



# SHAME AND RESPECTABILITY:

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*A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CAPE TOWN'S  
'COLOURED' FAMILIES THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS,  
CULTURAL PRACTICES AND ORAL HISTORIES  
(C. 1950 TO 2016)*

By **Nadia Kamies**  
(17405361)



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Department of Historical and Heritage Studies

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Supervisor:  
Dr Siona O'Connell,  
University of Pretoria

## **DECLARATION**

I, Nadia Kamies, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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## MY GRANDMOTHER'S DREAM CATCHERS

Mama made these doilies for me, my mother says,  
as green and blue tightly crocheted  
works of art fall softly  
out of the plastic packet she's kept them in.

I see my grandmother sitting  
in her chair, grey hair escaping  
from under a white cotton scarf  
wrapped around her head;  
her fingers hold the thin steel hook  
wrapping cotton thread in elaborate patterns,  
making poor man's lace,  
creating circles in the air to catch bad dreams.  
Her hands are never idle, weaving and spinning  
a livelihood to keep her family together,  
her work good enough  
for even white people, my father says,  
the patterns out of a secret book in her head  
dipped in starch and ironed to attention.

Round and round she goes  
weaving circles of where she came from,  
each stitch a link to the past,  
a chain from Arab trade routes to Africa,  
interlocking loops of yarn,  
tiny stitches helping to feed her family.

I wish I had followed that thread  
of journeys across oceans,  
wish that I had asked her to teach me  
how to catch dreams.

Nadia Kamies, November 2017

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the notion of ‘colouredness’ in South Africa by thinking through representation and attendant ideas of shame and respectability. The family photograph offers a lens through which we may view what it meant to live through apartheid, occupying an intermediate space in terms of race, colour, language, religion and social and cultural status, and how these impact on a sense of belonging in a post-apartheid South Africa, in particular, Cape Town. As such, the study responds to a need to understand what it means to be part of this diverse group of South Africans who continue to occupy peripheral spaces in the larger South African landscape and is an attempt to provide insight into the long reach of an oppressive past.

The issue of representation and history is central to the research and the thesis suggests that the very act of dressing up – performance – and sitting for photographs was a site of resistance against the way ‘coloured’ people were portrayed through the continuum of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Family photographs serve as memory aids and help us to access stories, revealing a way of life that disturbs the conventional representation that oppression dictated (Hirsch, 1999). The question of self-representation, cultural and social practices is understood to be deeply political and has particular meaning in a contemporary South Africa that still bears the scars of a past where ‘black’ bodies were legislated as being less than human.

As a creative writer, I frame my research in terms of narrative in order to better understand how the stories are structured, who produces them, and how they are consumed. Narrative research focuses on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories, giving them the opportunity to define who they are and where they come from. The stories of those who have been marginalised or oppressed bear witness to a life under apartheid. I acknowledge the difficulty of being an objective researcher while examining these photographs, stories, and memories which I filter through the lens which I am using. This is therefore, in part, an auto-ethnographic study; my own attempt to find meaning for what it means to be named and understood as ‘coloured’ in a democratic South Africa.

Shame is a principal source of identity for minorities, and the idea of respectability is a historically important mode of structuring unequal social relations in the African and ‘coloured’ worlds (Kaufman, 1996; Ross, 2015). The desire to prove respectability, I argue, is central to the experience of ‘colouredness’, tightly bound to a legacy of slavery and the ‘civilising’ mission of the church and Christian National Education. This study therefore starts with an examination of the genealogy of ‘coloured’ and examines the lived experiences of ordinary people against a background of dehumanising legislation and narratives of subjugation.

The thesis *re-presents* the lives of ‘coloured’ people by offering a platform for the expression of multiple narratives through which the past may be acknowledged and legitimised, leading to the dismantling of racial identities. I hope that it may serve both a cathartic and a restorative function and ultimately contribute to further dialogue which will assist in the healing and integration of our society so that we may transcend race and view each other as human.

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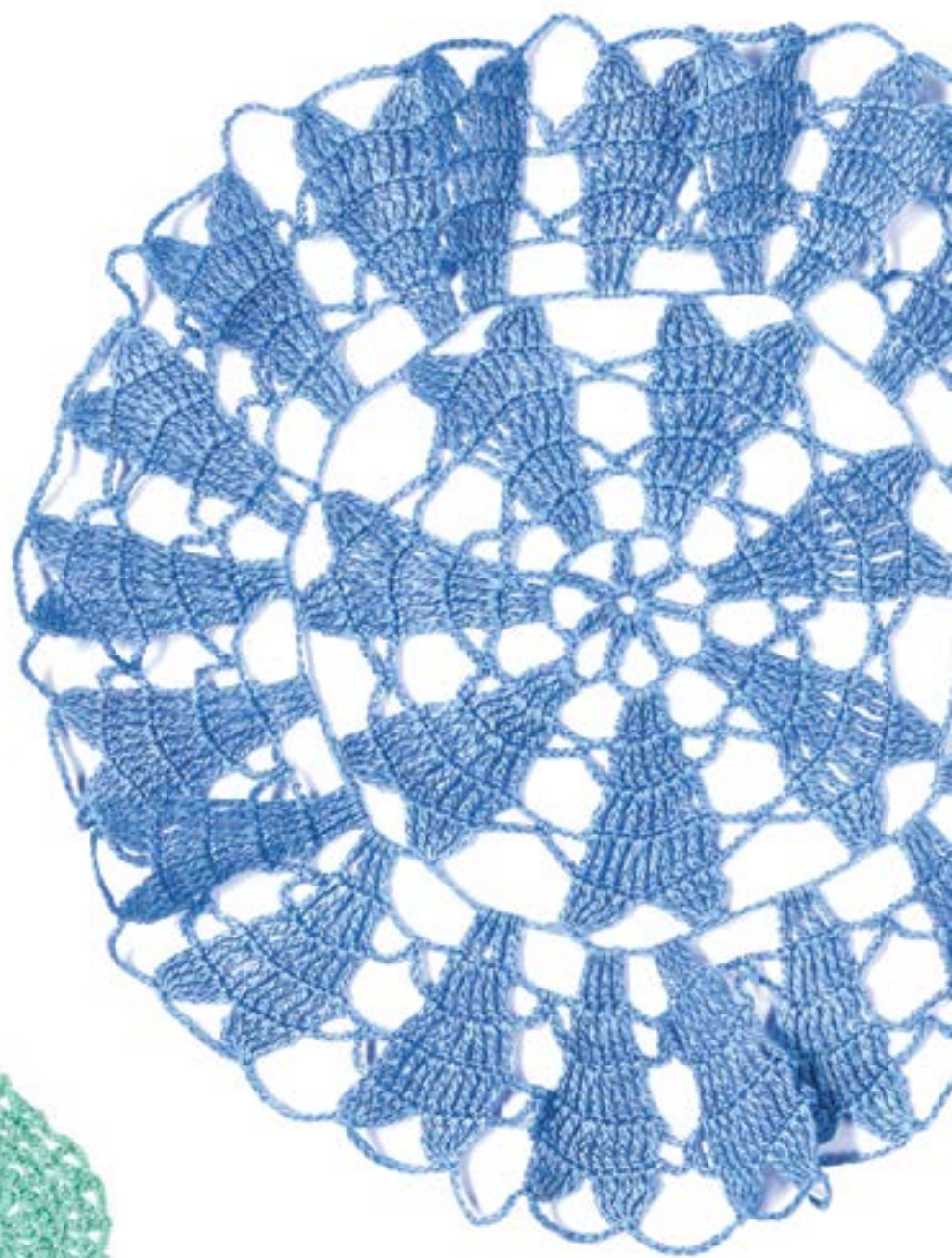
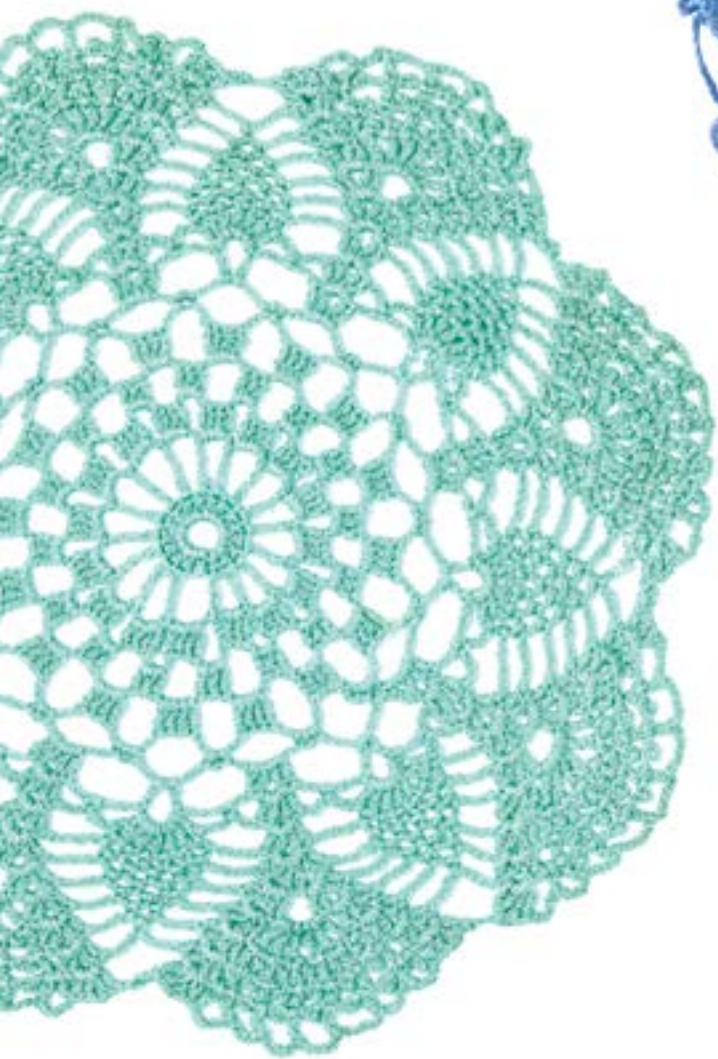
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I dedicate this work to my grandfather for setting me on this path of learning, to my grandmothers, both strong women in their own ways, and to my children, of whom I am so proud.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ANC:** African National Congress
- APO:** African Political Organisation, later the African People's Organisation
- BCM:** Black Consciousness Movement
- CAC:** Coloured Advisory Council
- CCPC:** Cape Coloured Permanent Commission
- CNE:** Christian National Education
- CPC:** Coloured People's Congress
- CPRC:** Coloured Persons Representative Council
- DA:** Democratic Alliance
- DRC:** Dutch Reformed Church
- DRMC:** Dutch Reformed Mission Church
- HNP:** *Herenigde Nasionale Party* (Reunited National Party)
- MJC:** Muslim Judicial Council
- NEF:** New Era Fellowship
- NEUM:** Non-European Unity Movement
- NGK:** *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church)
- NLL:** National Liberation League
- NP:** National Party
- SA:** South Africa
- SACPO:** South African Coloured People's Organisation
- TLSA:** Teachers' League of South Africa
- TRC:** Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- UCT:** University of Cape Town
- UDF:** United Democratic Front
- UWC:** University of the Western Cape
- VOC:** *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company)
- YMCA:** Young Men's Christian Association

## KEYWORDS

Apartheid  
Archive  
Cape Town  
Colonialism  
'Coloured'  
Culture  
District Six  
Eugenics  
Freedom  
Memory  
Oppression  
Oral History  
Photography  
Race  
Reconciliation  
Religion  
Representation  
Respectability  
Shame  
Slavery  
Stereotypes  
Trauma

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## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I believe that the concept of ‘colouredness’ is neither a biological nor an ethnic identity, but rather a result of apartheid social engineering. I reject this label and race as a concept, and consider myself a South African. The term ‘coloured’ refers to people of mixed descent, previously classified as such under the apartheid government. I am mindful that ‘coloured’ has different connotations in Britain and the United States of America, but my use of the word is specific to the South African context. Since it is impossible to move away from race markers in this discussion, I have chosen to write ‘coloured’, ‘black’ and ‘white’ with small letters and in single quotation marks.

Under Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness movement, ‘black’ referred to all those oppressed under apartheid. I have used this term to refer to people of African descent and for all people not previously classified ‘white’ in South Africa.

I have chosen to use the terms ‘Khoikhoi’ and ‘Khoisan’ (an amalgamation of two distinct groups the Khoikhoi and the San).

When referring to family members of my parents’ generation, I have used the customary mark of respect: Aunty or Uncle.

**FOREWORD**

*Writing, when all is said and done, is an attempt to understand one's own circumstance and to clarify the confusion of existence (Allende, 2008: xiv).*

Three years before I registered for the PhD, I returned to university as a Creative Writing Masters' candidate, intent on developing skills to share the stories of what it meant to live during apartheid<sup>1</sup>. I had little idea of the journey I would be embarking on. The theme of my masters' thesis — travelling with my family as a way of broadening their perspectives in a post-apartheid society — seemed innocuous. However, the journey became one of self-discovery: issues around shame<sup>2</sup>, identity, and a sense of belonging surfaced continually; religious tolerance, equality, respect, and human rights were some of the issues we grappled with in countries as diverse as Cuba, Greenland and Sweden; themes of dispossession, discrimination, colonialism and struggle ran throughout. Coming across posters of bull-fighters and Spanish dancers in a market in Madrid, I recalled my mother telling us that she had “Spanish blood”, a romantic story reinforced by the presence of a 60-centimetre-tall flamenco dancer and other Spanish knickknacks in the display cabinet in the lounge, as well as the lace mantilla<sup>3</sup> she would wear on her head to church with my grandmother or on *Eid*<sup>4</sup>.

The photograph to the right is taken in 1962 in my parents' bedroom, I recognise the furniture (that they still have), the ornaments and the flowers in the background that was meant to be seen and not touched by little hands. My mother, barely 20 years old, looks elegant and poised as she poses to photographically record the name-giving of her first-born, the lace scarf draped over her head and shoulders. Fifty-six years later, my mother's dressing-table looks much the same, with candlesticks, fresh flowers and glass perfume bottles that little grandchildren should not touch.



*Figure 1*

<sup>1</sup> The term apartheid (meaning separateness in Afrikaans) was introduced during 1948 as part of the election campaign by DF Malan's Herenigde Nasionale Party (HNP) (Boddy-Evans, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> shame n. 1 a feeling of embarrassment or distress arising from one's awareness that one has done something wrong or foolish. 2 loss of respect; dishonour. 3 a cause of shame. 4 a cause for regret or disappointment; put to shame = be much better than.

<sup>3</sup> A veil or shawl traditionally worn over the head and shoulders by Spanish women

<sup>4</sup> An Islamic festival that marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting; a second Eid is celebrated to honour the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son.



The second photograph, taken by my father about ten years later, on Eid, portrays us at our best — a typical photograph in our family album. We are formally dressed: my brothers in long pants and shirts with ties, I am wearing pantyhose and carry a handbag and gloves, my sister in a dress knitted by my mother. Clothes would have been bought especially for this day and a photograph on the steps of my grandparents' house would have been mandatory before we left to visit my father's side of the family. This is a recurring theme in our photographs – posed and proper, on special occasions. My father is seldom the subject of the photograph as he is the one charged with recording us at our best. What strikes me now, more than 40 years later, is that my mother, with her lace mantilla pinned on the top of her head with a pearl-ended hat pin, looks neither



*Figure 2*

‘coloured’-Christian nor Malay-Muslim<sup>5</sup>. It’s as if she deliberately resists the categories dictated by apartheid legislation. What was this constant need to present us at our best? I suggest that it was a way of challenging and resisting the dominant apartheid narrative that attempted to brand us as less-than. I further contend that there was a subconscious sense of shame that we were constantly trying to make amends for, in the way we dressed and behaved.

I can hardly imagine what a struggle my mother’s life must have been with five children by the time she turned 30. She stayed at home to take care of us while my father worked two jobs. Sometimes she’d joke that she was going to pack her bags and move to Spain to find a matador. Perhaps this fantasy gave her a reason to cope with the drudgery of her daily life, but now I wonder if this was an attempt to identify with something greater, denied her as one of the “left-overs”<sup>6</sup> or “God’s Stepchildren”<sup>7</sup>.

I realised that if I wanted to contribute to any meaningful conciliatory dialogue in South Africa, I needed to research and understand my own background. Initially, I intended to foreground the role of women as the anchors of the family and community and their role in portraying the image of respectability I detected in the photographs in our family album. My maternal grandmother and my mother were both born during World Wars, both indelibly marked by segregation and apartheid. I lived more than half of my life under apartheid, was part of the liberation struggle and still nurture the hopes and promises of 1994 when I cast my vote for the first time. My daughter, born at the dawn of the new democracy, has been raised with opportunities and freedoms that her grandmother and great-grandmother, and even I, would never have thought possible. And yet she has reached adulthood in a time when student protests disrupt university campuses, police are called in to quell violent service delivery protests, and incidences of racism make the news headlines on a regular basis. The last 100 years has seen tumultuous change, not least the rise and fall of fascism in Germany, communism in Eastern Europe, and apartheid in South Africa. I envisaged that that was more than enough to frame my research. However, in preliminary discussions with my supervisor, Dr Siona O’Connell, and Professor Anthony Bagues, director of the Centre for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University, it became clear that I needed to retrace our history much further back, in order to understand the mindset of those who created the conditions which resulted in apartheid. The arrival of the Dutch in South Africa occurred within the global context of slavery and colonialism in which they were major players.

<sup>5</sup> In Dutch colonial terms, ‘Malay’ could variously mean Muslim, or could refer to a linguistic group, rather than a specific geographical location. It was only by the end of the VOC period that the term Malay began to lose its direct link to forced migration and became more synonymous with Muslim. This is distinct from its use under apartheid as the racial category ‘Cape Malay’ or Malay’ (Baderoon, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> F.W. De Klerk’s wife, Marike, once described ‘coloured’ people as “left-overs”. “They are a negative group. They are not black, they are not white and they are not Indian. In other words, they are non-people. They are those who remained behind when the others had been sorted out” (Paauw, 2006: 25-26).

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Millin’s 1924 novel, *God’s Stepchildren*, about race and racial mixing, conceived of mixtures as tragic and sinful products of ‘white’ and ‘black’, and by implication, preached purity of the tribe.

The impact of slavery and colonisation on South African society has receded behind the far more dominant history of apartheid. Slavery was a subject glossed over in our history classes, presented as a more benign version of slavery in America, reinforced by texts in cookbooks and charming paintings of colonial Cape Town. Slave-owners in South Africa were portrayed as paternal figures, caring for their slaves, who needed instruction and guidance to live a more ‘civilised’ life. South African poet and academic, Gabeba Baderoon (2014), points out that this portrayal has obscured the brutality and dehumanisation of the enslavement of Africans and Asians in the Cape.

Associate Professor of Literary, Media and Gender Studies, Pumla Gqola (2010), concurs with Baderoon (2014) that it was only in the 1980s that studies on slavery in South Africa countered these assumptions and presented the essential role that slavery played in the economy and culture of the Cape Colony. Baderoon (2014) highlights the excessive use of force and punishment used to quell the intense fear of slave resistance and the regulations the enslaved were subjected to, such as limitations on the size of their gatherings, and the carrying of passes to control their movement – both of which later resurfaced as apartheid laws. The *dop* system<sup>8</sup> introduced by farmers to stop the migration of the enslaved after emancipation, has fed into a cycle of poverty, abuse and dependency, that continues to dog farmworkers post-apartheid, comment authors and academics, Jeanne Viall, Wilmot James & Jakes Gerwel (2011), in their book, *Grape: Stories of the Vineyards*. In the light of this, Baderoon (2014) contends that the colonisation of the Cape, two centuries before the rest of South Africa, has had a fundamental impact on social and economic relations, both during apartheid and the contemporary era.

Much of what I have learned over the last three years, has been a revelation, since I have no background of history except for the carefully controlled narrative I was taught in apartheid-era schools. In the 1980s, when significant new scholarship challenged the concept of slavery in the Cape, I was an undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town, with special permission to study at a university for ‘whites’. My grandparents are long deceased and my parents had little information about their grandparents, my mother even less of her maternal side. She grew up in a family where there were whispers of mixed marriages and relatives she couldn’t visit because they lived on the other side of an arbitrary racial divide. She never questioned these stories, since there were things you never spoke about, certainly not to children.

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<sup>8</sup> Or tot system, referring to the part-payment of workers’ wages in daily rations of cheap liquor

Even if she had, I think that it would be unlikely that her mother would be motivated to share stories about her very existence being deemed both a sin and a crime<sup>9</sup>.

Like many of my parents' generation and circumstances, the memories are contained in black and white images, stuffed into albums, chocolate boxes and biscuit tins. In the absence of a recorded history, it is to these humble images which I turn my gaze in an attempt to make sense of questions of race, colour and identity. In so doing, I hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of what it meant to live through apartheid from the viewpoint of the oppressed, in particular, what it meant to be 'coloured'. I offer the photographs and stories as a counter-narrative and a window onto how the oppressed survived and attempted to resist the dominant narratives that would portray them as less-than.

As I delved deeper into the subject of my thesis, it became clear that the concept of 'colouredness' in South Africa is a far more complicated and nuanced concept socially, culturally and politically than I had envisaged and this thesis has opened up a personal journey of discovery for me. I have struggled with texts concerning the physical, psychological and mental trauma inflicted on the majority of South Africans throughout slavery, colonialism and apartheid, causing me to question whether it is possible to heal from such an evil and dehumanising legacy. Equally though, I have come across stories which portray pockets of resistance, integration and humanity, in spite of the oppression. Somehow, ordinary people found ways to survive and hold onto that which made them human. Baderoon (2014) reminds us that, to remember slavery is also to remember the vibrant and diverse cultures, new language, food, music and beliefs that arose, and to honour the spirit of survival and resistance that was engendered.

