is close to them and deemed useful travels quickly and will be acted upon. This was the case with the news about a local Grahamstown boxer becoming a national champion. This piece of news filtered through very quickly. People shared the story rapidly among themselves. Before I saw a newspaper picture of the Ndwayana at a shop days later, people came into Chief's house to inform those present that the boxer had a police escort to the location with the championship belt in hand. Many were proud of his achievement and spoke glowingly about his boxing prowess.



## 8.18. Conclusion

Tying together the overriding theme of the study, which is the analysis of excluded groups and the meaning they make of mainstream media, Willems (2014) argues that the narrow normative

discourse of civil society that gained prominence in Africa post-Cold War has largely excluded those that did not fit into its assumptions about social composition. In this respect, what observations confirm is the fact that people in Joza live in a world that is different, or outside of the mainstream. From the playing of board games to their loose social arrangements (based on kinship and need) that makes up their social group, these factors point to the fact that people in Joza township live a life that does not necessarily follow the rules and regulations of mainstream the order. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this world, as argued when relating the pooling of resources for drug use, is that it is built so that its inhabitants survive with what they have.

This understanding, therefore, helps the study appreciate contestations and engagements in contexts where Euro-centric forms of civil society are not omnipresent. Writing about the experience of prison inmates, Skarbek (2014: 4) allows us to draw this study to a conclusion by noting that much of the confusion in interpreting prison behaviour arises from “both a failure to understand the motives of inmates and an unwillingness to admit that outcomes judged as inhuman or bizarre may be consequences of individually rational action”. This approach provides a way to understand that, despite its non-normativity, organisation emerges in alternative spaces in a form which often differs from the mainstream. In this respect, the finding that this chapter is organised around is that the confusion about the voting patterns of subaltern subjects, when their media interpretation is analysed, arises from a failure to understand the motives of the marginalised and to realise that their seemingly curious behaviour is a consequence of rational thought.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The questions I kept facing or running into... in this stupid script about four guys going up to kill a guy... But that was the story. The questions that that story kept putting to me I could not answer. Yet I knew that I had constructed the film in such a way that to not answer would be to fail. (Coppola, 1976)

This footage doesn't answer all the questions that it raises, doesn't fill in the factual background with a journalistic thoroughness. Instead, the film offers a portrait of a person whose exceptional talents didn't quite crystallize, whose gears didn't quite mesh, who seemed to float a few inches off the ground at a dreamy remove from the practical necessities for success. (Brody, 2013)

### 9.1. Introduction

Expressing a question that has dogged mainstream media observers for the past four years, former DA leader Helen Zille (2017) opined on Twitter: "The amazing thing is not how far the ANC's vote dropped, but how high it stayed - despite the fact that it is destroying the future of ALL Sans [South Africans]". One could have been forgiven for thinking that Zille was adding to the mainstream media reflections about the 2014 election results. Instead, Zille was responding to the results of the Municipal by-elections held on 15 November 2017. What concerned the former leader of the opposition in South Africa was that the results were reported to reflect the ANC's vote drop from 75,6% to 65,9% in Ekurhuleni, and from 82,3% to 70% in Cape Town (see Bapela, 2017). Zille's main concern was the lack of focus on the reasons why the ANC's share of the vote remained high despite its obvious failings, and the bad publicity it has received over the years.

What Zille highlights is that, despite all the scandals and the questionable way it governs, the ANC continues to win elections. The fundamental question that Zille poses is similar to the one considered by this study: what are we missing here? In asking how young people in Joza were interpreting mainstream media messages concerning the Nkandla scandal, the research similarly asked: why did the ANC continue to gain votes, even against the mainstream media push to expose the party's wrong doing? The 2014 election results were thus prescient in revealing a gap in knowledge about the relation of subalterns, not only to the political system, but also to the mainstream media system. The mismatch between what was purported by

mainstream media, and the eventual outcome, provided the study with the launch pad required to also consider why the mainstream media had gotten the 2014 election so wrong.

## 9.2. Research overview

Subaltern scholars have written that their area of study was initiated as a response to the elitist standpoints within historical scholarship (Guha, 1983). Chakrabarty (2000) argues that Subaltern Studies intervened in this situation by critiquing two contending schools of history: European-inspired colonial history and its nationalist counterpoint. “Both of these approaches... wrote up the history of nationalism as the story of an achievement by the elite classes, whether Indian or British” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 14). What Subaltern Studies pointed out was the inadequacy of elite viewpoints to capture and explain the intricacies of developing nations. Chakrabarty (2000: 14) claims that “for all their merits” exclusive perspectives could not explain “the contributions made by people on their own, that is, independent of the elite to the making and development of this nationalism”. This is to say that Subaltern Studies has been the analysis of the failure of mainstream stream discourse to speak on behalf of marginalised groups (Srivastava and Bhattacharya, 2012).

The research, therefore, drew on this insight, and concerned itself with analysing the failures of mainstream media, as an elite institution of society, to speak on behalf of subalterns and, in particular, for this study, the people in the township of Joza. To further this resolve, the research drew inspiration from the Robins, Cornwall and Von Lieres (2008: 1069) insistence that an analysis of post-apartheid society should centre on the “perspectives of citizens themselves”. It is in this respect that the researcher decided to focus on the perspective of the majority black voters in South Africa’s townships who had, by all accounts, been misjudged. This line of enquiry led to the more pointed research question: if the group in question did not follow the mainstream media prescription, how did they interpret events as reported by the media? Therefore, coverage of the 2014 elections begged the question: if a large majority had not been swayed by the mainstream media coverage of a multitude of scandals to vote against the ANC, then how was this silent majority interpreting dominant messages?

It was my hope that research would not only provide answers to the question set out but shed light on the point of view of the people who, while a majority, inhabit the fringes of South African society.

### 9.3. Findings – Underdevelopment and freedom

The answers gained from the data were unexpected (so much so that they necessitated that the researcher supplement the initial theory). In this regard, it must be noted that in the face of this development, where the findings diverted slightly from the foundation built in the first half of the study, the second half attempted to grapple with the emerging insights. To this end, Chapter Seven starts with an introduction of new theory and Chapter Eight is a fusion of foundational theory and fresh literature. In doing so, it is my hope that the work gave the reader greater understanding, and a sense of an exploratory trajectory from my own initial sense of unknowing to a gradual gaining of new insight.

The findings were thus unexpected because my assumption in conducting the research (before going into the field and based on previous research conducted by the Media and Citizenship research group (see Friedman, 2011; Jacobs, 1999 and 2002)), was that the distance between mainstream media and subalterns in the township was mostly racial. I assumed that there was a possibility that the black people in the township who continue to vote for the ANC against mainstream media prescriptions was based on racial solidarity in the face of a hostile power. The first half of the research was written to probe that assumption. What was sketched out in those first few chapters was the possibility that mainstream media's historical bias against black people might turn the marginalised against the sector. The basic question that was posed by that part of the research was whether black people in the township resisted mainstream media messages, and voted for the ANC because they were identifying with Jacob Zuma against continued negative depiction of black people.

Analysis of the interviews conducted with young people in the township of Joza demonstrated the group did not necessarily resist mainstream media messages, certainly not on the grounds of racial bias or negative representation. Closer to the truth was that this group chose to ignore the messages about the corruption of the ANC. The data suggests that they did so not because of racial solidarity, but due to the fact that in a context of high inequality, and continued limitations on economic emancipation, the party shone brightly for them as a vehicle for economic development. This expectation is seemingly borne out by experiences and knowledge of action the party had taken to improve the lots of the very poor across the country since coming into power.

The responses from participants revealed that subaltern publics in South Africans use the ANC as a resource to advance themselves, and do not believe there is another such resource for them

or which prioritises their interests. For many of the participants, the ANC, therefore, remains their best ticket out of the depravity of their condition. As such, the study has shown that people in this particular situation ignore mainstream media prescriptions and continue to vote for the ANC, because the party offers them promise of development and a historical legacy of advancing black people.

#### 9.4. Findings – Cultural shift

Without collapsing our earlier argument against social determination, the second major finding that may be reported is that the decisions people take make sense when viewed from their context and more sympathetically. This finding is not earth-shattering, as much as it is a wakeup call. As such, the finding can also be considered a mental or cultural shift. Although minor and obvious, it is an important step to take. Writing about Portugal's remarkable reduction in drug overdoses and drug-related crimes, Ferreira (2017) noted that instead of criminalising usage, Portugal in the 1990s opted for support. To get to this level, Ferreira (2017) argues that the small but significant shift that occurred was in how users were termed. "The language began to shift, too. Those who had been referred to sneeringly as *drogados* (junkies) – became known more broadly, more sympathetically, and more accurately, as "people who use drugs" or "people with addiction disorders". This, too, was crucial. This is a change that allows much bigger changes to take place" (Ferreira, 2017).