A year ago, I presented at a conference on *Racism and Social Justice*<sup>10</sup> in Charleston, South Carolina, one of the gateway cities of the slave trade and where the first shots of the American Civil War<sup>11</sup> (1861-1865) were fired. It was held over the weekend of the second anniversary of a fatal, racially-motivated shooting at a local church<sup>12</sup>. I returned motivated and with a stronger belief in what I was doing. I realised that this was not only because of the opportunity to engage with like-minded people from diverse backgrounds, but that what I was doing on the southern tip of Africa —essentially searching for meaning — which had seemed indulgent, fitted into a much larger global context, part of a much larger struggle. I realised that there was a formula that colonisers used and adapted in their search for God, gold and glory.

<sup>9</sup> Legislation like the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act, introduced in 1950, criminalised the very state of being 'coloured', while the Bible was used to justify segregation.W

<sup>10</sup> Carolina Low county and Atlantic World Conference, June 2017

‘Colouredness’, as Associate Professor of Sociology, Zimitri Erasmus (2017), suggests, was a process of creolisation that occurred globally, albeit under specific conditions, and it is not exceptional to South Africa. My study engages with issues of race, colour and identity through personal family photographs and the conversations that they generate in an attempt to make sense of our histories and to provide insight into the long reach of an oppressive past. The issue of representation is central to my research and I hypothesise that the act of dressing-up and sitting for photographs, which ordinary ‘coloured’ families engaged in, was a site of performance that resisted the dehumanising legislation and narratives of racial subjugation. My study contends that families classified ‘coloured’ during apartheid deliberately attempted to interrogate the stereotypes assigned to them by presenting their own positive images to counter the negative images in circulation. In this regard, what African Studies scholar, curator and filmmaker, Dr Siona O’Connell, calls “the album of the oppressed” offers a counter-narrative and provides a window into how ordinary people survived and attempted to resist the dominant narratives that would portray them as less-than (O’Connell, 2012: 16).

These efforts at self-representation against the dominative narratives of ‘white’ normative visibility have been documented in the American context, by scholar of African American history, Valerie Smith (1999) and art photographer and historian, Deborah Willis (1999). In their writings they demonstrate that photographs of ‘black’ subjects were taken regularly to document “their incremental rise to and beyond lower-middle-class respectability” and to display “the outward, material signs of their rising fortunes: homes, cars, furniture, decorations, festivities, and intact families” (Smith, 1999: 86), and to celebrate “achievements and create a sense of self-worth” (Willis, 1999: 113). Similar performances of resistance played out in the South African context, and present unique opportunities for reflecting on the resistance to the classifications and imposed identities of apartheid’s racialised judgements, and the aspirant identities claimed by ‘coloured’ subjects.

## **RESEARCH AIM**

My thesis aims to explore and examine the way that ordinary people lived and experienced the ambiguous spaces of colour, race and identity, before and during apartheid and how this affects their sense of belonging in a post-apartheid society.

<sup>11</sup> One of the central issues around which the war was fought was the abolition of slavery.

<sup>12</sup> Nine African Americans were murdered by a 21-year-old ‘white’ supremacist during a prayer service at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, on 17 June 2015. The church is one of the United States’ oldest ‘black’ churches and has long been a site for community organisation around civil rights.

I will do this through investigating the notion of ‘colouredness’ and attendant ideas of shame and respectability<sup>13</sup> within a framework of personal interviews, family photographs and oral histories. Through the examination of the photograph which serves as an *aide memoire*, I hope to *re-present* the stories of the marginalised and oppressed in South Africa.

My study is located in Cape Town, and the Western Cape,<sup>14</sup> where the demographics are very different to the rest of the country, according to oral historian, Alan Wieder (2002), and where the majority of the 4 832 900 ‘coloured’ people originated and still reside<sup>15</sup>. My roots are in Woodstock, Walmer Estate<sup>16</sup> and District Six<sup>17</sup>, and through my maternal grandparents in Malmesbury and Caledon<sup>18</sup>. I will, however, be referencing studies conducted throughout South Africa since this research addresses issues of relevance to a much larger population than the Western Cape.

I am aware of the difficulty of being an objective researcher while examining these issues. The photographs, the stories, the memories are all filtered by the lens through which I am looking at them. As Marianne Hirsch (1999), author of *The Familial Gaze*, reminds us, “those who analyse the familial gaze ... must be aware that to look is also, always, to be seen” (Hirsch, 1999: xv). Narrative research raises questions of objectivity and accuracy because stories must be viewed in their socio-cultural context and are personally meaningful. It is difficult to apply a standard set of procedures in the analysis thereof. However, these stories can be validated by corroboration from different narratives (ATLAS.ti, 2017). Associate Professor of History, Sean Field (2001), also cautions on the limitations of the interview process and how it is shaped by researcher and interviewee identities and power relations which govern retention and telling of memories. This, is therefore, in part and auto-ethnographic study, my own attempts to find meaning for what it means to be named and understood as ‘coloured’ in a democratic South Africa. In so doing, I hope to have offered others a platform for the expression of narratives through which we may come to terms with the past. The study is not meant to be a comprehensive one, but rather aims to contribute to existing and future narratives to achieve a multiplicity of voices. I hope that this will contribute to the dismantling of racial identities so that we may transcend race and view each other as human.

<sup>13</sup> Respectable adj. 1 regarded by society as being proper, correct and good. 2 adequate or acceptable; fairly good; Respectability involves caring for your own appearance as well as demonstrating decency through caring for others

<sup>14</sup> ‘Coloured’ people make up 48.78% of the population of the Western Cape (Frith, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> About 90% of ‘coloured’ people live in the western third of the country, two-thirds of all ‘coloured’ people in the Western Cape and 40% in the greater Cape Town area (Adhikari, 2006; Statistics South Africa, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Walmer Estate was bordered by District Six, Woodstock and University Estate

<sup>17</sup> Named the Sixth Municipal District of Cape Town in 1867. It was established as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants. On 11 February 1966 it was declared a ‘white’ area under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (District Six Museum web page).

<sup>18</sup> Both towns are situated in rural farming districts outside Cape Town.

# CHAPTER OUTLINE

## CHAPTER ONE

### **THE GENEALOGY OF ‘COLOURED’: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter will look at colonialism and racial slavery as the broader context within which apartheid and segregation and, in turn, the creation of the concept of ‘colouredness’ is situated. The colonisation of the Cape by the Dutch and English will be examined in order to reach an understanding of the social and political conditions, racialised stereotypes and prevailing mindsets which together contributed toward the formulation of the ‘coloured’ identity. I access this discussion through my personal apartheid classification of “Cape Malay/Cape Coloured”. This situating of ‘coloured’ identity will frame my own social experience of the attendant ideas of shame and respectability as reflected within an everyday archive of family photographs, oral history and cultural practices.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **THE ‘COLOURED’ QUESTION: THE RISE OF APARTHEID**

This chapter examines the rise of Afrikaner nationalism after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901) and the implementation of apartheid after the National Party came to power in 1948. The influences of racial science, eugenics and fascism on Afrikaner nationalism, and the justification of racism in South Africa, will be discussed. The concept of intergenerational trauma is introduced. Discussions around how the introduction of key apartheid legislation, such as the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, affected the lives of ordinary South Africans takes place within the context provided by photographs and interviews. The aim of this chapter is to provide a background to understanding the context of ‘coloured’ identity, and how it contributed to the shame of living ‘coloured’ in Cape Town.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **NARRATIVES AND MYTHS: REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPES**

Issues of representation are central to my thesis and I start from the premise that ‘colouredness’ is a cultural identity, created under “specific conditions of creolisation”, rather than “simply apartheid labels imposed by whites” (Erasmus, 2001: 16). Stereotypes as a means of social control and oppression are discussed. This chapter focuses on how ‘colouredness’ has been imbued with negativity and how these stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in a post-1994 society and the concomitant feelings of shame engendered

by these negative depictions. Central to this chapter are the stereotypes associated with alcoholism and illiteracy, as demonstrated in the Afrikaans idiom “*so dronk soos ‘n Kleurling onderwyser*”<sup>19</sup>. The role of the ‘coloured’ teacher and the importance of education as a means of earning respectability, is discussed against the background of early mission education and later Christian National Education, as introduced by the apartheid regime, is examined in terms of how it contributed to the concepts of shame and respectability.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **GOD’S STEPCHILDREN: SCENES OF SHAME**

Underlying my research is the issue of shame as experienced by those classified ‘coloured’ by the apartheid government and the subsequent struggle to prove respectability and decency. This chapter looks at the genealogy of shame and the issues of paternalism<sup>20</sup>, exploitation and mental subjugation which laid the foundation for shame. Psychosocial theories of shame and identity will be examined alongside the psychology of colonialism as discussed by psychiatrist and anti-colonial cultural theorist, Frantz Fanon. The central role that women played in managing shame and resisting the negative connotations of it within their home and families, is also addressed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESPECTABILITY: ARMOUR AGAINST INFERIORITY**

This chapter will look at respectability as a key defining principle in demarcating social status, and the roles of religion, British occupation, and clothing and material possessions as markers of respectability, rooted in slavery. The role of Islam as a unifying and humanising element has been discussed in chapter one.

This chapter will focus more on Christian evangelism and the role of the mission stations as the setting to shape the behaviour of the previously enslaved which at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a core element of respectability. This is done against the background of efforts by both the Dutch and British at the Cape to inculcate respectability and includes the fundamental role played by the Dutch Reformed Church in advocating and justifying apartheid.

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<sup>19</sup> As drunk as a ‘coloured’ teacher

<sup>20</sup> n. the policy of protecting the people one has control over, but also of restricting their freedom or responsibilities (Soanes, 2002: 652).



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONFRONTING OUR PAST: FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY**

This chapter will look at the promise of the 1994 democratic elections, the persistence of racialised identities in post-apartheid South Africa, and what historian, Mohammed Adhikari (2006) refers to as “the surge of colouredism” (Adhikari, 2006: 472). This chapter attempts to make sense of the cycles of reification and rejection associated with the identity and examines the positioning of the ‘coloured’ both pre-1994 and in the current political terrain of a post-apartheid South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the importance of acknowledging and remembering the past is discussed.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS SPACES: RACE, IDENTITY AND COLOUR**

This chapter is about passing through spaces, physically and metaphorically. Many of the spaces that ‘coloured’ people traversed were ambiguous, uncertain – ‘coloured’ people could speak different languages, belong to different religions, and be of various hues, which enabled them to move through different spaces. ‘Coloured’ people could also pass for ‘white’, passing from their previous existence and occupying a different space in the South African hierarchy of race. I examine race, identity and colour, and the concept of ‘colouredness’ through a trip to Australia as well as trips to rural communities which originated as mission stations.

## **CONCLUSION**

I conclude my study by reflecting on my search for roots and try to imagine a future in which we may be free.



# CHAPTER ONE

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*THE GENEALOGY OF 'COLOURED':  
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND*



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE GENEALOGY OF ‘COLOURED’: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Although one may speak of many coloured communities, it is questionable whether one can speak of the coloured people at all. In this essentially residual category are to be found people of the most diverse descent, including slaves from the Indonesian archipelago and the descendants of the area’s most truly indigenous groupings: the pastoral Khoikhoi (“Hottentots”) and the hunter-gatherer San (“Bushmen”). To be “coloured” in South Africa today is merely to say that one can trace some ancestry from Africa or Asia, or both, and speaks either English or Afrikaans as a home language. That the very notion of a “coloured people” exists is due to the complex sociology of three centuries of European domination and more recently the classificatory madness of the apartheid regime (Viall, et al., 2011).*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter will look at colonialism and racial slavery as the broader context within which apartheid and segregation and, in turn, the concept of ‘colouredness’, is situated. The colonisation of the Cape by the Dutch and English will be examined in order to reach an understanding of the social and political conditions, racialised stereotypes and prevailing mindsets which together contributed toward the formulation of the ‘coloured’ identity. I access this discussion through my personal apartheid classification of “Cape Malay/Cape Coloured”. This situating of ‘coloured’ identity will frame my own social experience of the attendant ideas of shame and respectability as reflected within an everyday archive of family photographs, oral history and cultural practices.



**Figure 3**

“Father Cape Malay; Mother Cape Coloured”, declares my birth certificate. I used to wonder what that made me, until years later, I was issued with an identity book, the last digit (9) of the identity number clearly labelling me as a ‘coloured’ female. Further evidence of what Viall, et al. (2011) call this “classificatory madness” would reveal itself when I worked as an occupational therapist at one of the state hospitals in Cape

Town. I learnt that the number 1 was reserved for “white male” in the racial hierarchy that extended to every aspect of our lives. Number 2 was for “white female”, 3 for “coloured male” and so on. These classifications appeared in the top right-hand corner of all patient labels, on their files, charts and medication. Different population groups also had different coloured patient files. Professor of Public Health, William Pick (2007), in his memoir, *The Slave has Overcome*, describes how, in the 1960s, as a ‘black’ medical student at the University Of Cape Town (UCT), he knew that he would be asked to leave the room when a pink file was handed to the doctor, since this meant that the next patient to be seen was ‘white’, and he was not allowed to be present at the examination (Pick, 2007). Twenty years later, similar restrictions were still in place and prevented me from doing clinical practice on ‘white’ patients.

Questions of race, colour and identity remain intimately linked in contemporary South Africa, but there is a reluctance to engage with issues of racial discrimination and a simmering anger about the lack of transformation in neighbourhoods and academic institutions as designated pre-1994. I contend that before South Africans, in the full range of their difference, can find a sense of belonging in a post-racial society, the issues of inferiority and superiority fostered by a hierarchical and racist past, need to be acknowledged and resolved. ‘Coloured’ is a complex and contested term, a label that I, as someone previously classified ‘coloured’, reject. Nevertheless, I find myself in a position where I have been investigating the notion of ‘colouredness’ and what it means to be part of this diverse group of South Africans who continue to occupy peripheral spaces in the larger South African landscape. It is impossible to move away from race markers in this discussion, since race continues to matter in South Africa, socially, politically and economically. On more than one occasion, I have been asked to fill in my son’s race “for administrative purposes” on forms at school. My son was born three years after a democratic government was elected and racism became illegal. Why am I being asked to classify him and how am I supposed to decide on this when his father and I, like my parents, were classified under separate categories during apartheid?

There are no wedding photographs of my parents, a fact I find inconceivable. I have bombarded my mother with questions – why are there no photographs, what did she wear, where were her friends, why was there no celebration, was it because she was “Cape Coloured” and my father “Cape Malay”, as my birth certificate says? A photographer seems a basic prerequisite to me. The only photograph of the two of them together as a young couple, was taken by a Movie Snaps<sup>21</sup> photographer, and I find myself drawn to it repeatedly as I search the fragile two-dimensional image for clues and hidden answers.

<sup>21</sup> The Movie Snaps Studio employed street photographers who would photograph people out on the town. You were given a ticket and could collect your black and white image a week later (O’Connell, 2012).



*Figure 4*

In the photograph, my parents stride confidently down one of the main streets in central Cape Town, past the General Post Office building, across the road from the City Hall. Both are immaculately dressed: my father in a dark pants and white shirt with a striped blazer, my mother in a fashionable dress of the day, its nipped waist showing off her figure, and wearing what I am coming to recognise as her signature court shoes. My father seems to be strolling casually, one hand in his pocket while the other arm is cocked to hold my mother's hand. They make a handsome couple and both seem at ease as they allow themselves to be photographed. This photograph was taken in the late 1950s, when the National Party (NP) had been in power for at least a decade and apartheid legislation had shaped the city. However, life seems to have gone on — people got dressed up, took the bus into town, went shopping, and had lunch at the only restaurant, *La Fiesta*, that 'coloured' people could eat at in the city.

In spite of the normalcy of the photograph, it seems to me to be an act of defiance, my parents are looking straight at the camera as they claim this segregated apartheid space as their own. The fact that they went back to buy the photograph speaks of a desire to remember this performance of normality and ordinariness that resists the memories that we have of apartheid. The photograph has been cut as if to fit into a frame and is more well-preserved than others in the family collection, indicating I believe, that it was special.

Hirsch, whose work combines feminist theory with memory studies and the transmission of memories of violence across generations, and Leo Spitzer, a cultural and comparative historian and writer in the field of memory studies, examine photographs taken of Jews on the streets of Romania before WWII and during the city's occupation by Nazis in their paper, *Incongruous Images: Before, During and After the Holocaust* (2009). They say that these photographs "reveal a normalcy and a social integration that was then violently

disrupted and destroyed”, allowing a glimpse of normality within the restrictive space controlled by a repressive government (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2009: 15). The conventional nature of my parents’ photograph similarly points to the ordinariness of life in spite of the implementation of draconian apartheid laws. Many families in Cape Town have at least one photograph taken on the same spot in in the city, when owning a camera was too expensive and people still dressed up to go to town. The photographs capture parents, grandparents, children, friends and couples in their best attire, often with suits, hats and gloves, defiantly striding through the centre of the segregated city, challenging their labelling as inferior. When I interviewed Jennifer Hardisty, she said that there were few photographs of them, but “we each have one walking with mom in town”, referring to the Movie Snaps photographs (Hardisty, 2018). In the absence of cameras in the home, this became one of the few ways that people could record their act of dressing up and presenting themselves in a way that resisted and challenged the narrative that the NP sought to affix to them. This photograph of my parents has taken the place of a wedding photograph for me, but its significance as a representation of ‘colouredness’ in the apartheid city is not lost on me. Try as I may, I cannot see any visible markers for why one should be labelled “Cape Coloured” and the other “Cape Malay”<sup>22</sup>. And if I look more like one than the other, does this make me more ‘coloured’ or more ‘Malay’? I start my study therefore with an examination of the genealogy of ‘coloured’ through a continuum of apartheid, slavery and colonialism. As journalist, John Pilger, (2006) contends:

... although apartheid took its name and mysticism from the first Boer regime ... its lifeblood flowed from the British imperial legacy of Cecil Rhodes and other men of commerce and industry, who at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stole the land, resources and economic birth right of the majority (Pilger, 2006: 11).

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM**

... the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus inaugurated an epoch of human history in which both colonialism and racial slavery profoundly shaped our ways of life for many centuries ... the[y] opened the way for the institution of a hierarchical system of classification of human beings ... difference and discontinuity in the gaze of the Western observer became linked to conceptions of historical progress, and race became a determining factor for human status (Bogues, 2010: 6-7).

As a child I was vaguely aware that the Coon Carnival<sup>23</sup> my parents took us to watch in District Six each

<sup>22</sup> This labelling impacted on their wedding, and my grandmother insisted that they be married in a civil ceremony to ensure that it was legalised since Muslim marriages were not recognised by the state. My grandfather accompanied them to court as he had to give permission for my mother, who was under 21, to be married.

<sup>23</sup> A New Year street parade in Cape Town of ‘coloured’ men’s performance clubs in American minstrel costume and blackface, performing Afrikaans and American minstrel and jazz music and African ragtime songs (Coplan, 1985). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century slave-owners had celebrated on the first of January and slaves were allowed off the next day for their celebrations which included street parades with musicians.

New Year, or the *liederen* that were sung by the Malay Choirs<sup>24</sup> and guests at weddings (standards like *Daar kom die Alabama*<sup>25</sup> and *Rosa*<sup>26</sup>) had something to do with a slave heritage. Indeed, as observed by Yvette Hutchison (2013), who writes on performance and memory, the “cape coloured identity is most often represented with reference to the New Year Carnival” and until recently this was one of the few ways in which South Africa’s slave history was acknowledged (Hutchison, 2013: 192).

This vague knowledge of slavery, reinforced by the absence of published slave narratives, I contend, has led to a general disregard for its importance among, especially, the descendants of the enslaved. This is supported by Gqola (2010) who notes that slavery in South Africa has only recently attracted historical interest, and the dearth of available literature written in the voices of the enslaved confirms the presumed inadequacy of the enslaved. Writer and scholar, Zoë Wicomb (1998), laments the absence of slave memory among ordinary people in the Western Cape, the roots of which she attributes to the shame associated with slavery, with being ‘black’ and with miscegenation<sup>27</sup>. Historian, Robert Ross (1983) observes that the only residue of the era of slavery in South African history lies in court records, while Viall, et al. (2011) confirm that the histories of the enslaved are documented mainly as slave-owners’ possessions, on estate transfer documents and in court records; consequently, there is little to be learnt about how the enslaved lived and survived from official records (Viall, et al., 2011:45). Gqola (2010) notes, however, that international trends regarding slave histories have highlighted the vague knowledge people had about their slave ancestry, leading to a renewed interest in this legacy which is evident in language, music, food and in the names<sup>28</sup> of descendants of the enslaved.

Furthermore, as Baderoon (2014) observes, this forgetting includes the “foundational notions of race and sex in South Africa” generated by slavery, both because of the pain and shame of remembering, and as a result of the sustained system of propaganda that portrayed slavery as minor and mild. Furthermore, Baderoon (2014) traces the imprint of slavery to the undervalued, and often violent, labour of farm and domestic workers in South Africa, and in the systemic violence that South Africa continues to experience today. I argue that the differences in slavery in antiquity and in the ‘New World’, compounded by differences in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slavery, created the conditions for the dismissal of slavery at the Cape as benign.

<sup>24</sup> The Malay brought musical skills to South Africa, contributing to the romantic Dutch ballads and the indigenous music of the East Indies (Coplan, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> This is one of the most well-known traditional Cape songs although the origin is obscure. The first part of the song seems to have been composed in response to the return visit of the Confederate ship, *Alabama* to the Cape. Ironically, the song was composed by descendants of slaves about a ship belonging to the southern states of America which still supported slavery. However, the lyrics of *ghoema-liedjies* (songs sung to the rhythm of a small drum, a *ghoema*) were less important than the rhythm (Bradlow & Bradlow, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> A love song usually sung at weddings

## **SLAVERY IN ANTIQUITY VERSUS NEW WORLD SLAVERY**

In his book, *Before Color Prejudice*, Professor Frank M. Snowden Jr (1991), examines the factors that contributed to the absence of virulent colour prejudice in the ancient world. He asserts that no single ethnic group was associated with slave status or with the descendants of slaves and, as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, slavery did not equate with ‘blackness’. Many Africans worked in the Roman Empire as musicians, artisans, scholars, and generals as well as slaves, and art and written sources portray a highly favourable overall view of ‘blacks’. ‘Black’ skin colour<sup>29</sup> was therefore neither a sign of inferiority nor an obstacle to integration into society (Snowden, 1991). The slavery that existed in antiquity and in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans then, was fundamentally different to New World slavery in that it was not formulated along racial lines which was foundational to slavery in the modern Western colonial context and informed the racist constructs of colonialism and later apartheid

Slavery in antiquity was not a permanent condition and manumission was common; many slaves occupied higher positions in the military, or as artists and educators, and were often symbols of power and prestige rather than a source of labour (Snowden, 1991). It was only in the New World that slavery, and the slave trade, became essentially about economics — the trans-Atlantic slave route assisted the manufacturing industries of Europe by using weapons and iron to purchase slaves, slaves were taken across the ocean to the New World (in what was called the Middle Passage<sup>30</sup>) to work on plantations producing cotton, sugar, coffee and cocoa, that, in turn, made its way back to Europe, according to educator, Dr Van der Ross (2005). British historian, Niall Ferguson (2012) postulates that, without the New World, Western Europe would have remained underdeveloped and dependent on the East for input regarding technology, culture and wealth. European monarchies, such as England and the Netherlands, driven by the imperative to extend their power and influence through the acquisition of colonies in the New World, “were willing to cross oceans and conquer whole continents in the pursuit of ‘God, Gold and Glory’”. However, in the absence of “American ‘ghost acres’ and the African slaves who worked them,” he asserts that there could have been “no ‘European Miracle’, no Industrial Revolution” (Ferguson, 2012: 97).

<sup>27</sup> the interbreeding of people considered to be of different racial types

<sup>28</sup> “Slaves were considered goods and often were not even mentioned by name in sales”, they lost their names and former identities and were named after months of the year, or given European or biblical names, names from classical mythology or their names were followed by the place they came from, were shipped from” (Viall, et al. 2011: 47).

<sup>29</sup> *Aethiops*, the most common generic term applied to ‘blacks’ from the south of Egypt and from the southern fringes of northwest Africa, meant literally a “burnt-faced” or a “colored” person, a reflection of the environment theory that attributed the Ethiopians’ skin colour and tightly coiled hair to the intense heat of the southern sun (Snowden, 1991: 7).

<sup>30</sup> Trade was conducted in a triangle – from Europe to Africa, Africa to the New World, i.e. the Middle Passage, and from the New World back to Europe.



Issues of colonial power, racial domination and fascism have shaped the long-term political understanding of the modern world (Bogues, 2010; Mangcu, 2015). As such, I argue that the centrality of race as primary to the development of global imperialism<sup>31</sup> is fundamental to our understanding of South African history and society. I will, therefore, turn my focus to racial slavery and, specifically, the Indian Ocean slave trade and its impact on the development of the Cape Colony, since the racial hierarchy it institutionalised fundamentally shaped South Africa, economically and socially, shaped notions of race and sex, and continues to influence the present. I do not wish to imply that slavery in antiquity was in any way acceptable as the logical interaction between civilisations, but to emphasise the difference between slavery and *racial* slavery, which involved the mass enslavement of Africans by ‘white’ Europeans and laid the foundations for racial segregation in South Africa and elsewhere.

## **RACIAL SLAVERY**

*Racial* slavery originated in the Middle Ages, when Christians and Muslims increasingly began to recruit slaves from east, north central, and west Africa. After 1453, when the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, the capital of eastern Christendom, Christian slave traders drew increasingly upon captive ‘black’ Muslims, known as Moors, and upon slaves purchased on the West African coast or transported across the Sahara Desert (Digital History, 2016).

The concept of race and racial difference has been used to justify slavery and the denial of rights and freedoms to people for centuries (Viall, et al., 2011). Various theories existed regarding the innate inferiority of “the Negro”, such as that ‘black’ people were “not far from apes in origin ... were amoral and less civilised” (Viall, et al., 2011: 126). People in the New World came to believe in the association of slavery with dark skin colour and these beliefs became doctrines which were put forward and supported by ample quotation from the Bible. Other racial stereotypes and ‘anti-black’ racism developed or increased in intensity after ‘black’ and slave became synonymous.

Africans were believed to be the descendants of Ham<sup>32</sup> and were thus condemned to be the ‘lowest of the slaves’ compared to their fellow human beings. “Some of the worst atrocities of history have occurred as a result of this kind of scapegoating”, according to leading commentator on religious affairs, Karen Armstrong (2011: 47-48). Van der Ross (2015) refers to another curse on Ham’s descendants – that they would for all time be “hewers of wood and drawers of water” to other tribes (Van der Ross, 2015: 14).

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<sup>31</sup> While *colonialism* is the practice of acquiring control over another country, occupying it with settlers and exploiting it economically, *imperialism* is the policy of extending a country’s power and influence through colonisation or military force; colonialism is the practice while imperialism is the idea driving the practice (Soanes, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> The first and most important rationalisation for slavery based on ethnicity, was the so-called “Curse of Ham”. According to Armstrong (2011), the biblical writers cast Noah as the new Adam. Almost immediately though, Noah falls from grace. Armstrong interprets this as Noah’s lack of spiritual resources to survive the trauma of the Flood; he abuses himself and his family and then refuses to take responsibility for his actions. Instead, he projects his guilt onto his grandson Canaan, the son of Ham, and curses him to be the “lowest of slaves to his brothers”.

It was Noah's curse of Canaan that provided a rationale for Israel's later subjugation of the Canaanites and the proposed genocide of the native peoples of the Promised Land (Armstrong, 2011). Later, Christians who maintained that God punished "Negroes" with a 'black' skin, would point to this verse to justify the institution of slavery (Snowden, 1991). Professor of Political Sociology, Maarten Vink (2007), notes that both God's selection of the Dutch as his Chosen People<sup>33</sup> and the so-called 'Ham ideology' continued to serve as the most important biblical justification for the enslavement and exploitation of Africans and Asians until emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will return to this topic in a later chapter, since the justification of racism by the church laid the foundation for the justification and formulation of apartheid by the Dutch Reformed Church, and is important to bear in mind when one considers the role of the mission stations in offering a sanctuary to the enslaved after emancipation.

Imperialism justified the formal and informal domination of non-Western peoples on both self-interested and altruistic grounds. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a result of the cultural differences perceived by 'whites' of European stock between themselves and 'black' colonials whom they ruled, many 'whites' associated poverty, inefficiency, and backwardness with 'black' people and attached strong emotions to physical differences (Snowden, 1991). However, Ferguson (2012) notes that the high tide of theories of racial distinction was not in fact in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and that in the century after the foundation of the United States, no fewer than 38 states banned interracial marriages, and, as recently as 1967, there were still laws prohibiting interracial marriage in 16 American states. This correlates with the time-frame in which apartheid was formulated as a systematic rule founded on racial ideology.

Bogues (2010) comments that it is clear that the American democracy, unable to contend with the consequences of the historical wrong enacted at its inauguration, responded by expelling the 'black' body from American policy. This exclusion shaped the character of American democracy and after the American Revolution<sup>34</sup>, the racial division<sup>35</sup> between 'black' and 'white' hardened. In response to a request for information about Virginia from the secretary to the French delegation in Philadelphia, American founding father, Thomas Jefferson<sup>36</sup>, penned his reply thus:

<sup>33</sup> Though present throughout Calvinist Europe, the metaphor of the 'Biblical Exodus' – the journey of God's Chosen People from slavery and idolatry, through ordeal, to freedom and godliness in the 'New Zion' or 'New Jerusalem' – contributed to a distinct sense of Dutch identity. The image of Netherlands-Israel was a stirring patriotic commonplace, which found expression in visual and even musical forms as well as in printed texts (Vink, 2007: 28).

<sup>34</sup> US War of Independence 1775-1783; conflict arose from growing tensions between residents of Great Britain's 13 North American colonies and the colonial government, which represented the British crown.

<sup>35</sup> The division was institutionalised when the United States constitution accepted the legitimacy of slavery. Article I, section 9, of the constitution, permitted the slave trade to continue for another 20 years and, on the steps of the Old Exchange in Charleston, where the Declaration of Independence was read, slaves were sold until 1808 (Ferguson, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the third president of the USA (1801-1809)

This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people. ... Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture (as quoted in Zechmeister, 2013).

Author, Gene Zechmeister (2013), comments that Jefferson makes his ideas about segregation clear in his writing, and later speaks of the virtues of America's Indians but argues that "the Negro" is inferior to both 'whites' and Indians. Although preaching about the equality of all men, Jefferson was a slave-owner and has been criticised for "his denigration of blacks in the harshest terms" (Zechmeister, 2013).

Racial slavery was about the degradation of the human being and, as a system of "property in the person", it represented the ultimate form of domination (Bogues, 2010: 55). The shift to racial slavery is an important one, as it legitimated colonial power over 'black' bodies and colonial expansion. 'Black bodies' were commodified and objectified in order to justify the economic and 'moral' purpose of colonialism (Bogues, 2010). The close identification of slavery with skin colour later encouraged the idea of 'white' supremacy and fostered racial antipathy in the United States and in South Africa, says Snowden (1991). These attitudes continued to shape life after emancipation, and throughout the apartheid era when 'black' bodies provided the labour in the mining and agricultural industries, as well as domestic labour, and continues to shape the position of 'black' people in South Africa, post-liberation. This genealogy of racial oppression and dehumanisation, I contend, laid the foundation of the shame associated with 'coloured' identity and was the genesis for the daily struggle to prove respectability.

### **INDIAN OCEAN SLAVE TRADE**

The forcible removal of over 12 million Africans to the Americas was one part of an international trade in human bodies. Another was the multinational shipment of the enslaved in an Indian Ocean slave trade to the Cape (Bogues, et al., 2013). According to Vink (2007), the Dutch were active participants in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, for nearly two centuries, while they were "the nexus of an enormous slave trade, the most expansive of its kind in the history of Southeast Asia" (Vink, 2007: 20). Historian, Karel Schoeman (2012), observes that the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC<sup>37</sup> were granted a monopoly over trade in the East Indies, where they enslaved over half of the population of Batavia (Jakarta) and protected their monopoly with brute force. Although a commercial endeavour, slavery served a much larger colonial agenda, says Vink (2007) and officials of the VOC used a variety of arguments to defend

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<sup>37</sup> Or the Dutch East India Company, a sovereign body which acted independently of the Dutch government although its headquarters were in the Netherlands.

their actions, ranging from “Christian humanitarian compassion” to the right of war and conquest, the need to establish and populate settlement colonies which were peopled by the “inferior, uncivilised ‘servile’ indigenous peoples” to “financial-budgetary considerations” (Vink, 2007: 37-38).

Erasmus (2017) proposes that Indian Ocean slavery differed from North Atlantic slavery in a number of ways. Amongst others, it was mainly female, not male, slaves were required for household rather than plantation work, and associations of race with slavery were not as pronounced. The fact that lines were not as clearly defined between slaves, ‘free’ people, indentured labourers and settlers was further blurred by independent traders and (mainly Muslim) clerics and pilgrims who crossed the ocean, challenging notions of slave-as-African and free-person-as-European (Erasmus, 2017). I agree with her contestation that ‘colouredness’ at the Cape arose as the result of a unique process of creolisation under specific conditions. This was also shaped by the Dutch and British and their adaptation to local conditions.

### **THE OCCUPATION OF THE CAPE**

In 1652 the VOC established a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope, setting in motion “dramatic social changes affecting the lives of both the original inhabitants of the Cape and those who came to the Cape as settlers<sup>38</sup> and slaves”, according to historian, June McKinnon (2004:11). Soon after the arrival of Van Riebeeck, the first isolated slaves arrived, paving the way for the Cape Colony to become dependent on enslaved labour<sup>39</sup>. By 1657 the small settlement had grown, and a decision was made to import slaves to meet the increased labour needs of the colony. A total of 228 slaves from the coast of Guinea and 174 from Angola were the first to arrive in 1658, but by 1700, about 50% of slaves came from the coast of India, probably speaking Bengali (McKinnon, 2004). During history lessons at schools I recall rote learning facts such as, “Jan van Riebeeck founded the Cape on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1652”, along with the names of the three ships that accompanied him, and the Dutch names of the five points of the fort he built. This date was reinforced by the public holiday celebrated each year. I don’t recall learning anything about slavery.

By 1660 the Cape was a busy port where all the languages of the world — African, Indo-European, and Malayo-Polynesian were spoken. Women from all backgrounds – “Khoekhoe, Bushman, slave and European – bolstered the population” (McKinnon, 2004: 12) and, as in all areas colonised by Europeans in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, mixing between ‘whites’ and the indigenous people took place.

<sup>38</sup> Van der Ross (2015) observes that the ‘coloured’ people did not exist when Jan van Riebeeck arrived in 1652 with about 100 men and eight women.

<sup>39</sup> Slavery was a central element of the Dutch colonial conquest and part of the emergence of Afrikaner political and social ideas. However, both the British and the Dutch occupied the Cape during this time and were responsible for the continuation of slavery until it was abolished in 1834 (Bogues et al., 2013).

The VOC turned a blind eye to the fact that the slave lodge served as a brothel for garrison soldiers and passing sailors, since it bolstered the slave population and within two decades liaisons between Europeans, slaves and the Khoi had given rise to a population of mixed origin (McKinnon, 2004; Van der Ross, 2015). Historical researcher, Dr Hans Heese<sup>40</sup> (2013) says that the ethnic and genetic mixing that took place in the Cape until 1795 cannot be easily equalled. In America, children of unions between ‘whites’ and Africans were only accepted as ‘white’ if they had less than one eighth or one sixteenth colour, depending on the state they were born in. He observes that if the same guidelines were applied in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Cape, there would be a much smaller ‘white’ population and a much larger ‘coloured’ one. As early as 1666 the church had to decide regarding the christening of children born from the union of free burghers and slaves. Between 1682 and 1685 there were vain efforts to regulate the casual relationships between ‘whites’ and slaves. It is not clear whether this was because of economic, moral or religious reasons (Heese, 2013). The first, and only<sup>41</sup>, documented marriage between a European and a Khoikhoi during the time of the VOC, took place in 1664 (Heese, 2013). Pieter van Meerhoff was a Danish soldier and medic employed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) who arrived in the Cape in 1659. He married Eva<sup>42</sup>, a Khoikhoi woman, who worked in Jan van Riebeeck’s<sup>43</sup> household as an interpreter who was proficient in both Dutch and Portuguese<sup>44</sup>, writes journalist, Max du Preez (2004). Heese (2013) draws parallels between van Meerhoff and Eva in the Cape, and Pocahontas and John Rolfe in North America, saying that marriages of this sort were of diplomatic benefit to the colonisers as it fostered good relations with the indigenous people. However, he places more importance historically and socially on the unions between Europeans and slaves<sup>45</sup> that were then followed by relationships between the already-mixed slaves and Khoikhoi. Between 1652 and 1795 there were 1 273 (mixed unions) and 147 cases of marriage and other unions between ‘coloured’ and European people. McKinnon (2004) agrees with Heese (2013) that Cape-born women of mixed parentage made up the majority of brides.

<sup>40</sup> I translated Heese’s book, *Groep Sonder Grense: Die Rol en Status van die Gemengde Bevolking aan die Kaap 1652-1795*, for my own reference.

<sup>41</sup> Heese (2013) points out that although the Meerhoff-Eva union is the only recorded marriage, there were informal arrangements..

<sup>42</sup> Eva is the name the Dutch gave to Krotoa when she converted to Christianity. She was the niece of Aushaumato, the leader of a clan of Khoikhoi. (McKinnon 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Jan van Riebeeck was the first governor of the Cape, arriving in 1652

<sup>44</sup> As a Khoikhoi woman she was thus a valuable interpreter and negotiator between the two groups of people

<sup>45</sup>Of note regarding the unions between Europeans and imported slaves, is the fact that the slaves were of Indian origin; this element is substantially greater than unions between slaves from East Africa, Indonesia and Madagascar. Possible reasons for this could be the long association with Europeans in the East, and the relative similarity of European and Indian appearance and culture as opposed to that between Europeans and Africans (Heese, 2013).

Professor of Politics, Louise Vincent and her student, Danielle Bowler (2011), propose that these unions produced a mixed population of ‘coloured’ people who were to occupy the interstitial zone between ‘white’ and ‘black’. An interstitial space, in biology, is the space which exists between cells, tissues and organs. Therefore, a space between structures and objects; it can be interpreted to be neither here nor there, or extended to be neither ‘black’ nor ‘white’. As such, I argue that it is important to understand this deliberate creation of a buffer zone between Europeans and indigenous people, as it would be the offspring of these unions who later occupied this in-between space as ‘coloureds’ after emancipation and during apartheid, and still continue to do so post-1994. As Bowler and Vincent (2011) contend, it was ‘coloured’ people who were destined to “represent the terrain upon which classificatory boundary disputes would most starkly come to play themselves out” (Bowler & Vincent, 2011). Both McKinnon (2004) and Heese (2013) draw attention to the fact that many enslaved women married European men, produced large families and became matriarchs of ‘white’ South African families, indicating that many Afrikaners are descended from Eastern foremothers through the male and female line. The descendants of these marriages were all accepted into the ‘white’ community and European surnames masked the slave woman’s origins. I propose then that this hidden heritage was to be protected at all costs with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this shame was behind the fervent attempts by the Afrikaner to distance himself from the ‘black’ population.

### **MOTHER: CAPE ‘COLOURED’**

This lineage then, came to be written in ink on my birth certificate as “Cape Coloured”. My mother has scant information about her maternal history, and the little she does know, she overheard my grandmother telling someone else. My grandmother was born in Malmesbury<sup>46</sup>, the heart of ‘*die Swartland*’, or black land<sup>47</sup>, and, along with three younger siblings, was sent to live with an aunt in District Six, after her parents died when she was about 14 years old. As far as my mother knows, my grandmother never returned to the town (Kamies, 2016). In this portrait of her (below), she sits on her *stoep* in Woodstock, with her hands neatly folded on her lap, staring straight into the camera from under perfectly arched eyebrows, with every hair in place. It’s my favourite photograph of her because of the olde-worlde glamour it conjures up for me, and releases the memories of her, seated in front of the dressing table.

<sup>46</sup> Malmesbury is the centre of South Africa’s largest wheat-growing area, situated 40 minutes north of Cape Town; the first settlers established themselves here in 1744.

<sup>47</sup> So-called perhaps because of the *rhenosterbos* (rhinoceros bush) which appeared black at certain times of the year, or because of the black colour of its fertile soil.

I used to love watching her do her makeup — the way she applied powder with a thin sponge from the light blue *Ponds Rachelle* compact with gold lettering, the black *kajal*<sup>48</sup> from the little red or green tin that she applied to her eyes with her pinkie finger, and the bright red lipstick that matched her nails. She would blot the lipstick on a tissue that I would pick up and hold to my lips, imagining when I would be old enough to do the same.



*Figure 5*

The photograph shows evidence of being handled, there is a definite crease down the middle and the left corner is threatening to come off. On the back, a childish handwriting proclaims, “my beautiful grandma”, written by my brother, Enver, I suspect, who we always said was my grandmother’s favourite. She liked to remind us that she was a beautiful woman and a good few shades fairer than my grandfather who had to change his classification from ‘white’ to marry her. When they argued, he would remind her that he had a pedigree, while she was a *Strandloper*<sup>49</sup>.

The satiny sheen of her dress is obvious, in spite of the faded black and white image, and her hands appear to be clutching a purse made of matching fabric. At the same time there seems to be an element of containment about them, suggesting that she is holding more than just the purse. My eyes are drawn to her lips, which I know were ruby red, not a retiring colour. Red is traditionally associated with passion and seduction, power and courage, and can also give confidence to those who are shy. When my daughter, aged 22, decided to take a gap after graduation to figure out what she wanted to do in the next phase of her life, she discovered a similar red lipstick, *Russian Red*, a surprising choice since she had never used much makeup.

<sup>48</sup> A black eyeliner used in the east; my grandmother often asked people who she knew were going to Mecca, to bring her a tin of kajal.

<sup>49</sup> a member of the Stone Age communities of Khoisan fisher-gatherers living formerly in the Western Cape; a beachcomber (Soanes, 2002)

Armed with her red lips, she set off to explore five countries she had never visited before, doing a combination of community service, adventure and Spanish language. I think that she may have been channelling the pioneering spirit of her great-grandmother who had to set off to Cape Town with her younger siblings after their parents died. My grandmother always seemed fearful, for our safety, not keen to go out on her own, not even to the shops, but this was hidden by those red lips and the splash of *Moon drops* perfume she dabbed on her wrist and behind her ears. This photograph records her at her best, and I wonder how much of that was motivated by the need to prove that she was not a *strandloper*.