This is to say that the truly significant finding this study makes is hitting on the shift from seeing the people who voted for the ANC as 'clowns' (Schutte, 2014) to seeing them as intelligent beings who make smart decisions when their set of circumstances are considered. To imagine them any differently is to fail to understand the full impact of their decisions on their lives and it is to deny them any modicum of intelligence or agency. By diverting from the mainstream media perspective of downplaying subaltern action, such a perspective enables us to see that those at the bottom continue with the ANC because this is where they see their lot improving. In this light, the study was able to argue that the decision to continue to vote for the ANC was not taken by simple minds or people blinded by a historical legacy, but a weighty decision taken by people with a very small margin for error. In all, this is to contend that a good way to see human beings – even subaltern human beings – is as capable agents.

## 9.6. Tune out

In the attempt to do exactly that, this study, Chapter Eight especially, sought to paint a deeper picture of the social milieu in which the respondents act. This ethnographic approach offered a way forward because it opened the conceptual space, where people, no matter their circumstances, are recognised as engaged in productive action. In conducting such an analysis, the researcher was drawn to cultural studies and subaltern insights that argued that people are creative in their relation to the world. As such, one of the central tenants the study adhered to was that subaltern groups, though not determined by their circumstances, are strongly affected by socio-economics when making sense of their surrounds. This is also the main lesson gleaned from the interviews: that a majority of the participants felt that the ANC is their best option at socio-economic development.

Another crucial insight worth mentioning is that the lack of insight about this lack of opportunity, which leads people to stick to the ANC, is often the basis of the difference between mainstream media and subaltern groups. Although a foreign example, Heather Stewart's (2017) analysis of how Britain's Labour Party defied expectations and made a strong showing in the 2017 snap elections offers valuable insight. "Every lesson all these politics professors ever learned has been proved wrong," says Jon Trickett, another trusted Corbyn ally, whose analysis helped to shape the campaign's broad outlines. "I think the dislocation between ordinary people's lives and the people who run the country has never been greater: they don't understand what's going on in the country. That applies to the people that write the newspapers, the people on the telly and some people in our own party. The political centre of gravity in the country was never where they thought it was" (Stewart: 2017).

Therefore, the study suggests that the continued marginalisation of black people and subaltern groups, and their continued non-involvement in serious consumption of the mainstream has to be taken into account. Due to the fact that these groups have limited participation in mainstream society and mainstream media, they tend to ignore its pronouncements. This means that mainstream is often incapable of capturing what is going on in this subaltern sphere of politics, and thus marginalised groups 'tune out'. In this respect, the data revealed that subaltern groups do not totally ignore mainstream media, as they often engage with the media items that relate and have an immediate effect on their circumstances. Ebewo, Stevens and Sirayi (2014) argue that when people's lives realities are not captured the target audience will intentionally channel their attention to concerns that match their existing tendencies, values and behaviours.

## 9.7. Conclusion – Alternative mediation

In all, the perspectives adopted by the study argued for the importance of understanding people within the structures or parameters of their lives. This was an important point for the study because this insider perspective to subaltern lives provided valuable information about the gap between mainstream media and marginalised groupings. Centering the experiences of this subaltern counter public enabled the study to understand the people involved from the inside. This meant that the researcher could attain greater insight about the reasons subaltern groups supported a political party that was roundly panned by mainstream critics. A key advantage of this ethnographic approach, thus, was that it provided, as argued by Willems (2014), a more dynamic process of communication when compared to more static understandings that centre institutions. In this respect, the reception analysis adopted by the study explored the understanding that meanings come from human action, and in order to grasp meaning, one has to understand actions undertaken within a context.

Audience study scholars maintain that this means that research has to account for “embodied subcultural participation” how respondents go about in their natural environments (Williams, 2011: 29). This non-media centric form of communication or alternative mediation was useful for the study because it was able to capture the non-media, interpersonal and embodied ways in which groups of people are able to operate outside the mainstream media institutions (Willems, 2014). In adopting this perspective, what the study was able to comprehend was that understanding subaltern engagement with mainstream messages had less to do with the mainstream media delivering the news, and access and reach, and more to do with people taking up these discourses in relation to their lived experiences. This was an important development when analysing the process of meaning making, because, as much as reading is an individual exercise, the centrality of context to the act of interpretation meant that embodied experiences had to come into play. In light of the above, the study, therefore, saw communication as an embodied exercise and, as such, the research is more context focused than it is media-centric.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview design and questions – March 2016

Basic summary:

In relation to the argument that has been carried in the study that people inhabit multiple realities, and possibly relate to the wider social structure in the political rather than the civil society (see Chatterjee, 2003), the study considers that even though people are creative in their relation to the world, social creativity cannot always be expressed rationally. Willis (1977) argues that rational expression is only just one half of the story. Therefore, respondents cannot always be expected to fully capture their subjectivity or the creativity in which they deal with circumstance. As a result, in designing the data collection instrument a balance has had to be struck between obtaining explanations from participants, and describing their world. The reason behind the pairing is to grapple with the fact that meaning also comes from action. What respondents decide to do and how they live their lives rather than articulation is also part of the narrative. The research thus used a mixture of two orientations (Olive, 2016): emic (account comes from a person within the culture) and etic (description of a behaviour and scene by the observer).