The term *Strandloper* appears to have been introduced by Van Riebeeck and referred to a small group of indigenous people who may have been outcasts. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century they provided various services to passing ships, such as carrying fresh water and acting as intermediaries between sailors and the Khoikhoi, writes Alan Mountain (2003). History textbooks made cursory reference to Harry, the *Strandloper*, who was described as a scoundrel, untrustworthy and ungrateful regarding his relationships with the Dutch. It was many years later that I learned that their leader, Harry, the *Strandloper* was in fact Autshumato, who had served as an interpreter for Van Riebeeck in the early years of the settlement at the Cape. Malmesbury's original inhabitants were Khoi and San people, so I imagine that my grandfather hit a nerve with his *strandloper* reference. My grandmother prided herself on her fair skin and straight hair, and this must have been the ultimate insult to her. She often spoke of her second-born daughter, who was fair and blue-eyed and who died when she was four months old. I wonder what effect this had on my mother, who was darker and who had to witness my grandmother's pain at the loss, not only of a child, but a child who seemed more special because of her fairer colour.

My early memories of my grandmother are accompanied by a cloud of smoke, littered with cigarette ends. She would light up in the kitchen and leave the cigarette to burn through the Formica table while she went to another room to burn some other piece of furniture. Sometimes she used an ashtray but, usually, she would just balance it on the end of the table, or arm of a chair. Most of the furniture bore tell-tale marks of her addiction. Her relationship with cigarettes reaches way back to when she arrived in Cape Town and had to find employment as soon as possible, which she did at the Cavalla Cigarette Factory in Woodstock. She would have received part-payment of her wages in cigarettes and probably started smoking around the same time. Her work – trimming the ends of the cigarettes – was boring and repetitive and it would eventually be the cause of her death of lung cancer. Historians, Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth Van Heyningen and Nigel Worden (1999), observe that in Cape Town women were producers as well as consumers of tobacco, and worked under harsh conditions of overcrowding, on insanitary premises and for long hours. The part-payment of wages in cigarettes echoes the '*dop*' system employed by farmers in the vineyards.



I don't know when exactly the photograph was taken, who took it and why, and the photograph raises as many questions as it does memories of her life. The plants behind her – plants with names like the Wandering Jew, Star of Bethlehem, and Hen-and-Chicken – remind me of the tiny garden she nurtured, but they reveal little else. It is as if the careful pose and neatly folded hands deliberately contain and guard the secrets of her past. The simple black and white, two-dimensional image unleashes memories of her time in Cape Town, her time as Ethel Jeanet Silvia Kleinsmith, but it has nothing to tell me about Ethel Jeanet Silvia Adams of Malmesbury.

Marita Sturken (1999) in an essay about the personal photograph and its role in cultural memory, describes photographs as “technologies of memory” that allow us to move between personal and cultural memory, and history, “a mechanism through which the past can be constructed and situated within the present” (Sturken, 1999: 178-179). Elizabeth Edwards (2005), Research Professor in Photographic History, similarly argues that photographs are social objects that exist in time and space and therefore provide a tangible cultural experience, which links people to each other and to objects and are therefore significant in the telling of histories. As such, the image of my grandmother connects her past to my present. Decades after her death, it provides me with proof of what she looked like, and how she dressed, while at the same time pointing to the tragedy of all she lost as a young girl. I suggest that that is why she had it taken. So that her great-grandchildren would know her. Her image provides them with a tangible history that goes further back than mine does, validating their past, and mine, with an image of a well-dressed, respectable woman of whom they have nothing to be ashamed of.

### **FATHER: CAPE MALAY**

Relative to the “Cape Coloured” label on my birth certificate which originates from my mother and grandmother, the “Cape Malay” label bestowed through my father presents a more immediately discernible cultural and historical narrative. My father's family, classified Cape Malay, had a distinct identity, different to my mother's family, socially, culturally and linguistically. They spoke a version of Afrikaans peppered with foreign words, like *kaparangs*, the wooden sandals my father's oldest brother wore after he had taken *abdus* (the ritual bathing) before he unrolled his *musallah* and faced the east to *soembain* (pray) after he heard the *bilal bang*, calling him to prayer. As children we were taught to say *kanala* and *tarammakassie* when we were offered something to eat on *Labarang*. I was terrified to go to the *jamang* (outside toilet) when we visited at night because it was in the far corner of the garden, lit by a bare globe, beyond an orchard of loquat<sup>50</sup>, fig and other fruit trees. Rituals associated with eating, dressing and praying were practiced daily, young children attended *madressah* and learned Arabic; every year the community fasted and celebrated together; older

<sup>50</sup> This tree originated in southeast China and was grown for its fruit which could also be made into jams.

members of the community went on pilgrimage to Mecca and returned dressed in a particular way. There was a sense of pride in the customs and beliefs which were independent of apartheid rules and laws.

## **SLAVERY AND ISLAM**

Muslims first arrived in the Cape Colony in 1658 as slaves and free servants of the Dutch, making slavery, Islam and colonialisation “co-terminous” (Baderoon, 2014: 6-7). The first Muslims were the Mardyckers of Amboya in the East Indies who were brought as soldiers to support the Dutch against the Khoisan resistance, but the majority came as slaves from East Africa, the African islands of the Indian Ocean and South and South-east Asia (Baderoon, 2014). Many of the Muslims came as political prisoners when the VOC used the Cape as a penal colony and between 1652 and the end of Company rule, about 200 exiles spent time there (Viall, et al., 2010). Baderoon (2014) urges the importance of first understanding that the Cape Muslim community developed “under conditions of enslavement [and] enforced prostitution ...” during colonial rule before we can address the “enduring concepts of race, sexuality and belonging in the country today” (Baderoon, 2014: 6, 12). The public practice of Muslim rituals was punishable by death and consequently “Islam survived through hidden practices that shaped communal relations, language and food rituals” that have survived into present-day South African culture (Baderoon, 2014: 11). Baderoon (2014) notes that the observance of Islam was regarded with ambivalence by the Dutch precisely because it offered the possibility of an interior life and communal space outside of the control of the slave-owners. Viall, et al. (2011) and journalist and author, Allister Sparks (2003) believe that some slave-owners even encouraged the growth of Islam since Muslim slaves were more reliable workers because of their prohibition on alcohol. It was only in 1804 when the Dutch sought the loyalty of the Muslims in the face of impending British invasion that they granted them freedom of religion for the first time. Despite the restrictions placed on them by the colonial masters, Muslims at the Cape were to build the first school for ‘black’ people in South Africa in 1793, the first mosque in 1798 and the first Afrikaans texts written in Arabic script in 1856.

Those who were able to buy their manumission were allowed housing in the *Bo-Kaap* where they established mosques and a burial ground. Men like Sheikh Yusuf of Macassar<sup>51</sup> and later Tuan Guru<sup>52</sup>, provided intellectual and religious leadership (Sparks, 2003).

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<sup>51</sup> A Bantamese resistance leader who arrived at the Cape in 1694 (Sparks, 2003). He is credited with having brought Islam to the Cape; he arrived with a group of political exiles who were sent to the Zandvliet farm at the mouth of the Eerste River, an area which today is known as Macassar. He is buried here, and his tomb is one of 25 Islamic shrines or *kramats* that encircle Cape Town (SAHO, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> a prince from Tidore, a sultanate in the Moluccas, named Imam Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam who was imprisoned for a time on Robben Island (Sparks, 2003); Tuan Guru (which means Master Teacher) was captured by the Dutch for allegedly conspiring with the English and was sent to Robben Island; his teaching and philosophy provided the basis of Cape Islam; after his release he set up a *madrassah* at his house in Dorp Street and was given permission to convert a warehouse in Dorp Street into the Auwal Mosque; a *kramat* was erected on Robben Island to honour his memory (SAHO, 2011). [There are also *kramats* at Oude Kraal, Signal Hill and Constantia]

Imams were central figures in the community, more than just spiritual leaders which often caused conflict<sup>53</sup> around the election of an imam. In 1862 Abu Bakr Effendi, supported financially by the Ottoman government, arrived to take over the leadership in the community, at the invitation of De Roubaix, a Cape parliamentarian (Ross, 2004). According to Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith (1998), Muslim schooling expanded with “a stronger feeling of brotherhood amongst Muslim boys” under his leadership and conversion to Christianity practically stopped (Worden, et al, 1998: 189). However, Ross (2004) disputes the unifying role that Effendi played since he belonged to the *Hanafite* school of Islam which was popular in Turkey at the time, while Muslims at the Cape were *Shaffiites* (Ross, 2004). Be that as it may, it was around this time that Cape Muslim men altered their style of dress from the ‘Malay’ to the Ottoman<sup>54</sup> style, most notably changing the conical hat for the fez, signalling a connection with an identity outside of the Cape. In the photograph below, taken in the mid-1940s, my father (centre back) and his brothers are caught in a rare photograph, dressed for Eid in their double-breasted suits, albeit with short pants, their headgear – the Ottoman-style fez – clearly identifying them not only as Muslim but implying the wider connection to Islam internationally. My father’s hands rest on his youngest brother’s shoulders as if to make sure that he ‘behaves’ for the photograph; the brother on the right of the photograph seems to have similar concerns. All four boys stand stiffly to attention, almost military-like in their neatness, their shoes shining, socks pulled up and pocket handkerchiefs on display. I imagine them to be the epitome of respectability – proper, correct and good – conveyed through the way they are dressed, and visually captured as proof. Knowing that they grew up in poverty and seeing evidence of this in the background of the image, I believe that this respectability came at great sacrifice.



*Figure 6*

<sup>53</sup> This was partially resolved with the establishment of the Muslim Judicial Council in 1945

<sup>54</sup> The Ottoman Empire spanned 600 years, coming to an end in 1922 (Shaw & Yapp, 2018)

The blurry image is from an A4 size photocopy that my uncle gave to my father a few months ago. He has no idea where it comes from but handed it over to me, to use in my thesis. My parents have both been supportive of the prying and prodding I have been subjecting them to, and are secretly proud of their history being recorded in this way.

Although my grandfather was a tailor, my father says that he did not make their suits as he was working in Stellenbosch by the time this photograph was taken. There were many other tailors in District Six who could have sewed for them. The slaves from Bengal, the Malabar coast and the Indonesian archipelago were skilled craftsmen – silversmiths, milliners, cobblers, masons and tailors – which ensured them slightly better living conditions and they were able to hold on to more of their heritage. My father’s brother was apprenticed to a tailor and earned his living that way until his death recently; other family members were plumbers, bricklayers and carpenters. According to historian, Shamiel Jeppie (2001), the slaves who came from the Malayan peninsula were “for a long time viewed as the ‘respectable working class’ and even a sort of labour aristocracy in Cape Town” (Jeppie, 2001: 87), while Ross (2004) refers to them as “the king of the slaves, from whose ranks came the ingenious workmen of the Cape” (Ross, 2004: 35). This stereotyping of slaves set the precedent to view ‘coloureds’ as dexterous workers rather than intellectual thinkers and contributed to perceptions of the kind of work that ‘coloureds’ were supposed to do and the station in life to which they were allowed to aspire.

Erasmus (2017) refers to the “contentious colonial and apartheid history” concerning ‘Malay’ as a category of people (Erasmus, 2017: 110). In its early usage, she says that the term, Malay, “signified a convergence of language, geography, religion and slave status – not genetic difference – as a composite marker of otherness” (Erasmus, 2017: 110-111). Malay-ness, therefore is not a biological construct but rather a social one.

‘Coloured’ Muslims were encouraged by the government to see themselves as distinct and the Cape Malay Association (CMA), consisting of skilled artisans and property owners, supported Hertzog<sup>55</sup>, who promised them the franchise<sup>56</sup>. Both Baderoon (2014) and Erasmus (2017) refer to the work of Jeppie (2001) who suggests that it was I.D. du Plessis, a folklorist, who influenced the construction of Malay as an ethnicity. Bickford-Smith, et al (1999) concur that the CMA was influenced by Du Plessis’ construction of the “archetypal Malay” who was introspective and kind, spoke slowly and tended to be “passive and indolent” but could “lose self-control and run amok” when aroused (Bickford-Smith et al., 1999: 83).

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<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1924 to 1939

<sup>56</sup> After ‘white’ women were granted the vote in 1930, the Nationalists no longer needed the ‘coloured’ vote and Hertzog reneged on his word

This Malay construct included cultural practices such as choral singing and supported the preservation of the *Bo-Kaap* as the “old Malay quarter” (Bickford-Smith et al., 1999: 83). When Du Plessis became Commissioner of Coloured Affairs in 1952, ‘Cape Malay’ entered the apartheid lexicon as a sub-category of ‘Coloured’. Divisions of ‘Malay’, ‘coloured’, and African identities were encouraged. Official discourses concerning religion rejected connections of creolisation, ethnic interaction and cultural exchange between the enslaved, and Malay was used as a synonym for Muslim, while ‘coloured’ became associated with Christianity.

### **NARRATIVES OF PILGRIMAGE**

My grandmother went on *haj* during the period September 1964 to May 1965. She left by steamer ship from the Cape Town docks on a journey that would last eight months. I think that I remember a foghorn sounding when the Union Castle ship left the harbour, but this would have been a common sound living in Walmer Estate. Definitely my aunts would have been crying when she left. Although undertaking the journey was viewed with respect and a sense of duty, it was usually older people who went on haj since they would have spent most of their life saving for this fulfilment of their religious duties. Families left behind could not be sure that they would have the strength and health to complete the journey and return home safely, hence the sadness.

All the photographs that my father has of my grandmother, except one, are to do with her pilgrimage — her departure and arrival, a formal studio photograph and a passport photograph with the lower half of her face closed by her scarf. Clearly, this was a major occasion in her life, something that would have been saved and planned for and she would have gone to classes to prepare for it. This was the fulfilment of one of the pillars of the religion which she practiced, had been practised by her family, and propagated by her father who had been a well-known imam in Woodstock. The occasion warranted a formal photograph taken at the Van Kalker Studios<sup>57</sup> in Woodstock. The studio specialised in taking photographs of returning hajjis<sup>58</sup> against a backdrop of the Great Mosque or the Ka’aba<sup>59</sup> in Mecca. Baderoon (2014) observes that such photographs, “displaying the comportment and resplendent dress of hajjis in their new roles as respected pilgrims”, are displayed prominently in Muslim homes as proud mementoes of the haj (Baderoon, 2014: 79).

<sup>57</sup> A photographic studio set up in 1937

<sup>58</sup> Someone who has performed the hajj

<sup>59</sup> A building at the centre of Islam’s most sacred mosque in Mecca



*Figure 7*

I don't recall my grandmother dressing in the traditional clothes she is wearing, and certainly not with her face veiled as she stands in the photograph. Although the lower half of her face is hidden, and this is a profile picture, she turns her head to look directly into the camera. The taking of the photograph offered her the opportunity to display multiple layers of resistance — her independence in a community where women were traditionally more subservient, the ability to fulfil her religious duties and the pride with which she wears her Muslim identity. All of this speaks to a refusal to accept victimhood. In spite of the restrictions she was forced to live under during apartheid, and the challenges of her life as a widow and single parent, she appears to have claimed her right to be part of a broader community, and, in so doing, transcends boundaries of race and class, however briefly. This performance of resistance taking place in the studio, says O'Connell (2012) made it possible for 'black' working-class families to present themselves in a certain way that defied their designation as second-class citizens, in the midst of removals, poverty, violence and shame. As such, I say that my grandmother's photograph represents her triumph over her experiences under the apartheid government.

On their return, hajjis, as they were now known, came bearing dates and *mebos*<sup>60</sup>, which were cut up and threaded onto toothpicks to serve to visitors who came to greet the returning pilgrims. Tables would be set with lace tablecloths and the best crockery would be used to serve watermelon and sour fig *konfyt*, sweets, nuts, samosas and pies, along with tiny glasses from which to drink *Zam Zam*<sup>61</sup>. All over Cape Town similar scenes would be playing out since the haj occurred during a specific time period. Practices of rituals and beliefs such as these contributed to a sense of community that challenged the divisive policies of an oppressive regime and opened up spaces for people to defy and resist the memories that we have of apartheid; they testify to a will to normality and ordinariness.

<sup>60</sup> Dried fruit

<sup>61</sup> water from the sacred spring in Mecca

Baderoon (2014) explores narratives of pilgrimage as an archive in her book about the history of Islam in South Africa. She proposes that the oceans are of significance to South African Muslims, since most arrived via the Indian Ocean into lives of slavery and indentured labour, and later traversed the same ocean for pilgrimage. In spite of the difficulties associated with practising Islam during the colonial period, the earliest known pilgrimage by a Cape Muslim took place during 1834-1837, immediately after emancipation. The ability to perform the *hajj*<sup>62</sup> became associated with status and authority within the community.

Another photograph shows my grandmother wearing the cream *medorah*<sup>63</sup> embroidered with gold thread which hajjis wore on their return. That same *medorah* was fashioned into the headdress I wore when I got married and later used to wrap my son in at the name-giving ceremony held on the seventh day after his birth<sup>64</sup>. The continuity in that piece of cloth, carefully wrapped in tissue paper in the bottom of my draw of scarves, had not occurred to me until I examined these photographs for my research. It links my son to his great-grandmother through me, to a lineage that extends across the ocean to origins in the Malayan peninsula and to the ocean she sailed on to fulfil her religious duties, belonging to something larger than the small community defined by apartheid in South Africa. The universality of the religion challenged constraints of imperialism and colonialism, uniting Muslims across borders, connecting them to their countries of origin. Seemingly simple objects such as the scarf my grandmother bequeathed to me, convey meaning far beyond what they at first appear to be. Along with photographs they chronicle an alternative history and “operate as props and prompts in verbal performances of memory”, according to cultural historian, Professor Annette Kuhn (2007: 285).



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

<sup>62</sup> Arabic for the pilgrimage to Mecca

<sup>63</sup> traditional scarf with gold embroidery which pilgrims wear on their return from Mecca

<sup>64</sup> My daughter was born during Ramadan, the month of fasting, and so a much simpler ceremony was had for her, without the medorah.

Clinical psychologist, Dr Gershen Kaufman, in his book, *The Psychology of Shame*, asserts that a sense of belonging grows through a positive identification with a group of people (Kaufman, 1996). Identity, he says, is not formed in a vacuum but is shaped through how we define ourselves, how we are perceived by others and how we respond to that, against a background of historical, genetic, cultural, religious and social influences. Kaufman (1996) asserts that people who are relegated to an inferior position in a society tend to not only question their own self-worth but also the worth of the group that they belong to, resulting in feelings of shame.

Gqola (2010) refers to the humanising effect that Muslim identity offered to slaves; it offered community and family, a direct link to a pre-slave identity<sup>65</sup>, “it was a source of pride to counteract the shame of their position” (Gqola, 2010: 157). I can understand how enslaved people, violently ripped from their homes, transported across oceans and forced to live in a place where they were not only brutally oppressed but stripped of their identity and culture, would want to cling to a religion that offered them the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than themselves. This sense of community would also be attractive to those enslaved who searched for a sense of belonging<sup>66</sup>. Both Gqola (2010) and Baderoon (2014) emphasise the fundamental role that slavery and Islam occupied in the history of South Africa, since Islam was the dominant religion<sup>67</sup> among slaves and served as a cohesive element within the enslaved community. I contend that a sense of pride was engendered through belonging to a community with a common belief system, through the performance of rituals consistent with a pre-slavery religion and culture. This sense of identity endured throughout and beyond apartheid, the proof and memories supported by photographs in family albums.

The family photograph offers a lens onto what it meant to live through apartheid, and how occupying an intermediate space in terms of race, colour, language, and religion, impacts on a sense of belonging in a post-apartheid South Africa. In this regard I argue that such photographs defy and resist the memories that we have of apartheid and testify to a will to freedom and humanity. Why did ‘coloured’ people go to such lengths to take photographs of themselves at their best, of laden tables, and new possessions? Were these acts of defiance, a silent challenge to a government intent on subjugation and humiliation? Or was there a sense of the future in their performance, a need to make sure that their stories were told? At the very least, the subjects of these photographs silently but defiantly assert:

We were not what they dictated we should be.

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<sup>65</sup> Many of the slaves, especially those from the Indonesian archipelago, practiced Islam

<sup>66</sup> Islam became a refuge for the enslaved and indigenous people, who had little access to formalised religion and turned to the imams who were prepared to perform religious ceremonies so that they could be married and buried.

<sup>67</sup> Although the Dutch had decreed that no religion other than the Dutch Reformed one could be practiced at the Cape, a 1770 statute prohibited the sale of baptised slaves which made slave-owners reluctant to allow baptism and resistant to Christian missionary work among slaves (Viall, et al., 2011).





# CHAPTER TWO

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*THE 'COLOURED' QUESTION:  
THE RISE OF APARTHEID*



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ‘COLOURED’ QUESTION: THE RISE OF APARTHEID

*It is this systematic violence of reducing people to things, which lays the groundwork for genocide; that presents itself in the current ethnographic display of personal effects, cultural objects and at some point, body casts, which are in fact evidence of a “colonial crime scene” (Kasibe, 2017).*

This chapter examines the rise of Afrikaner nationalism after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901) and the implementation of apartheid after the National Party came to power in 1948. The influences of racial science, eugenics and fascism on Afrikaner nationalism, and the justification of racism in South Africa, will be discussed. The concept of intergenerational trauma is introduced. Discussions around how the introduction of key apartheid legislation, such as the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, affected the lives of ordinary South Africans takes place within the context provided by photographs and interviews. The aim of this chapter is to provide a background to understanding the context of ‘coloured’ identity, and how it contributed to the shame of living ‘coloured’ in Cape Town.

### COLONIALISM, RACIAL SCIENCE AND GENOCIDE

In 2013 the discovery of a human skull and two hair and eye colour charts was made in the now-defunct<sup>68</sup> Department of Cultural Anthropology at Stellenbosch University<sup>69</sup> that pointed to the close links between apartheid and Nazism<sup>70</sup> (Lee, 2013). Both Hendrik Verwoerd, who as Prime Minister introduced the first apartheid laws in 1950, and his Secretary of State for Native Affairs, Max Eiselen (a cultural anthropology student), studied at the university. While skeletal remains and cadavers are used in medical science departments, the presence of a human skull in an anthropology department raises questions as to the history of its use at the university. The skull (thought to be that of a woman of mixed ancestry) and charts, clearly tools of classification, were used to measure and classify humans and to advance the idea that miscegenation was “problematic” (Lee, 2013).

The case of the hair colour chart bears the name of Dr Eugen Fischer, who was one of many German scientists intensely interested in the ‘mixed-race’ people of South West Africa<sup>71</sup> (SWA), the Rehoboth Basters or ‘The Bastards’ as he referred to them. After examining 310 children of Nama women and ‘white’ men, he concluded that a role could be found for them since they were racially superior to pure Negroes but inferior to pure ‘whites’, but racial mixing was to be avoided.

<sup>68</sup> The department closed in 1998 when student numbers dwindled.

<sup>69</sup> considered to be the intellectual heart of Afrikanerdom during the apartheid era

<sup>70</sup> The late Prof Russel Botman, Stellenbosch University’s first ‘black’ leader, who was vice-chancellor at the time of the discovery, gave the go-ahead to a five-year research project, to investigate the significance of the find. It was met by a backlash in the Afrikaans media. Critics argued that it is unfair to apportion blame to *volkekunde* students and protest the connection between apartheid and Nazism (Newling, 2013).

<sup>71</sup> Now Namibia

His findings contributed to the prohibition of inter-racial marriage in all German colonies as early as 1905, according to Heike Becker, a Professor of Anthropology at the University of the Western Cape (Becker, 2017). Fischer later headed the Kaiser William Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics, in Berlin, and served as one of the scientists on the Gestapo's Special Commission Number Three which performed forced sterilisation of the 'Rhineland Bastards'<sup>72</sup>. Stellenbosch's students of cultural anthropology not only used Fischer's tools of racial classification from 1926 to the mid-1990s, but a textbook written by Fischer was used up until the 1960s (Newling, 2013). The discovery at Stellenbosch University places apartheid and racism in a larger, global context, intimately linked to German colonialism and Nazi racial policy, and demonstrates how the past continues to inform the present in South Africa. Mandisa Mbali and Handri Walters of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch, who made the discovery of the skull and tools, urge that questions of how these were used at the university and how this knowledge was used to justify racism during the 1930s and 1940s need to be addressed (Mbali & Walters, 2013).

## **EUGENICS**

Francis Galton's anthropometric work on human heredity laid the foundation for the discipline he christened eugenics<sup>73</sup>. According to the theory of eugenics, Africans were biologically inferior, an inconvenient obstacle to the development of Africa by more advanced 'white' 'Aryans'. At a time when hardly anyone ('white') in the West doubted that 'white' men were superior to 'black', work like Galton's was at the cutting edge of science and racism was enthusiastically embraced. His observations of the Herero and Nama people in SWA in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century would later inform his thinking about human evolution. These theories were to have a devastating influence on the people of Germany's newly-acquired African colony, SWA, who would provide the test subjects for this racial science (Digital History, 2016).

The prevailing idea about race in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of pluralism, in spite of Charles Darwin's "radical" idea that 'black' and 'white' people were a single species. Another attempt to explain 'black' skin was via the theory of polygenesis, which claims that God created two men, one 'white' and the other 'black'. Although this went against the Christian teachings of the unity of mankind it led to the anatomical and scientific examination of 'black' bodies and skin. The study of 'blackness' was propelled by a desire to prove polygenesis and the Royal Society (18<sup>th</sup> century) went so far as to suppress anatomical research which found skin colour

<sup>72</sup> Children born of the union between Senegalese soldiers stationed in the Rhineland after the war, and German women; this was the notorious 'Black Shame' that produced fresh evidence of the conspiracy to pollute the blood of the Aryan race (Ferguson, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> the science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable characteristics which are able to be inherited; the use of selective breeding to improve the human gene pool (Soanes, 2002). It was only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that eugenics and the related concept of 'racial hygiene' were finally discredited with the realisation that all human beings are 99% identical and there is no characteristic trait or gene that distinguishes all members of one so-called race from members of another (Viall, et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2012).

to be a superficial distinction among humans. According to Professor of History, Craig Koslofsky, the theory of polygenesis was used by British colonialists to justify both the enslavement of Africans and the subjugation of Native Americans (Koslofsky, 2014).

### **CLEANSING THE SOCIAL BODY**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, Germany was in the vanguard of western civilization<sup>74</sup> (Ferguson, 2012). Although the British and the French had abolished slavery in their colonies during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Germans had not and, by 1893, it was becoming clear that the Germans were planning to expropriate the native Herero and Nama peoples and settle their land with German farmers (Ferguson, 2012). In response to the Herero rebellion<sup>75</sup>, General von Trotha was sent to restore order. He massacred<sup>76</sup> both the Herero and the Nama people who later joined the uprising, and placed survivors in concentration camps. Not only were the Herero and Nama peoples exterminated in great numbers but the Germans conducted further trials on their bodies in the name of ‘race hygiene’. Autopsies were performed for racial-biological research; sample skulls were scraped clean by female prisoners to be sent to Germany. Bagues (2010) comments that Von Trotha’s actions made it clear that “genocidal violence is about cleansing, the creation of an order based on a notion of purity” that necessitates the extermination of an ethnic or religious group (Bagues, 2010: 70).

This is chillingly described in Andre Brink’s 2002 novel, *The Other Side of Silence*, in which he examines the extraordinary violence of life in colonial SWA, through the eyes of a young German woman. The cruelty and dehumanisation of women’s and ‘black’ bodies described in this novel is not only an indictment on colonialism and masculine attitudes in German SWA but also, by association on South African society. This history of violence underlies European occupation and was consistently repeated over generations, along the continuum of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, leaving a mark not only on the body but also on the psyche of those affected by trauma. Brink’s protagonist, Hanna X., observes,

... their bodies carry the imprint of their histories as hers does. It shows in the way they sit or stand or lie  
 ... Yet these things hardly matter, they are no more than signs. There are other scars, invisible, which are incomparably worse and will not heal (Brink, 2002: 45).

Becker (2017) draws a significant link between 20<sup>th</sup> century racial science, colonialism and genocide<sup>77</sup>, and proposes Fischer as the connector. After WWI, German colonisation ended but the racial science which had

<sup>74</sup> Around a third of Nobel science prizes were awarded to German professors between 1901 and 1920 and German universities led the world in chemistry and biochemistry (Ferguson, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> 1904-1907

<sup>76</sup> After the uprising only 15 000 of the 80 000 Herero and fewer than half of the 20 000 Nama remained.

<sup>77</sup> She concludes that, although the Nazi genocides are seen to be unique, the connection between the three concepts has had repercussions internationally, citing the 1994 Rwandan genocide as an example.

been practised was “brought back and applied in civilised central Europe” (Becker, 2017). Becker (2017) postulates that it was natural for the many ex-colonial soldiers who joined the ranks of the Nazi Party, to carry over the theories born in the concentration camps of Africa to the Nazi colonisation of Eastern Europe and the racial policies that produced the Holocaust. Ferguson (2012) agrees, saying that, “if Auschwitz marked the culmination of state violence against racially defined alien populations, the war against the Herero and Nama was surely the first step in that direction” (Ferguson, 2012: 189-190). Becker (2017) draws similarities between the way that Africans were classified by physical anthropologists and colonial officials, and the way Jews were classified by Nazis. Both Jews and Africans in German colonies were regarded as threats to the purity of German ‘blood’. She postulates that Fischer’s ambition as a scientist was the driving force for his involvement in Nazi racial policy, which guaranteed state funding for his experiments; and points to the “colonial origins of dehumanisation and objectification of racially and the eugenically undesirable” and the role of European imperialism in the Nazi genocides. She refers to the work of Francophone Caribbean writer and founding father of Negritude<sup>78</sup>, Aimé Césaire, who, in his paper *Discourse on Colonialism*, proposes that Nazism in Europe in the 1940s is viewed with such shock, not because of the crime and humiliation against man, but the crime and humiliation against the ‘white’ man – the Nazis “applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa” (Pinkham, 1972: 3). Césaire’s statement demonstrates the different lens through which colonisers viewed Europeans as opposed to the inhuman view they had of those who they colonised.

This history of SWA has direct bearing on South Africa since the Union of South Africa essentially became a second colonial power in SWA, first at the behest of Great Britain but from 1921 onwards, on a mandate from the League of Nations. Apart from a new international position for the Union and physical space for expansion, occupation of SWA, “offered raw material for the production of knowledge (and images) about ‘Bantu’ and ‘Bushmen’ which fed into a number of institutional and administrative initiatives in South Africa itself” (Hartmann, et al., 1998:3).

Hartmann, Silvester & Hayes (1998) in their book, *The Colonising Camera*, suggest the photography of Namibia and its people were crucial to South Africa’s bid to the League of Nations to occupy the country. Anthropometric<sup>79</sup> photography of indigenous people portrayed them as primitive and played a significant role in their subjection and attempted to fix their identity and appearance.

<sup>78</sup> The Black Consciousness movement that sought to assert pride in African cultural values to counterbalance the inferior status accorded to them in European colonial thinking (Thieme, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> The study of human body measurement for use in anthropological classification and comparison. The use of such data as skull dimensions and body proportions in the attempt to classify human beings into racial, ethnic, and national groups has been largely discredited, but anthropometric techniques are still used in physical anthropology and paleoanthropology, especially to study evolutionary change in fossil hominid remains (The American Heritage Science Dictionary, 2011).

The process of fixing is evident in the diorama of the ‘Bushmen’ in the South African Museum from its installation in 1960 until its closure in 2001. The ‘Bushman’ figures were cast with the purpose of providing examples of “a pure racial type”. This racial stereotyping and misrepresentation involved the acquisition of human remains, skeletons and skulls for craniometric research (Kasibe, 2017). In his analysis of the display, Wandile Kasibe (2017) has argued that the exhibition of indigenous people alongside animals in the natural history section of the museum was intended to show that they were sub-human and had more in common with animals than with Europeans.

It is this systematic violence of reducing people to things, which lays the groundwork for genocide; that presents itself in the current ethnographic display of personal effects, cultural objects and at some point, body casts, which are in fact evidence of a “colonial crime scene” (Kasibe, 2017).

Genocidal violence and racial hygiene in SWA provided a blueprint for the implementation of the policies of segregation that would be institutionalised as apartheid. Racial science and eugenics along with Christian-nationalist theology, which was frequently invoked by leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church, provided both ‘scientific’ and religious justification for apartheid and were used to promote the idea that ‘blacks’ were inferior.

### **INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA**

The imprint of trauma on the psyche and body of Hanna X, can be viewed as a direct result of what Bogues (2012) calls the specific forms of domination of colonial power, racial slavery and apartheid. This violent domination resulted in the colonised body always being in a state of emergency, subject to repetitive trauma (Bogues, 2012). In the same way that culture is passed on from one generation to the next, historical trauma is passed on in the cultural memory and becomes normalised, leading to a “dysfunctional community syndrome” where multiple violence types<sup>80(a)</sup> occur, according to mental health researchers, Atkinson, Nelson and Atkinson (2010)<sup>80(b)</sup>. Basic assumptions such as the world being a safe and meaningful place, a sense of self-worthiness and trust in others, are violated by chronic exposure to trauma. The legacy of this trauma continues into subsequent generations, manifesting as alcohol and drug abuse, diminished self-worth, and the re-enactment of trauma and repetition of violence against spouses and within families (Atkinson, et al, 2010).

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<sup>80(a)</sup> this would typically include male-on-male violence, female-on-female violence, child abuse, substance abuse, rape, assault, homicide and suicide (Atkinson, et al, 2010)

<sup>80(b)</sup> Atkinson, et.al (2010) describe the effects of violence across five generations in South America that can be mapped onto the history of Australia’s indigenous people. Atkinson has linked historical events such as colonisation to increased rates of family violence, child sexual abuse and dysfunctional families in indigenous society in Australia. In the first generation are males who have been enslaved, killed or imprisoned resulting in their inability to provide for their families. In the next generation males show signs of alcohol or drug abuse to cope with the resultant loss of their cultural identity and diminished feelings of self-worth. In the third generation we see a prevalence of domestic abuse which, in the fourth generation, begins to be directed at the spouse and/or child. The violence is repeated in the next generation, leading to a repeated cycle of trauma and violence, ultimately causing the breakdown of the family unit (Atkinson, et al: 2010).

This legacy of trauma is evident not only in ideas about race and sex, but in the high levels of violence that South Africa continues to experience today. Baderoon (2014) highlights the fact that in spite of enslaved women being routinely subjected to brutal sexual assault, not one male – slave or freed, ‘white’ or ‘black’ – was convicted for the rape of a slave woman throughout the period of slavery. These ideas of manhood were passed down across generations, irrespective of the colour of the men who committed the rape. The lasting legacy is that the bodies of ‘coloured’ girls are available for abuse (Baderoon, 2014). Gqola, in her book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, points out the centrality of the stereotype of the ‘black’ male rapist of ‘white’ women to the rise of racism, but equally highlights that the authors of that myth also created the stereotype of “black women as hypersexual and therefore impossible to rape”. This serves to negate the ‘black’ woman’s experience of sexual assault, and means that they are not taken seriously when they do report being raped (Gqola, 2015: 4-5). Today, sexual violence in South Africa has reached epidemic proportions, with one in four females likely to be sexually abused before the age of 18 (Skosana, 2017). I argue that the results of Atkinson, et al.’s study can be extrapolated to the South African situation and the after-effects of the legacy of violence as a result of colonisation, slavery and apartheid in South Africa, could be similar to that experienced in South America and Australia. Violent crime and trauma have become normal in South Africa, according to Brandon Hamber and Sharon Lewis (1997), in a report written for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. They argue that South Africa has been characterised by violence since its colonisation and, besides public forms of violence such as criminal and political (especially pre-1994) acts, numerous acts of violence are committed in the domestic home, including child abuse, wife battery, domestic assaults and acquaintance rape (Hamber & Lewis, 1997). I raise the issue of intergenerational trauma here to underline how the effects of colonisation, slavery and apartheid continue to haunt the present, and to emphasise the need to address the oppressive past.

### **AFRIKANER NATIONALISM AND THE RISE OF APARTHEID**

The rise of fascism<sup>81</sup> in Europe in the 1930s along with Hitler’s emphasis on national pride, racial purity and the rebirth of Germany, struck a chord with a new generation of Afrikaner graduates headed to universities

<sup>81</sup> A right-wing system of government characterised by extreme nationalistic beliefs and strict obedience to a leader or the state (Soanes, 2002).

in Berlin and Munich for doctoral studies. Afrikaners had an emotional bond with Germans through ties of ancestry, a related language and the fact that Germany was a traditional adversary of Britain. The scholars returned to South Africa to take over the faculties of politics, philosophy, sociology and psychology at new Afrikaans universities such as Stellenbosch and Pretoria. Here they merged with the young theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church many of whom shared their ideas of “the divine right of each nation to a separate existence” (Sparks, 2003: 148).

The war between the English and the Afrikaners (1899-1902) and Lord Milner’s reconstruction programme (1902-1907) had been an attempt to destroy Afrikaner nationalism. Thousands of Boer families were left homeless and destitute, and the British High Command ordered that they be accommodated in camps where they died in large numbers. After the war they flocked to the cities to work on the mines where they found themselves competing on an equal footing with ‘black’ people for the same jobs. The only advantage the Afrikaner had was his ‘white’ skin (Sparks, 2003). The Afrikaner was left with a deep sense of grievance, that spurred on the desire for nationhood. A nation needed its own flag, a language, a culture and a history. The desire for a distinct national identity demanded that Afrikaners distance themselves, and their history, from the ‘coloured’ people with whom they shared blood, language and religion. Power and European descent became very important and maintaining racial distinctions became a compelling necessity. The colour bar was to become the hallmark of the South African way of life (Viall et al, 2011).

The Afrikaner cause had garnered international sympathy prompting a decision by the Liberal Party to reconcile with the defeated Boers, when it came to power in Britain in 1905. When the Union of South Africa was formed on 31 May 1910, Afrikaner Nationalists were given a relatively free hand to reorganise the country’s franchise according to existing standards of the now-incorporated Boer republics, the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek*<sup>82</sup> and the Orange Free State. The British were under pressure to conclude the unification, and the northern colonies made it a condition of Union that no non-Europeans were to be members of parliament, although they could retain the vote in the Cape and Natal. The British withdrew with the attitude that the colour bar clause was unfortunate, but that domestic matters should be left to South Africans to settle (Van der Ross, 2015). Sparks (2003) describes this as “an act of unprecedented betrayal” on the part of the British, since this was the first and only time in history that an imperial power had granted sovereign independence to a racial minority (Sparks, 2003: 129).

Following WWII, the roles between coloniser and colonised changed dramatically with many French and British colonies gaining independence, ending the official racial discrimination of the colonial rulers.

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<sup>82</sup> ZAR – South African Republic or Transvaal



The opposite happened in South Africa when the NP won the general election in 1948 — race, culture and heritage were emphasised and ‘whites’ were placed in a politically privileged position. To prevent any uncertainty as to who was ‘white’ or ‘black’, legislation was adopted to prevent mixing. To justify the segregation, sociological, ecclesial and political views were relied on, on the presumption that mixing had been minimal in the past and ‘whites’ had maintained their physical and cultural purity (Heese, 2013).

Parallels can be drawn to the American South where, after the Civil War and during the Reconstruction, freed ‘blacks’ could vote, attend school and college and become professionals such as doctors and lawyers, and run for office. But by the mid-1870s the South began to resurrect its caste system based on race, thereby preventing the movement of ‘blacks’ into the mainstream and undoing the opportunities accorded to freed slaves (Wilkerson, 2011). Similarly, after Germany’s defeat in WWI, which left them humiliated and stripped of power and prestige, the rise of the Nazi Party displayed a backlash resulting in extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism. In the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, the Afrikaners had to deal with the negative cultural images of a minority who had been humiliated by the British and placed on a similar footing to ‘black’ labourers.

Kaufman (1996) says that the striving for an identity is a need to feel a sense of pride because of belonging to a specific group. When people are relegated to an inferior status, as the Afrikaner was after the War, they experience shame which can only be held at bay through disparaging someone. Contempt is employed as a strategy against either the majority culture or against other minority groups. The target of the contempt is thus rendered lesser and the minority group employing contempt as a strategy feels superior. The success of this strategy depends on finding a group that can be continually reduced to an inferior status and, in a reversal of roles, the inferior then becomes the superior (Kaufman, 1996). In their search for pride “the Afrikaner *volk* became a special nation with a special mission” to preserve its national identity, which meant reinforcing, or creating, separate identities for all of South Africa’s people (Sparks, 2003: 148). Consequently, all ‘blacks’ in South Africa became the target of Afrikaner contempt, through the implementation of the ideology of a system of segregation on racial grounds. The NP’s policies of racial segregation were built on the foundation that ‘white’ South Africans and Afrikaners were of pure European descent and legislation was introduced to ensure that no mixing could occur.

In 1950 Malan announced the removal of ‘coloured’ people from the parliamentary voters’ roll in spite of Clause 35 being entrenched in the South African Act by which the Union had been established. Adhikari (2006) comments that the erosion of civil rights has been the most consistent feature of ‘coloured’ political history from the British administration up until the latter days of apartheid — starting with restrictions imposed on the franchise in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and segregation measures implemented in the early 1900s,

the compromise of labour and economic policies in the 1920s and 1930s, and the enfranchisement of only ‘white’ women (which diluted the ‘coloured’ vote), through to the implementation of apartheid legislation and the removal of ‘coloured’ people from the common voters roll in 1956 (Adhikari, 2006). Pick (2007), describes the “relentless process of legislating ... racism” introduced to humiliate ‘coloured’ people, and, recalling in particular, his normally even-tempered father tearfully telling him that he was “nothing” and had no future since he would no longer be able to vote, even though the franchise to ‘coloured’ people had been heavily qualified and limited to the Western Cape (Pick, 2007: 64-65).

### **IMPLEMENTING APARTHEID**

The first step towards institutionalising discrimination as the foundation of apartheid was the introduction of the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950, which required every citizen to be registered according to his or her race group.

The Act defined the different racial categories thus,

A white person is one who in appearance is, or who is generally accepted as, a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance is obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person. A native is a person who is in fact or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa. A coloured person is a person who is not a white person or a native (Government Gazette, 1950).

A person’s race could be determined by a special Race Classification Board. If there was any doubt as to a person’s racial status, testimony was taken from family and friends, and a person’s hair<sup>83</sup>, eyeballs and cuticles could be examined for pigmentation. The implementation of the act was a seemingly innocuous step since registration of citizens was an accepted practice in many countries. However, this register was used as a basis for further legislation, such as the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950, which divided the urban areas of South Africa by race, the Separate Amenities Act 49 of 1953<sup>84</sup>, that set specific limits to racial contact in education, employment, entertainment, sport, and public amenities. The Immorality Act of 1927, which prohibited intercourse between Europeans and natives, was amended in 1950 and 1957 to prohibit sex between ‘whites’ and ‘non-whites’. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 55 of 1949 which regulated personal relations and outlawed sex across the colour line was one of the first laws to be implemented after the NP came to be power in 1948 (Sparks, 2003; Van der Ross, 2015).