#### Interview questions:

##### Day one, session one

Critcher (1976) argues that biography is the network of personal circumstances and decisions, which occur within a situation that is already highly structured, and with a limited number of available options. Biographical factors are thus important to understanding the options taken by individuals in a given situation. Since we are looking at structure (culture and society) and agency, the interview began with **biographical** questions.

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. Are you originally from Grahamstown? How long have you lived in Grahamstown?
4. Tell me about your family.
5. Where did you go to school? What is your highest qualification? Tell me about your school years.
6. Would you like to go back to school or a tertiary institution some day?

### Session two

To investigate the idea that media narrative perpetuate negative stereotypes about young people, the next set of questions deal with **self-perception**:

7. This may sound obvious, but, would you like to work someday? Have you worked before? What kind of work have you done? What type of work would you like to do in future?
8. Some young people are thought to be lazy, they don't want to work and would rather live off government grants. What is your opinion?
9. Young women are thought to want babies so they can live off social grants. What is your opinion?
10. Young men are thought to be prone to violence and criminality. What is your opinion?
11. Young people in the township are thought to have no direction? What is your opinion?
12. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? What are your goals?
13. What do you think is the biggest obstacle between you and your goals?

### Session three

The next set of questions deals with the assumption made by the study that since young people have no real power in the civil society, they choose to ignore that world and focus on the **community** around them.

- Do think that you have the means to alter your life?
- Do you think you have the means to change your immediate surroundings?
- Do you think you can change things in your community? If so, how?
- Do you think that you can change things in greater Grahamstown? In town?
- Do you take part in community forums or associations? Please tell me about them.
- Do you think you have the power to change things in South Africa, on the national stage?

### Day two, session one

To pursue the issue of lived reality further, the next questions deal with **relevance** of the media and **access**.

- Where do you get your news? What papers do you read? Which channels do you watch or listen to? Social media?
- Do you think that the media is relevant to your life? Why?
- Do you think that the media gives you enough information about your community?

- Do you think that the media covers issues that are important to you?
- What issue does the media cover instead? What and who do they cover the most?
- What issues that are important to you would you like the media to cover?

### Session two

#### Media and politics

- What do you think of the media coverage of political stories?
- What do you think about the coverage of Nkandla? What do you think of the story?
- What did you think the first time you heard about Nkandla? Did you care about the story? Did it resonate with you?
- Did you care that Zuma was alleged to have spent R240 million? If you cared about the story, what made you care, if you didn't care, why not?
- Does the corruption exposed influence how you vote? Would you or did you vote against the ANC because of it?
- A lot of people say that they support the ANC and not Zuma. How do you feel about that?

### Session three

#### Trust

- Do you trust the media? Do you think that they could be biased? Against ANC and Zuma, or do you think they are fair?
- Who do you trust more, the media or ANC?
- If media, why do you (or people) continue to vote for the ANC?
- Do you trust the ANC?
- Do you think that the ANC effectively represents your views? If they do, how do they did this?
- If they don't and you vote for the party, why do you do so?
- Which party or organization or social organ effectively represents you?

### Day three

#### Racism

- Do you experience racism in your everyday life?
- Do you think racism is a factor in your life? How does it affect you?
- Do you think that the media is racist?
- Do you think this lack of coverage of issues relevant to township people is due to race?
- Do you think that the ANC makes too much of an issue of race?

- Is race still a factor in South African society?
- End of interview. Before I go, would you like to add anything?

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**Centralising a counter public. An ethnographic study of the interpretation of mainstream news media by young adults in Joza.**

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

*The following was read to participants and they were asked to verbally consent.*

I (participant's name) agree to participate in the research project of (researcher's name) on (short title / topic of research project).

#### **I understand that:**

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a/an (Honours/Master's/PhD) degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on \_\_\_\_\_ (cell phone) or \_\_\_\_\_ (email). The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Prof/Dr/Ms/Mr \_\_\_\_\_ in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on \_\_\_\_\_ (office) or \_\_\_\_\_ (email).
2. The researcher is interested in (short description of the main focus areas of the research).
3. My participation will involve (short description of the nature of participation required and the anticipated duration of this participation).
4. I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life and work which I am not willing to disclose.
5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction.
6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal and/or work experiences, attitudes and behaviours. I agree that/ do not agree that my identity be made known the general reader.
8. I agree to being recorded.

Thank you.