The Immorality Act, says Sparks (2003) was the “ultimate in human insults” inflicted on the ‘coloured’

<sup>83</sup> The notorious ‘pencil test’ was employed by race inspectors to determine the sleekness of one’s hair – if the pencil slid out of the hair one was classified ‘white’, if it remained in the hair, one was classified ‘non-white’.

<sup>84</sup> Only public roads and streets were excluded from the Act

people — “it was a statutory declaration that the coloured people should never have existed, that their procreation was a sin and a crime which should have been prevented” (Sparks, 2003: 86). The negativity associated with being the product of miscegenation, without a distinctive culture or full ethnic integrity, became firmly entrenched and ‘coloured’ people internalised the racist values of the dominant society. Adhikari (2006) asserts that ‘coloured’ people “tended to accept their ‘identity’ with resignation and often a sense of shame”, becoming obsessed with acting “civilized” to prove that they were capable of living up to the standards set by the dominant society and therefore entitled to the same rights and privileges as ‘white’ people (Adhikari, 2006: 481).

Not only was this shame written on the body of ‘coloured’ people, but the population group they belonged to was marked with negativity — they were the “leftovers” and the “non-people”. This negativity was broadly accepted with resignation and often with a sense of shame by its bearers (Wicomb, 1998; Adhikari, 2005). Being inferior and a member of a negative group was replayed in what Kaufman (1996) calls daily “scenes of shame”. ‘Coloured’ people were constantly reminded of their inferiority through inhabiting separate spaces — neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, in fact every space except public roads (Kaufman, 1996: 274). Shame is reflected in the very word ‘coloured’, in the negative fashion in which the ‘coloured’ community was usually identified, forcing them into a borderline existence, and an in-between reality.

### **THE ‘COLOURED’ QUESTION**

Adhikari (2006) and Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) agree that ‘coloured’ identity as we know it emerged around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when freed slaves and their descendants or “assimilated colonial blacks” who occupied a similar socio-economic class and a shared culture, asserted their separateness to distinguish themselves from ‘whites’ and natives. They were a group of “heterogeneous, generally non-Bantu speaking, black labouring class” of people who differentiated themselves from the Africans who had moved to the Western Cape and those who they came into contact with in the mining towns in order to claim a position of relative privilege (Adhikari, 2006: 469).

The elusiveness of fixing the identity of ‘coloured’ people is reflected in the different definitions offered up by the government over the years leading up to the 1950 definition. The 1904 census claimed there were three clearly defined race groups — “White, Bantu and Coloured” — and defined ‘coloured’ as

all intermediate shades between White and Bantu<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> ‘coloured’ officially excluded ‘black’ for the first time

The 1928 Pensions Act defined a ‘coloured’ as someone who was:

neither (a) a Turk or member of a race or tribe in Asia, nor (b) a member of an aboriginal race or tribe in Africa, nor (c) a Hottentot, Bushman or Koranna, nor (d) a person residing in a native location ... nor (e) an American negro (Dicey, 2004).

The 1950 Population Registration Act defined a ‘coloured’ as, *a person who is not a White person or a Bantu* (Boddy-Evans, 2017)

According to this definition, the descendants of slaves were positioned “in terms of an in-between identity, a biologically based hybridity which at once made them superior to blacks and inferior to the same because of their ‘lack of culture’” (Gqola, 2010: 13). ‘Coloured’ became “a hold-all category, a miscellaneous category of the ethnically undefinable, a penumbral group in apartheid’s stark world of light and shade” (Sparks, 2003: 83).

Both Baderoon (2014) and Erasmus (2001) refer to the fluidity of the position held by ‘coloured’ people in South Africa. Baderoon describes an “the interstitial zone between ‘native’ and ‘white’... defined solely through negatives, imbued with ambiguity”, while Erasmus refers to a “residual, in-between or ‘lesser’ identity – characterised as ‘lacking’, supplementary, excessive, inferior or simply non-existent” (Baderoon, 2014: 18; Erasmus, 2001:15-16). Their perceptions of ‘coloured’ identity are echoed in the conceptions of race outlined by British-Caribbean theorist, Stuart Hall (1997) who refers to race as a ‘floating signifier’ – the concept of race is variable and it does not occupy a permanent place, says Hall. In spite of the fact that race is a major concept whereby human society has been, and continues to be, classified, all attempts to ground race as a scientific, biological or genetic, concept have been refuted (Hall, 1997). I argue that ‘coloured’ identity then was so intangible that it is not surprising that the apartheid government struggled to define it. ‘Coloured’ became a residual category into which smaller groups that did not fit into either ‘white’ or African categories were placed. The Population Registration Act was amended in 1959 and divided ‘coloureds’ into seven subgroups:

Cape Coloured/Malay/Griqua/Chinese/Indian/Other Asian/Other Coloured (Reddy, 2001).

The South African population in general is ignorant of the extent of racial mixing, observes Heese (2013) in his book on the role and status of the mixed population at the Cape, written in Afrikaans and first published in 1985. This he attributes to the fact that not many people read historical or scientific publications and their impression of the past is influenced by old patriotic works or myths and legends. He says that the study of the history of demographics of South Africa is necessarily a study of race culture and social mixing between slaves, indigenous groups and ‘white’ immigrants. When Heese’s father, Dr Johannes Heese, also a historian, wrote an article in 1971, that found that, on average, 7% of all Afrikaner forefathers were of ‘coloured’

origin, he was accused of trying to undermine the apartheid system. The work of the Heese duo was not new but was seen to carry more weight since it was published in Afrikaans. As early as 1946, a German, anthropologist, Hoge, had written about the incidence of mixed marriages and extra-marital relations involving German immigrants. In 1957, according to Heese (2013), Jeffreys, an archivist, published articles in *Drum*<sup>86</sup> magazine which emphasised the extent of race and colour mixing since ‘white’ settlement. Because her articles were not published in a scientific magazine and were aimed at ‘black’ readers, her findings were regarded with suspicion and dismissed as political propaganda (Heese, 2013).

The Afrikaners had tried to banish all evidence of their past ‘indiscretions’ by stripping the ‘coloured’ people of a shared history, treating them with contempt, and implementing strictly policed legislation to distance themselves from the proof of their sexual liaisons. Heese (2013) refers to many researchers who had tried to prove that there had been no significant mixing and that the Afrikaners were pure European or German, with a slave component of less than 1%. I assert that Heese, as one of their own, had touched a nerve with his work, clearly intended for the Afrikaans-speaking population. He incurred the wrath of the apartheidists who, paranoid about their purity, summarily banned the book.

### **THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ‘COLOUREDS’**

Having sought to establish the background against which the concept of ‘colouredness’ was created both before and since 1948, I would like to start introducing examples of the lived experiences as direct consequences of the introduction of apartheid legislation as gathered through personal interviews. In an effort to understand the intersection between public and private lives and attendant questions of representation and belonging in a broader South African context, I employed techniques of narrative inquiry to encourage participants to share personal accounts of their lives. The path of narrative is intuitive, experiential and imaginative and the interviews were as unstructured as possible. Most participants were interviewed in their homes or in a space where they were made to feel at ease in order to create an environment conducive to sharing. I used a cell phone placed on a small tripod on a coffee table or side table as unobtrusively as possible as a recording device. Notes were taken, but I tried to be as engaged as possible to allow the participant the opportunity to share their stories in an unselfconscious manner. The interviews were guided by photographs that participants were asked to share of themselves or their family.

Questions to establish the context of the photograph were asked initially but, as far as possible, the photograph was used as an *aide memoire* to encourage the participant to share their memories of what it

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<sup>86</sup> *Drum* magazine was founded in 1951, and was highly political, visibly involved in the anti-apartheid struggle and often ran stories that exposed the injustices committed against ‘black’ people by the apartheid government.

was like to grow up as a ‘coloured’ person. I tried to avoid using the words “shame” and “respectability”, but guided the interviews to uncover how the particular representations challenge or resist the dominant narrative of how ‘coloured’ people were meant to live and be.

### **LIVING APARTHEID: THE GROUP AREAS ACT**

By 1950, almost a third of ‘coloured’ people lived in mixed areas. That was soon to change as the Group Areas Act of 1950 was introduced to restrict ownership and occupation of land to specific population groups as defined by the Population Registration Act. Public facilities (transport, parks and public toilets, restaurants, theatres and cinemas) and beaches became segregated. Eventually one out of four ‘coloured’ people and one out of six Indians across the country were forced to move according to Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga (2007), authors of *A New History of South Africa*. Sociologist, Cheryl Walker (1991) makes the point that in 1955 the government, clearly intending to remove the entire African population out of the Western Cape, stated that it was the “natural home” of the ‘coloured’ people and declared it a “coloured preferential area”<sup>87</sup> (Walker, 1991: 167).

On 11 February 1966, District Six, the largest suburb in Cape Town and one of the oldest, was declared an area of ‘white’ settlement in accordance with the Group Areas Act. As more affluent residents moved out to the new suburbs, District Six became neglected by the municipality and landlords were reluctant to spend money to improve sub-standard, high-density houses. In 1882 the poor conditions and over-crowding led to a smallpox epidemic and, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few cases of bubonic plague were used as an excuse to move the Africans who were living there to Ndabeni. By the time District Six was declared a ‘white’ area, it was a densely populated, working-class community with well-established schools, mosques, synagogues and churches, cultural centres with easy access to the beach, city centre and to the factories which provided work for the residents. In spite of its reputation as a slum that harboured criminals, most people living there were law-abiding citizens (Swanson & Harries, 2001).

I have fond memories of the area where my father was born and my grandmother lived. Hanover Street was the main artery which ran all the way up from the city centre to Walmer Estate where I grew up. My life revolved around Hanover Street: my uncle’s tailor shop was a hive of activity; the doctor who delivered me in my grandparents’ home had his surgery there, where we would queue for hours to be seen, and Majiet’s barbershop where my brothers and I sat on a wooden board across the chair to have our hair cut, was filled with people playing dominoes and catching up on the news. A trip into town would inevitably involve a stop for roti and curry from the Crescent Café. My father says that you could buy anything in Hanover Street except petrol (Kamies, 2016).

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<sup>87</sup> Employers had to give preference to employing ‘coloured’ workers over Africans in their businesses and industries

It would take about 15 years to move the 60 000 people out to the Cape Flats, to areas like Manenberg, Hanover Park and Mitchell's Plain. As the bulldozers moved in and the walls came tumbling around her, my paternal grandmother was banished to Mitchell's Plain, far from the city centre where she had lived her whole life. She made *koeksisters*<sup>88</sup> and *konfyt*<sup>89</sup> to sell door-to-door on Sunday mornings in District Six and made crochet items, to earn a living. She used public transport or walked wherever she had to go. Suddenly she found herself far from her family and community, in an area without any infrastructure or public transport. What I remember most was her loss of independence. For the first time this very proud and fiercely independent woman, who had to earn a living after her husband died and had raised five children on her own, had to ask for help to go to the shops, or the doctor or to collect her pension from the post office in Cape Town. Giliomee & Mbenga (2007) verify that "people were dumped in new areas that lacked infrastructure" and the poor were "put at a considerable distance from their places of work, often without adequate public transport" (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 319).

My mother was born in Woodstock, later moving with her parents to Walmer Estate. Popular images were of Woodstock as 'whiter', more concerned with achieving and maintaining respectability. Walmer Estate was seen as already respectable and occupied by a higher class, while District Six (where my father was born and raised) was poorer, more cosmopolitan, and livelier. It was commonly believed that Walmer Estate people signalled their superior status by speaking English<sup>90</sup>, while District Six people spoke *Kaaps* or *Kombuis*<sup>91</sup>, says Professor of Linguistics, Kay McCormick (2002).

Our home language was English, and my mother's family was English-speaking, although they were known to speak Afrikaans when there was something that they didn't want the children to hear. Many of my mother's cousins were teachers who also lived in Walmer Estate. My father was bilingual, fluent in English and Afrikaans, but also spoke *Kaaps* to his family. It was not the same Afrikaans we learned at school. It was peppered with 'Malay' and English words as well as different pronunciations of words. Our inability to speak the same way created an awkwardness between us and our paternal cousins, as we struggled to communicate without being teased about trying to be "posh".

Living in Walmer Estate must have been a source of pride for my grandmother. It was known as the 'coloured' Bishopscourt<sup>92</sup>; or the 'black' Sea Point<sup>93</sup> and "status and lifestyles rose with the ground" from District Six towards Walmer Estate (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999: 130). McCormick (2002) concurs, saying

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<sup>88</sup> A spicy doughnut dipped in syrup and rolled in coconut

<sup>89</sup> A preserve of fruit, usually watermelon, figs or sour figs

<sup>90</sup> Straight hair, English-speaking was associated with upwardly mobile not only in District Six but also in other parts of the peninsula (McCormick, 2002: 43).

<sup>91</sup> names given to the local dialect of Afrikaans

<sup>92</sup> the most elite 'white' suburb in Cape Town

<sup>93</sup> another affluent 'white' suburb in Cape Town

that the residents of District Six, Woodstock and Walmer Estate generally believed that their neighbourhoods differed in terms of class. In Richard Rive's 1988 novel, *Emergency*, he observes that Walmer Estate was occupied by "upper class coloureds with electric stoves, refrigerators, venetian blinds on their windows". Moving to Walmer Estate was a sign that a family had established itself (Rive, 1988: 75).

My grandmother belonged to St Bartholomew's, the Anglican Church a few roads away from where we lived. We would often attend services with her and my mother at Christmas or Easter, walking to and from the church with family members or neighbours. She also belonged to the Anglican Women's Fellowship and feverishly prepared for the annual church bazaar. Our two-bedroomed house was a flurry of activity as she sewed, knitted and crocheted. As the day drew nearer we were roped in to stuff cushions, sew on buttons and wrap and price items. So committed was she to the church activities, that I suspect that St Bartholomew's might have been a substitute for the family she had lost. My father, although Muslim, would be roped in to erect and decorate the stall and to help prepare the church hall. This was hardly unusual though, as I recall Muslim youth attending church activities, and when my grandmother died, all the pall-bearers who carried her coffin out of the church, were Muslim. One of my mother's Christian cousins who I interviewed recently, expressed her appreciation that my father had been the last person to pray for her father before he died.

Another cousin, also Christian, now 80 years old and widowed for 15 years, had set aside an *onder-kuffiyah*<sup>94</sup> that my father's mother had crocheted for him to wear since he so frequently accompanied my father to funerals and to meet returning pilgrims. I mention these to illustrate how respectful and tolerant people in the community were of each other's diverse religious, social and cultural backgrounds.

In his book, *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Jacob Dlamini writes about ordinary people with spirit, values and pride, living in the township of Katlehong under apartheid. He makes the point that not everything people did was a response to apartheid, and, that in spite of the oppression, they still produced art, literature and music, and raised morally upright children. 'Black' South Africans, he says, refused to remain prisoners in their own land, finding the strength to resist the dehumanising process partly from a sense of community, from being part of a supportive network of people on whom one could rely. It is the fabric of this community that the apartheid government ripped apart when they bulldozed people's houses and removed them to barren townships on the Cape Flats, where gangsters formed their own communities amid the hastily and poorly constructed council houses. A generation later, and despite the abolition of apartheid, crime, poverty and unemployment are still rife and Cape Town has been described as the most violent city in South Africa (Business Tech, 2017).

As our family increased in size, my father struggled to find a house in a 'nice' area. There were few desirable 'coloured' neighbourhoods to live in in the 1970s. My father, in spite of being a teacher, didn't earn enough



to qualify for a home loan, but was considered to be too affluent to be placed on the waiting list for council housing. I remember us going with my parents to look at houses in areas where my mother was often afraid to get out of the car. When my father found a newly-built house in Lotus River, about 30 minutes' drive from Cape Town, at the right price, we were excited about having enough space for our family of seven with a proper bathroom. We certainly didn't notice the *shebeen*<sup>95</sup> and the *smokkie*<sup>96</sup>, and the lack of access to schools or shops. We would discover that it was almost impossible for anything to grow in the hostile alkaline soil and when the southeaster blew, it would swirl up and filter through every crack to settle onto my mother's just-polished dining room table and kitchen countertops.

The houses were simple, square structures with a garage, not ostentatious in any way, but mansions compared to the sub-economic council houses with makeshift lean-tos of corrugated iron which lined the street around them. The neighbours who weren't milling about in the untarred street, watched surreptitiously from behind curtained windows or stared openly, hanging over chicken-wire fences as we unpacked our belongings. Children and dogs darted across the road, women in slippers and gowns with curlers in their hair, strolled to the shop to buy cigarettes, past unemployed tattooed men who loitered on corners in front of flats of concrete block with graffiti walls. "*Is julle dan wit?*"<sup>97</sup> asked one of the snotty-nosed barefoot boys who stood at the gate watching our arrival with interest. Perhaps he had noticed us unpack our possessions, or overheard us speak English, or perhaps it was the fact that our house was so different to the one he lived in, that gave the impression of relative privilege and made him doubt that we were 'coloured', just like everyone else in the road.

When I interviewed my brother, he said that he only became aware of apartheid when we moved to Lotus River. "Walmer Estate was like a bubble" he recalled, "Chinese Mr and Mrs Yap on the corner, Indian Mr Allie on the other corner and Mrs Morgenrood, who was white and would celebrate Guy Fawkes by walking around the neighbourhood with a 'guy'. And the view, remember we could watch the start of the Cape to Rio race from the *stoep*? We couldn't be there but we could still watch" (Kamies, 2018).

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94 A skull cap that was worn by Muslim men when they attended prayers or went to the mosque

95 a place where alcoholic drink is sold illegally; S.Afr. a drinking establishment where liquor is sold and consumed.

96 a place where drugs are sold; from *smokkelaar* - smuggler

97 "Are you white?"



*Figure 11*

In Walmer Estate, we were part of a community where we played in the street, walked to school and took the bus into town. In Lotus River we had to travel far to school, my mother worried about us using public transport, and certainly didn't encourage us to play outside. Consequently, we didn't spend much time in the neighbourhood which probably protected us from succumbing to the alcohol and drugs which were freely available to not only those who lived there but, to my mother's consternation, the "nice people's" children (often 'white') who came into the area to buy drugs. This meant that we no longer felt part of a community that we belonged to.

I don't think my mother ever got over the shame of living in Lotus River. She would cringe at the idea of what people might think if they came to visit us, to be stared at by women in nightclothes and men with tattoos. Inside though, the dining-room table and kitchen countertops gleamed, the swirling white sand having been tamed by the patch of tough buffalo grass my father had nurtured. In the photograph above my mother poses with us in the front garden, the Vibracrete<sup>98</sup> wall partially obscuring the neighbourhood from view and keeping at bay the chaos – the drugs, alcohol and unemployment - over which she had no control. I realise that within the boundary walls, my mother in charge of the physical space she inhabited, and she made sure that it was an extension of the way she intended us to present ourselves to the world.

Similar memories of the shame and embarrassment of being forced to live in apartheid areas were shared with me. When Hardisty and her family had to move from their home in Steurhof, an area declared 'white', to Parkwood Estate<sup>99</sup>, she says that her mother never got over the stigma of staying in a council house. Her

<sup>98</sup> Precast concrete

<sup>99</sup> A study of Parkwood Estate, conducted in 1941 described it as the Middletown of the Cape Flats, where 70% of the population were living below the poverty line; women worked as domestic servants and men as general labourers (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999).

mother reminded them that, “just because they lived in Parkwood, didn’t mean that they had to look like Parkwood”. They had to speak properly and be properly dressed and groomed, even though money was tight. Hardisty’s father had lost his business due to the unscrupulous behaviour of a ‘white’ sponsor he was forced to use in order to open a shop in Heathfield’s Main Road, which was reserved for ‘whites’.



*Figure 12*

She shared this photograph of her parents taken outside an aunt’s house in a more affluent ‘coloured’ area. “No occasion,” says Hardisty, “that’s how my parents dressed on the weekend”. This performance of respectability, clearly challenged the negative stereotypes associated with ‘coloured’ people and, particularly with those who lived in Parkwood. Hardisty’s smartly dressed parents, posed against a background of a ‘nice’ house, even though not theirs, created the image that they wanted to present to the world. This photograph captures a brief moment in their life and makes it permanent, in effect, what Lorie Novak, Professor of Photography, would call “freezing them for inspection” (Novak, 1999: 14). The decisions centred around how and when photographs were taken and more importantly what was photographed and chosen to be preserved for the future, lie at the basis of my thesis. I agree with Sturken (1999) who says that these personal and seemingly casual photographs take on a cultural and historical meaning “hauntingly tragic in their evocation of loss” when they are shared to form a communal voice (Sturken, 1999: 179). Hardisty’s parents had lost their home, business and community but this weekend photograph freezes them the way they want to be seen and remembered. However, the photograph and the memories of loss they evoke in their daughter decades later, has taken on a significance far beyond what they may have imagined. It’s the loss that is evoked, the memory of what is not in the photograph, that she remembers when she looks at it.

The same trauma of forced removals was echoed in an interview with Bonita Bennett (2018) whose family moved from District Six to Bonteheuwel on the Cape Flats. She says that her mother believed for many years

that the move was temporary, a “stopgap”, and refused to make alterations to the house or do anything that might indicate the permanence of their situation. They were not allowed to play in the road and continued to socialise in District Six (with family and friends who still lived there). So much so, that until she was 12 or 13 years old, she still believed that they were part of the District Six community and couldn’t understand why she had to attend school so far from ‘home’.

Bennett’s mother’s survival mechanism calls to mind what Susan Berger (2009) in her book on grief, terms the ‘normaliser’ personality. I believe that Bennett’s mother placed emphasis on her family, friends and community, in order to recreate a lifestyle that compensated for the loss she had experienced. I think that the trauma of being relocated and separated from all that was familiar to her, was so difficult for her that she coped through denying the permanence of the loss, and focused instead on how she and her family lived within their home — all that she had control over, under the inhumane apartheid laws. So successfully did she manage to recreate the sense of the community that her daughter believed that they still lived in District Six.

For both Hardisty and Bennett’s mothers, the shame and embarrassment attached to being forced to move, was tied to multiple losses, exacerbated by the loss of status in having to move to a lower socio-economic area. Living in areas like Bonteheuwel and Parkwood, also meant a loss of physical security since these areas were considered to be dangerous. In Michele Paulse’s 2002 doctoral study of residents in Tramway Road and Ilford Street, Sea Point, some of whom were moved to Bonteheuwel, one of the interviewees laments the loss of geographical beauty, the sea and mountain being replaced with a landscape of sand and wind. These townships indicated a loss of status and people were reluctant to say where they lived (Paulse, 2002). This was similar to my personal experience of moving to Lotus River from Walmer Estate. This Lotus River, this Parkwood, this Bontehuwel, that we were not, was exactly the depiction of ‘colouredness’ that the apartheid government wanted us to believe. Our mothers resisted this by keeping as much distance between us and those who would comply. They could not control where we lived but they could control how we lived. This was a choice they exercised vigorously, as a last residue of freedom.

Ironically, Malan’s justification for the implementation of residential segregation was to foster good relationships between the races and to give the “non-European” an opportunity to “do justice” to himself and his community, to live his own life and maintain and develop what was his own, thereby overcoming a “sense of inferiority” (as quoted in Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 318). Almost 40 years later, PW Botha would express similar sentiments, claiming that the NP had been benevolent in removing District Six residents to Mitchell’s Plain where they could be home-owners and “live with dignity” (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 318). As such, I conclude that the NP government clearly had different standards of justice and dignity depending on the colour of one’s skin.



*Figure 13*

### **LIVING APARTHEID: THE IMMORALITY ACT AND THE PROHIBITION OF MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS**

As I delve further into the photographs, I come across one of Aunty Hilda and Uncle Bill, who were married in 1958 or 1959 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. The back of the photograph is inscribed in neat ink, “To Uncle Ivan and Aunt Ethel”, my grandparents. The matte postcard, was sent almost 60 years ago, and is folded in two places at the bottom, perhaps to fit into a too-small frame. The card is yellow and ragged around the edges, but the image of the newly-weds is strong. I can still detect the pinstripes in Uncle Bill’s trousers, and the feathery leafy fronds in the boutonniere on his lapel, and in Aunty Hilda’s bouquet. In the photograph, Aunty Hilda wears a traditional wedding gown and veil and holds onto the arm of her handsome, groom in his tuxedo. Neither one is smiling although they don’t look unhappy. He stares straight into the camera, gloves in hand, looking strong and dependable — good qualities for what lay ahead. The young, petite bride appears to be leaning in towards her groom, perhaps for support? They are framed by the strong lines of the brickwork, the timber door and solid concrete steps. The door behind them seems firmly shut; perhaps symbolic of the fact that the door to living in South Africa had been legally closed to them for daring to fall in love and marry.

Their lives epitomised the control exerted by the apartheid government that dictated who you could socialise with, who you could love and marry, where you could live, and where your children could go to school.

Aunty Hilda had been working as an usherette at the Metro Bioscope in Sea Point, a cinema for ‘whites’ but “her skin was good enough” for the management to turn a blind eye, according to her sister, Sylvia Wentzel (Aunty Sylvie), who I interviewed (2018). In fact, Aunty Sylvie believed that most of the ushers were fair-skinned ‘coloureds’ who could “pass”; “we knew who was coloured, but we kept it quiet”. When Uncle Bill asked Aunty Hilda’s parents their permission to marry her two years later, she was in London and the couple

wed in Rotterdam, where they were forced to settle. None of her family were able to attend the wedding. Their marriage was illegal under the Mixed Marriages Act, sexual relations between them were banned under the Immorality Act, and the Group Areas Act prevented them from living together in South Africa. The black and white image was taken outside the town hall in Rotterdam. My mother thinks that they must have had a civil wedding since Uncle Bill was not religious. She recalls Auntie Hilda telling her that the townspeople had gathered to get a closer look at the “African” Uncle Bill was marrying, perhaps expecting her to be wearing a grass skirt or a bone through her nose (Kamies, 2016). The photograph does not reveal the pain attached to being forced to sever ties with her home and family, but represents a special day in the life of an ordinary couple in love, a photograph that was sent home to family and friends to reassure them, perhaps, that the exile was worthwhile.

My memories of her are reduced to about five or six photographs. I was young at the time so it’s more the memory of the photographs arriving in an airmail envelope with overseas stamps, being taken out and pored over, that I recall, rather than the girls who I saw infrequently. There’s a photograph of a smiling, chubby baby girl, staring at the photographer with her big, blue eyes, that was sent when Wilma was born in 1960. A couple more are of two young girls under a Christmas tree, inscribed “Christmas 1966” on the back. There’s also a photograph taken in summer of the same year, of the girls with Uncle Bill’s family drinking tea in the garden looking, ironically, for all intents and purposes, like a typical Afrikaner family. They are the kind of photographs which would have been taken countless times in different settings; they speak of ordinary lives and moments of humanity; they defy categorisation and yet, reinforce the separateness the apartheid government was so intent upon.



*Figure 14*



*Figure 15*

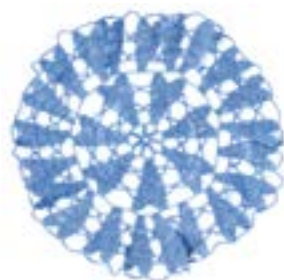


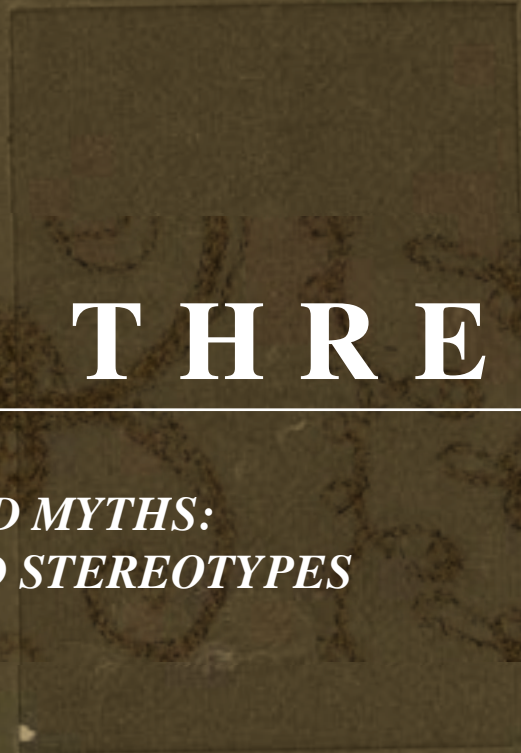
*Figure 16*

People we knew didn't travel overseas much which is probably why I remember so well this relative who married a 'white' man and was banished for doing so. I remember the excitement and anticipation of her visits, but also the adults whispering about the difficulties associated with the visit. Aunty Hilda wasn't able to stay with her mother if her daughters came with her since they were Dutch and therefore 'white', so they had to stay in a hotel. Uncle Bill wasn't allowed to stay at his mother-in-law's house in Walmer Estate or go out with his brothers-in-law for a drink, so they never visited together as a family. Aunty Hilda's sister remembers Wilma and one of her Cape Town cousins being stopped on the Grand Parade by a policeman who wanted to know what they were doing together. After a while Aunty Hilda visited by herself.

Adhikari (2005) observes that light-skinned 'coloured' people represented the danger of infiltration of 'white' society. Consequently, these borders needed to be strictly policed. Aunty Hilda had crossed these boundaries and would be constantly reminded of her 'illegal' activity and, by implication, of her 'inferior' status compared to Uncle Bill. Scenes of shame like these, were repetitively played out in countless ways, in many homes and families, throughout the apartheid era. Even though she no longer lived in South Africa, the government still controlled and policed her visits to her family and how she would spend her time here. Social anthropologist, Fiona Ross (2015) concurs that during apartheid the domestic realm – the household and its relations, and social life – became increasingly under the control of the state through separate development policies, and aforementioned legislation. This is certainly illustrated by the relationship between Uncle Bill and Aunty Hilda who were effectively exiled to Rotterdam.

Did Aunty Hilda and Uncle Bill realise how difficult it would be to visit family back home? To miss out on the many ordinary moments we shared? Did she imagine that she would be missing noisy family Christmases with the steady stream of her six siblings, their spouses and children, plus all the extended family, as we exchanged gifts of *Old Spice* after-shave lotion, and *Fenjal bath crème*? The Netherlands sounded exotic and exciting to my childish imagination — fields of tulips, windmills and dykes, and white Christmases, where people could be equal and free. As I look at these photographs now, both Aunty Hilda and Wilma have died. I am forced to consider what O'Connell (2012) terms "the modes of survival" employed "by those who were dominated" and I wonder if that is where she would have wanted to live and raise her children if she had been free to choose for herself (O'Connell, 2012: 104).





# CHAPTER THREE

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*NARRATIVES AND MYTHS:  
REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPES*





## CHAPTER THREE

### NARRATIVES AND MYTHS: REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPES

*In Afrikaner mythology, 'coloureds' would only perform a functional role within the compass of the following syndromes: the labour syndrome, the comic syndrome, the Bacchus syndrome, the incarceration syndrome, the loud-mouthed and the bellicose syndromes (February, 1981: 35)*

*We live, experience and give meaning to our world by using a system of representations such as language, pictures and the mass media (Fourie, 2007: 313).*

Issues of representation are central to my thesis. I start from the premise that 'colouredness' is a cultural identity, created under "specific conditions of creolisation", rather than "simply apartheid labels imposed by whites" (Erasmus, 2001: 16). Stereotypes as a means of social control and oppression are discussed. This chapter focuses on how 'colouredness' has been imbued with negativity and how these stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in a post-1994 society and the concomitant feelings of shame engendered by these negative depictions. Central to this chapter are the stereotypes associated with alcoholism and illiteracy, as demonstrated in the Afrikaans idiom "*so dronk soos 'n Kleurling onderwyser*"<sup>100</sup>. The role of the 'coloured' teacher and the importance of education as a means of earning respectability, is discussed against the background of early mission education and later Christian National Education, as introduced by the apartheid regime, is examined in terms of how it contributed to the concepts of shame and respectability.

### BORN A CRIME

Trevor Noah, South African comedian and host of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, is the son of a Xhosa mother and a Swiss ('white') father, who identifies himself as "mixed but not coloured – coloured by complexion but not by culture" (Noah, 2016: 141). In his memoir, *Born a Crime and Other Stories* (2016), Noah shares his experiences of growing up in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, living in a 'coloured' neighbourhood and not fitting in because of the "two types of coloured people" he encountered — those who hated him for being 'black', i.e. speaking Xhosa or Zulu and having curly hair, and those who resented his 'whiteness' and "perfect English" and for not speaking "Afrikaans, the language that coloured people *were supposed to speak*" (emphasis my own) (Noah, 2016: 142). Ironically, Noah describes very accurately the space of ambiguity which mirrors the 'coloured' experience of occupying the interstitial zone, defined through negatives, discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>100</sup> As drunk as a 'coloured' teacher

While his story resonates on many levels with ordinary people in South Africa, and offers a lens into what it was like for his family (and others) to live and navigate apartheid legislation, his description of the origin of ‘coloureds’ is peppered with stereotypes and inaccuracies, starting with the presumption that ‘coloured’ people speak Afrikaans.

The white colonists had their way with the Khoisan women and the first mixed people of South Africa were born ... the slaves and the Khoisan intermarried, and the white colonists continued to dip in and take their liberties ... the rest of their (Khoisan) bloodline was bred out of existence, mixed in with the descendants of whites and slaves to form an entirely new race of people: coloureds (Noah, 2016: 135).

Adhikari (2005) in his book, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, references this popular myth that ‘coloured’ originated largely from ‘black-white’ sexual unions outside of wedlock; a result of “prostitution and casual sex between slave and Khoisan women and passing soldiers, sailors, and white riffraff”, to which Noah seems to be alluding (Adhikari, 2005: 26). Noah perpetuates the myths of the existence of separate races and of racial purity by referring to ‘coloureds’ as “an entirely new race” and by claiming that sexual intercourse between the different ‘races’ gave rise to hybridity ...

... a complete mix. Some are light and some are dark. Some have Asian features. It’s not uncommon for a coloured man and a coloured woman to have a child that looks nothing like either parent (Noah, 2016: 135).

Professor Cheryl Hendricks (2001), writing on the intersections of race and sex in the colonial Cape, says that racist representations were prevalent from the first encounters between Europeans and the indigenous people and fed into the construction of ‘coloured’ identity; the hierarchical nature of the classification, treatment and representation of the ‘mixed’ offspring was necessary to maintain ‘white’ rule and led to the internalisation of these racist stereotypes. Representations of those of ‘mixed’ descent, a signifier for ‘coloured’ identity, she says, are tied to racial and sexual politics. Sexual encounters between Europeans and indigenous people threatened the social boundaries which were necessary to enforce colonial rule. The sexual encounter between Noah’s Xhosa mother and Swiss father, an encounter between a European man and an indigenous woman, is no different to the encounters between colonists, the Khoisan and the enslaved population at the Cape, albeit under different historical and geographical conditions.

Professor Desiree Lewis (2001), in a chapter analysing the writing of authors, Richard Rive and Zoë Wicomb, concurs with Hendricks (2001) that the apartheid hallmark of fixing ‘coloured’ identity was preceded by the coding of ‘coloured’ identity in racial identity. Hybridity, she says, references “a language of ‘race’ that originates in the nineteenth century and shapes dominant and oppositional formations of

identity well in to the twentieth century”. The enforcement of institutionalised racism and the policing of strict boundaries between ‘white’ and ‘black’ led to a preoccupation with the ‘purity’ of the races and the ‘coloured’ as “debased in-betweeners or ‘racial mixture’, perceived product of the transgression of a sacrosanct boundary, has connoted lack, deficiency, moral and cultural degeneration” (Lewis, 2001: 133). It is my view that Noah appears to have internalised the negative stereotypes attached to being ‘coloured’ and dismisses the lack of history and heritage which he attaches to the identity, with contempt:

The curse that coloured people carry is that they have no clearly defined heritage to go back to. If they trace their lineage back far enough, at a certain point it splits into white and native and a tangled web of ‘other’. Since their native mothers are gone, their strongest affinity has always been with their white fathers, the Afrikaners. Most coloured people don’t speak African languages. They speak Afrikaans. Their religion, their institutions, all of the things that have shaped their culture, came from Afrikaners. The history of coloured people in South Africa is, in this respect, worse than the history of black people in South Africa. For all that black people have suffered, they know who they are. Coloured people don’t (Noah, 2016: 135-136).

More than 360 years after these first encounters, and 24 years into democracy, these stereotypes remain firmly fixed in the psyche of the majority of people in South Africa as evidenced in the work of Bowler and Vincent (2011). They identified the principle themes that emerged as those to do with “the idea of colouredness as a position of ‘mixture’ or ‘inbetweenity’” and say that “the role of stereotypes emerges both from ‘within’ and from ‘without’ colouredness”. They refer to the tension between, and implications of, the rejection and reification of the concept of “colouredness”. Their paper was prompted by the media storm following a column published in the *Sunday World* in 2011, where working class Cape ‘coloured’ women were portrayed as “cigarette smoking, beer swilling, drug-abusing, street fighting, promiscuous drunks who wear hair curlers in public and have no front teeth”. I believe that Noah demonstrates the success to which the apartheidists perpetuated racist stereotypes through his descriptions of what he believes ‘coloured’ to be, and also consistently reverts to the gangster stereotype every time he references ‘coloureds’ in his stand-up shows.

The denial of the history of the ‘coloured’ people is a deliberately engineered myth of the Afrikaner government. Vernon February (1981), author of *Mind Your Colour: The Coloured Stereotype in South African Literature*, references the novel by Andre Brink (1973), *Kennis van die Aand*<sup>101</sup>, which was the first Afrikaans book to be banned<sup>102</sup> by the apartheid government. The book was criticised for “vilifying

<sup>101</sup> Banned in 1975, in English as *Looking on Darkness*

<sup>102</sup> Banned in 1974, unbanned in 1982

the Afrikaner, portraying the police as inhuman, and ridiculing religion” (February, 1981: 122). More importantly though, according to February, is that Brink supplies his protagonist, the ‘coloured’ Josef Malan, with “a neatly constructed genealogical tree ... that forcibly accounted for ... the no-past, no-myth, heritage of the Cape Coloured”, which is what Noah articulates in his memoir (February, 1981: 124).

I am impressed by Noah’s career path from impoverished township boy to hosting an award-winning show in America; his memoir was on the *New York Times*’ Bestseller list shortly after its release and is about to be made into a movie, starring an Oscar-nominated actor in the role of his mother. I believe that Noah may have embellished some of the details of his life to make it more Hollywood-worthy. While the Immorality Act and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and, later, the Group Areas Act were repealed when Noah was a young boy (the first two in 1985 and the latter in 1990), South Africans continue to live with the legacies of these and other laws, as a deeply divided and racist society. However, I cannot conceive that Noah’s mother could not be seen to hold his hand in public nor that his father had to run away from him for fear of being arrested, as he describes in the late 1980s, early 1990s when Mandela was freed and political organisations were unbanned.

I suggest that Noah’s overall depiction of ‘coloured’ behaviour and the contempt with which he references it, is a way of distancing himself from what he perceives to be the shame of being ‘coloured’, the shame related to miscegenation, which “tends to be a failing of the lowest elements of society” (Adhikari, 2005: 26). His rejection by those he calls the “two types of coloureds” mirrors the experiences of many ‘coloured’ people who navigated the ambiguity of the label. In being made to feel like an outsider, he has had to deal with historical patterns of oppression and racism and was prevented from assimilating into the wider community in which he found himself, leading to his contempt (Kaufman, 1996). He counters this shame, I argue, by continuing to disparage this community (Kaufman, 1996).

### **STEREOTYPES AND REPRESENTATION**

In his examination of the portrayal of ‘Hottentot’ characters in early 19th century theatre, February (1981) finds that the basic elements are clear: their love of liquor, their irascibility (which inevitably leads to a fight), their moral looseness, and linguistic incomprehension. February remarks that by the early 20th century, ‘coloureds’ were limited to certain roles in Afrikaner mythology based on the same characteristics that had been attributed to the ‘Hottentots’. He notes that, in spite of evidence that they resisted the appropriation of their land by foreigners, “the image of the docile, spineless ‘Hottentot’” and “the stereotype of the lazy, weak ‘Hottentot’ who was wiped out by the smallpox epidemics in the 18th century, or who drank himself to death” continues to exist (February, 1981: 19).

Adhikari (2005) similarly refers to the alleged inherent characteristics of ‘coloured’ people – such as “being physically stunted, lacking in endurance, and naturally prone to dishonesty, licentiousness, and drink” and “supposed propensities for criminality, gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, and vulgar behaviour” – that have often been blamed on the idea that ‘colouredness’ was the product of miscegenation (Adhikari, 2005: 14). He elaborates further, saying that “many of the racial traits attributed to coloured people have often been explained in terms of the deleterious effects of racial mixture” (Adhikari, 2005: 24). Because the ‘coloured’ community was “conceived in a negative fashion with reference to other groups, in terms of what it was not, it has usually not been identified in a positive manner, nor does it have a set of distinctive characteristics” (Adhikari, 2005: 26).

Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, has written extensively on representation as the central element of culture. Representation, he says, is the way in which meaning is given to images, signs and language between members of a culture, and reflects how people view the world and their place in it. Meaning is given to the images seen based on concepts that have been internalised from an individual’s own cultural experiences; this interpretation is communicated to others through the use of language. Images, says Hall, can have different meanings depending on how the image is represented and what has previously been learned about the image. Without internalising some sort of concept about the image, an individual cannot answer questions relating to what has been seen, what words to use and what it means. In other words, language externalises the meanings that an individual makes of the world (Hall, 1997). In a culture, language incorporates narratives, statements, groups of images and conversations around a diversity of texts and topics, explains educator and researcher, Alisa Acosta (2012).

By attempting to fix the meanings that are given to groups or things, the relationship between the viewer and the image may be controlled (Hall, 1997). This is how stereotypes, the oversimplified idea of the typical characteristics of a person or thing, work. By dictating what it means and what to think whenever we see a certain image, stereotypes circulate a limited range of who people can be or become. The reason for wanting to fix an image and its meaning is to ultimately change the relationship between the viewer and the image, to intervene in the relationship between the two and to control the perceptions of the viewer (Hall, 1997). Consequently, the question of power can never be bracketed out of representation (Hall, 1997). February agrees with Hall that stereotypes function as a means of social control and repression, whereby the power-holders (i.e. the ‘whites’) justify their dominant position in society (February, 1981). In his examination of stereotypes in literature and culture, specifically pertaining to ‘coloured’ people, February (1981) contends that there is irrefutable proof that Afrikaner political ideas were shaped by the stereotypes as found in these

texts. He offers as an example cabinet minister, Eben Dönges, quoting from the novels<sup>103</sup> of Sarah Millin Gertrude and Regina Nesor, to support his proposal of the law prohibiting sexual relations between ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’ in 1948.

Communication, says Hall (1997), is always linked with power; ideology and power try “to close language, to close meaning, to stop the flow” (Hall, 1997: 19). Hall (1997) asserts that those who hold the power in society control what is represented in the media; their ideology is propagated through the media. The media attempts to fix meanings around gender, class, race and ethnicity, presenting the public with a limited way of thinking about people and of the world, and of what they can aspire to become or do. The news derives its meanings from social and political institutions such as the courts, police and universities, which is the foundation of the collective opinion in which both liberal and conservative party politics take place, contends author and journalist, Arun Kundnani (2017). In 1915, five years after the Union of South Africa was formed, a group of prominent Afrikaner nationalists and supporters of the NP started a daily newspaper, *De Burger*<sup>104</sup> (later to become *Die Burger*<sup>105</sup>), which would promote the Afrikaner cause, in a media dominated by English publications. Published by *De Nasionale Pers*<sup>106</sup> (now Naspers), the newspaper’s first editor was the religious minister, Dr D.F. Malan, who in 1948 led the NP to victory and proceeded to implement institutionalised racism. *Die Burger* served as the de-facto mouthpiece of the NP until 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released<sup>107</sup>, according to writer, John McDuling (2014).

Race, says Hall (1997), is not a fixed concept, its meaning shifts according to the dictates of society and culture. It is the key to how society experiences and makes sense of the social and economic structure through, for example, the news media. The question of race was intimately linked to that of identity in South Africa, along with feelings of inferiority and superiority. In spite of scientific proof to the contrary, ‘black’ people continue to be portrayed as inferior and are limited to certain positions in society by the narratives that society and culture propagate, according to Professor of Communication, Sut Jhally (1997). The notion of racial superiority added to the paternalistic attitudes of ‘white’ farmers long before apartheid was formalised and ideas about race were used to subjugate ‘coloureds’ politically and economically, justified by the idea that their ‘mixed’ blood made them inferior (Viall, et al, 2011; Vink, 2007). The depiction of ‘coloureds’ as “drunken, happy-go-lucky clowns” who often become violent when drunk, accompanies the ‘white’ nationalist discourse which constructed ‘coloureds’ as ‘left over people’ (Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999: 184). Erasmus and Professor Edgar Pieterse, Director of UCT’s Centre for African Cities, in a chapter they

<sup>103</sup> *Kinders van Ishmaël* by Regina Nesor and Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Step-children* both deal with mixtures as tragic and sinful products of ‘white’ and ‘black’, and by implication, preached purity of the tribe (February, 1981).

<sup>104</sup> Dutch for The Citizen; the newspaper was first published in Dutch with Afrikaans articles appearing in 1916

<sup>105</sup> In 1921 the Dutch title was translated to Afrikaans

<sup>106</sup> The National Press

<sup>107</sup> Then-editor, Ebbe Dommissie, informed the party of its disaffiliation

co-wrote on ‘coloured’ identities (1999), quote Percy Sonn<sup>108</sup>, as publicly justifying his drunkenness by claiming that it was “so much a part of his people” (Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999: 184). For this reason, I would like to examine this stereotype more closely as it forms the basis for further typecasting of ‘coloured’ people, specifically with regards to education, choice of careers and respectability. Since education played a fundamental role in respectability, it is necessary to also examine its history.

### **“DRUNKEN, HAPPY-GO-LUCKY CLOWNS”**

The history of the vineyards is fundamental to the history of South Africa. Its legacy is interwoven with 350 years of slavery and serfdom. The early history of farm workers ... “is the history of mobility, of slavery and freedom, dispossession and resistance. Primarily, though, it is a story of paternalism ... and oppression which has left a legacy of hopelessness, dependency and alcohol abuse” (Viall et al., 2011: 113). As discussed in a previous chapter, slaves were initially brought to the Cape to work on the farms as the Dutch settlement grew. After their emancipation, freed slaves flocked to the cities for better opportunities. In order to stop this migration, the wine farmers introduced the economical and addictive *dop* system (Sparks, 2003). Rather than offering workers better housing, higher wages or better perks, farmers would compete by offering more alcohol<sup>109</sup>. This system, accompanied by poor living conditions, poor nutrition and low wages, contributed to foetal alcohol syndrome<sup>110</sup> and high infant mortality rates. This was not only an incentive to work and the only form of socialising, but also a way for the farmers to control their workers<sup>111</sup>. Alcohol thus became established as a way of life on farms in South Africa.

The *dop* system is peculiar to South Africa’s rural areas of the Western Cape dominated by wine and wheat farms, and where families lived on the farm for generations (February, 1981). The farmers’ paternalistic attitudes about the nature and culture of the ‘coloured’ people, and their supposed love of liquor, fed into the practice of this system. The *dop* system was outlawed in 1960 but this did not end the practice. This “socio-economic poisoning” was so deeply entrenched that farmers could see nothing wrong with it (Viall, et al, 2011: 141).

One of the earliest proponents of enforced segregation was sociologist, and apartheid ideologist, Professor G. Cronje, who in the mid-1940s, recommended that mixing was undesirable as it would result in a biologically inferior group of people who would be, amongst others, susceptible to alcoholism. This was used as a moral justification for the legalisation of segregation (Heese, 2013). The ‘Ham ideology’ which

<sup>108</sup> Sonn was vice-president of the Western Province Cricket Association and Deputy Attorney General of the Western Cape.

<sup>109</sup> A worker would typically receive 500 litres of cheap alcohol per year.

<sup>110</sup> Alcohol consumption is just one risk factor for FAS – smoking, low body weight, drug abuse and poor education also play a role (Viall, et al., 2011: 148)

<sup>111</sup> The farmer also controlled his labourers through low wages, tied housing and corporal punishment (Viall, et al., 2011).

had served as the most important biblical justification for the enslavement and exploitation of Africans and Asians, continued to be invoked as the justification for the abuse of farm labourers. Theories put forward for alcohol abuse and poverty were also underpinned by ideas of “coloured people” (especially farm workers) being “less advanced” than others, at a different “stage of development”. This then justified why they did not need better housing, wages or treatment. Farmers were also very sceptical about the value of education for their workers since they believed that the ordinary type of ‘coloured’ with whom they dealt had the “mentality of a child” and the most that could be achieved was teaching them to read and write. Besides, if the children were allowed to study further they would be lost to farm work (Viall, et al., 2011: 125; Sparks, 2003: 84). The cycle of poverty which people became trapped in, was then ascribed to the fact that they were ‘coloured’ rather than to the consequences of years of poverty, powerlessness, the *dop* system, poor education and hopelessness (Viall, et al., 2011: 127).

### **SO DRONK SOOS ’n KLEURLING ONDERWYSER**

The theme of alcohol is a recurring one throughout Afrikaans literature, enshrining the tot system and justifying alcohol as the ‘coloured’s’ greatest cultural heritage (February, 1981: 26). The stereotype of drunkenness is explicit in the Afrikaans idiom, ‘*so dronk soos ’n Kleurling onderwyser*’ translated as ‘as drunk as a coloured teacher’ (Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999: 174; Baderoon, 2014: ix). Alcoholism and education are inextricably linked by this idiom, “meant to signal the impossibility of black intellectual life” (Baderoon, 2014: ix). Although I remember this expression clearly, it still came as a shock to see it in print in Baderoon’s book on Muslims in South Africa. She observes that,

... the contempt with which this saying highlighted the failure of the black intelligentsia also conveyed in the heartbreak induced by apartheid’s attack on all of black life ... through the idiom, apartheid tried to erase the long history of black intellectual achievement in South Africa ... (Baderoon, 2014: ix).

The association of alcohol with education goes back to the very first school started by Jan van Riebeeck near the Slave Lodge at the Cape, where “a glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco” was used “to stimulate the attention of and induce the slaves to learn the Christian prayers” and to bring them “into proper discipline”, as quoted by researcher, Muriel Horrell (1970: 3).

When I asked my father, a teacher, about the association of teachers with alcohol, he says, “Yes, it was true. A survey was done, I don’t remember when. They said that 75% of coloured teachers’ cheques were being cashed at the bottle store. The idiom was even in the Afrikaans dictionary” (Kamies, 2016). I recalled my high school English teacher, brow-beaten into one of the few respectable jobs a man of colour could get. His



cultured English voice belied the curse of the colour of his skin. Some days he would show up in the same dirty green suit badly in need of pressing, and make us read quietly at our desks, other times he wouldn't show up at all.

Why then did my father still choose to become a teacher if this was the association? He taught for more than 40 years but he tells me that he would have loved to become a doctor if there had been money. But why teaching, I press. "We lived next door to a family in Woodstock. They had nine children – none of them could write their names. That made me want to teach" (Kamies, 2016). My father was a 'coloured' teacher – distinct from a 'white' teacher or a 'black' teacher or an 'Indian' teacher in apartheid South Africa. A 'coloured' teacher was only allowed to teach 'coloured' children in 'coloured' schools.

Ironically, and in spite of the racist stereotype of drunkenness associated with 'coloured' teachers, teaching had a high status and 'coloured' teachers were highly respected in their communities. The limited employment opportunities available to 'coloureds' meant that teaching was one of an artificially limited number of professions available – 'coloureds' in the majority either went into nursing, teaching or into the civil service. These constraints on employment opportunities encouraged many to become teachers and enhanced the status of the profession and teachers in the community (Hammett, 2007; Horrell, 1970).



*Figure 17*

This photograph of my father was taken shortly after he started teaching in the late 1950s. He is sitting on one of the desks, his feet on a chair, leaning forward with hands loosely folded, and elbows on his lap; he seems comfortable surrounded by the tools of his profession, the maths equations on the blackboard easel behind him. The humble black and white image is water-marked and peeling around the edges, but triggers memories of his early days as a teacher when he tells me about it. By day he taught at a primary school in Elsie's River, one of

the poorest areas on the Cape Flats, and at night had a second job teaching English and Maths at a school for adults in the city. When I ask him about the photograph, he closes his eyes and pauses as he tries to recall the name of the photographer — “Ah! Timothy Thembo, from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a chef at the Arthur’s Seat Hotel in Sea Point,” he says. Thembo had brought his newly-acquired Polaroid camera, that he had ordered from America, to class and offered to show my father how it worked. I imagine that they were having a conversation about it and Thembo said, “Sit there and I will show you”.

The corners have been rubbed away, leading me to think that it could have been put on display stuck in one of the clips that holds the mirror on the dressing table, or the mirror on the inside of his cupboard door, common places that he and my mother kept photographs. In the photograph my father is in his early twenties, already far too much responsibility resting on his shoulders — his father, a tailor, had died when he was in his late teens, so he left high school to help his mother support the family. My grandmother had been supplementing the income by baking and crocheting for many years. When it was possible my father went back to school to train as a teacher, as he believed that this was the way that he could alleviate some of the poverty that surrounded him. The significance of his career choice extends beyond this explanation, since there was a limited number of career paths to choose from as a ‘coloured’ person (Hammett, 2007).

My father was born in 1935 in District Six, Cape Town, which the apartheid government declared for ‘whites’ only in 1966. This image of him pre-dates the forced removals to the Cape Flats, his marriage to my mother, the struggle to provide for five children, the search for housing in a ‘nice’ ‘coloured’ area. His revelation about wanting to do medicine takes me by surprise; he had never shared this before. I am amazed by how much this unremarkable photograph, what Bogues (2012) calls the “archive of the ordinary”<sup>112</sup>, reveals and I wonder how many of his dreams were deferred (Bogues, 2012: 36).

I imagine that I see a resistance, a refusal to be a victim to his circumstances, in the way he looks at the camera. He seems in charge of his life and future. To me, he is the epitome of respectability in his grey suit, white shirt and neatly knotted tie and, the photograph was displayed as a reminder of this. The directness of his gaze, the way he is dressed and his position in the centre of the image, although seemingly casual, are all at odds with what apartheid dictated. My father, as a practising Muslim, never touched a drop of alcohol in his life, but the stereotype of the drunken ‘coloured’ teacher did not discriminate in its impact. This photograph, though, defies any labelling of him as a “drunk, ‘coloured’ teacher”. I therefore contend that the everyday practices of freedom, which Bogues (2012) relates to the archive of the ordinary, include the taking of photographs by the oppressed in order to disrupt the dominant narrative of apartheid.

Fanon (2008) refers to the way that the colonialist destroyed the past of the oppressed person by stripping

<sup>112</sup> The archive of the ordinary refers to the everyday processes of humanisation as performed by the oppressed and includes the extraordinary actions that disrupt the dominant order (Bogues, 2012).

them of pride and instilling a sense of fear and inferiority. In so doing, the culture of ‘black’ people has been arrested in such a way that stereotypes of barbarism, laziness, occupations with sex and alcohol, are transposed and perpetuated. Since there are few records of slavery except for court records and official complaints, I find it hardly surprising that a picture of drunkenness, gambling and promiscuity emerges. Education as the way out of our situation became the mantra we were raised on. Education, my parents reminded us constantly, was something that the government could not take away. They could take away our homes, our rights and privileges, but not what was in our “brains”. Professor Shirley Zinn, who grew up in Cape Town, recalls in her memoir, *Swimming Upstream* (2016), that her mother constantly reminded them that they would have to work hard to succeed and to “liberate ourselves from the hand history had dealt us and make a better life for ourselves” (Zinn, 2016: 10). African-American journalists, James McBride (1996) and Margo Jefferson (2016), relate similar stories in their respective memoirs written two decades apart, despite different backgrounds – Jefferson grew up in an upper middle-class family, McBride’s family was working class. McBride, the son of a Jewish woman and an African-American man, recalls that his parents believed that education and religion would help them to climb out of poverty, while Jefferson observes that good manners and education proved your value to society. Education would make you an exemplary citizen, a ‘somebody’.

“Educate yourself, or you’ll be a nobody,” McBride’s mother tells him in the 1960s. When McBride pesters his mother to tell him whether he would be a ‘white’ or a ‘black’ nobody without education, she responds, “If you’re a nobody, it doesn’t matter what color you are” (McBride, 1996: 92).

According to the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA), ignorance and lack of knowledge was the source of many of the social ills<sup>113</sup> suffered by the ‘coloured’ community and education was the most effective method for instilling the skills necessary for economic advancement and for turning the mass of ‘coloured’ people into exemplary citizens. Founded in Cape Town in 1913 as a professional association expressly for ‘coloured’ teachers with the explicit aim of fostering the educational interests of the ‘coloured’ people, the TLSA was one of the most influential ‘coloured’ community organisations of the time. According to Adhikari (1994), the *Educational Journal*<sup>114</sup> mirrored the values, aspirations, and frustrations of the ‘coloured’ elite. “Educational improvement” was considered to be “the most powerful means for eliminating ignorance and remoulding the coloured working classes to fit its image of bourgeois respectability”, therefore “school was the bulwark<sup>115</sup> of civilization” (Adhikari, 1994: 79-80).

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<sup>113</sup> hooliganism, crime, immorality



*Figure 18*

### **“EDUCATE YOURSELF SO THAT YOU CAN BE SOMEBODY”**

In this photograph of me in my paternal grandfather’s arms in the mid-1960s, I imagine that he is envisioning the different life that I would have because of the education he was determined to provide for me. As far back as I can remember, my grandfather had been telling me that my brothers would be able to take care of themselves but that I would have to study further so that I could be independent. In retrospect this was quite revolutionary on his part, considering not only that no one in the family had completed matric or attended university, but also that I was a girl. He had passed standard six (grade 8) and worked as a driver of a delivery van for Duens Bakery, leaving for work while we were still asleep and coming home soon after we returned from school in the afternoon. From the pockets of the khaki coat he wore, he would take out any loose change and hand them to me to deposit into the yellow money box which said “UBS”<sup>116</sup> in blue letters, that he kept in his cupboard. Every deposit was accompanied by the reminder that this was for my education. By the time I had finished school he had saved enough to pay for my first year of university.

My pride at being the first person in my family to complete matric and make it to university was tempered by the humiliation of having to apply to the Department of Coloured Affairs for permission to attend the University of Cape Town which was for ‘whites-only’. I was granted permission on the basis that the ‘coloured’ University of the Western Cape did not offer the Occupational Therapy degree I wished to pursue. Occupational Therapy was a little-known discipline in the ‘coloured’ community but our family was well-acquainted with it since both my sister and youngest brother had learning disabilities. My parents had struggled to get them the therapy which they needed and which was not easily available to ‘black’ children. Both of them had been humiliated at school by teachers who had little insight into their difficulties because

of their own inadequate training<sup>117</sup>. My choice of career then, in some respects, was as shaped by apartheid engineering as much as my father's choice of teaching.

Entering university was such a cultural onslaught that I might as well have gone to study in a different country. The campus was overwhelmingly large — I think that my entire school could have fitted into the Jagger Hall, the main assembly hall on campus. There were more 'white' people than I had ever seen in my life and I was able to sit next to them in class, on the bus and in the library, something that I could not legally do off campus. In my class of 25, there were three of us who were not 'white'. I had hardly mixed socially with 'white' people before. In fact, the only 'white' people I knew were the Irish nuns and one or two teachers at my high school. As for the few people my parents may have interacted with, we had known that we had to impress them with good behaviour, dressed in our Sunday best. I carried not only the weight of expectation to succeed at this opportunity that was bestowed upon me, but also the burden of having to reflect well on my family and my community. I felt constantly that I needed to be on my guard, that I needed to prove that I was good enough, that I deserved this place of 'privilege' in spite of the colour of my skin. Jefferson (2016) accurately reflects my feelings when she describes having to be careful to not display "basic racial traits" that would mark me as "undignified" or "flamboyant" (Jefferson, 2016: 3-4). Like her, I was aware that

... in the world beyond family and family friends, your mistakes – bad manners, poor taste, an excess of high spirits – could put you, your parents, and your people at risk. All of you could be designated, at a stroke and for life, vulgar, coarse, and inferior (Jefferson, 2016: 4-5).



**Figure 19**

Attending university was a struggle not only socially, but academically and financially as well. School subjects had been limited and, although I had taken Biology, Science had not been offered and I now had to contend with both Chemistry and Physical Science in order to fulfil the requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree. My grandfather had managed to save enough to cover the fees for the first year and I had to find a bursary or take out a bank loan if I was to continue. Learning to become an occupational therapist was also fraught with the burden of

living in apartheid South Africa, as previously mentioned. As 'black' students we were constantly reminded of our inferior status on campus. In our anatomy practical sessions, even the cadavers we worked on had to be 'black'.

During clinical practice in the hospitals and schools in our third and fourth years of study, we were not allowed to treat 'white' patients, which limited the placements and experience we could be exposed to.

My grandfather died of cancer soon after I completed my first year of study and so was not alive to see me graduate, but the learning path he set me on changed the course of my life. Education meant that I could be

‘somebody’ and be of value to my community. My parents were very proud to attend my graduation, even more so when a photographer from the *Rapport*<sup>118</sup> snapped us for the social page. The photograph was framed and hung up in the passage alongside the official graduation photographs, for all to see.

### **SEPARATE EDUCATION**

Restricting access to education was one of the ways in which those in power could control the lives of ‘black’ people. By placing limitations on the kind of education and the level of education ‘blacks’ could attain, the government ensured that they would remain less educated than ‘whites’, therefore less qualified and unable to rise above the station in life which the government deemed fit. This was generally as unskilled labour on farms and in homes, which reflects the historic roles of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ slaves. This narrative then gave rise to the myth that ‘coloured’ people were fit only for physical labour. Separate systems of education which were one of the hallmarks of the apartheid era, effectively have their roots in slavery and the introduction of mission schools. Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the educational system for ‘coloured’ and ‘white’ children was derived from the Netherlands and was essentially religious. Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, criticised the missionaries for the attitudes inculcated through their work, calling the traditional inferior-superior ‘black-white’ complexes “deliberate creations of the colonialist”. Through the work of missionaries and the style of education adopted, he said that “the blacks were made to feel that the white man was some kind of god whose word could not be doubted” (Biko, 2004: 75-76).

### **EARLY SCHOOLING**

The first school at the Cape was started by Jan van Riebeeck near the Slave Lodge shortly after his arrival. Later, a second school was opened in 1663 with 12 European, four slave children and one ‘Hottentot’<sup>119</sup> child; tuition was free for ‘non-whites’, and Europeans who could afford it, paid a small fee. In 1685 a free school<sup>120</sup> for small numbers of the children of enslaved and children of mixed ancestry was opened near the Slave Quarters. In the outlying areas European families depended on itinerant teachers for the most rudimentary education. When the government made it compulsory for enslaved children between the ages of three and ten to attend school, there was strong opposition against their admission to the government school in Stellenbosch. Some farmers allowed the children of the enslaved to attend classes but the majority of colonists saw no reason for them to be educated when they could be working on the farm, so it is unlikely

<sup>117</sup> Learning disabilities was generally viewed as a problem of intelligence rather than the syndrome of visual, perceptual and/or motor problems which it encompassed. My sister, for example, who had dyslexia, would be made to stand in front of the classroom to demonstrate her lacking of spelling ability.

<sup>118</sup> An Afrikaans Sunday weekly newspaper published by Naspers since 1970; it had a supplement for ‘coloureds’ called the *Rapport Ekstra*.

<sup>119</sup> As early as 1663 G.F. Wreede prepared a Dutch-Hottentot vocabulary although it was never published (Horrell, 1970).

<sup>120</sup> the school closed after the emancipation of slaves in 1834

that this was enforced (Horrell, 1970; Viall, et al, 2011).

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Moravian missionaries in Baviaans Kloof<sup>121</sup> were teaching ‘Hottentots’, in spite of opposition and hostility on the part of the colonists who were resentful of the fact that the ‘Hottentots’ were getting education not available to their children, although they later realised that the mission-trained ‘Hottentots’ made better employees. The missionaries focused on teaching the ‘Hottentots’ to forgo their nomadic lifestyles and “to realize the dignity of labour and the need for discipline and regular habits” (Horrell, 1970: 5-6). Years before any ‘white’ teachers were trained the Moravians were teaching ‘Hottentot’ teachers at Genadendal<sup>122</sup>, making it the first teaching-training institution in the country. It focused on both book-learning as well as practical subjects such as gardening, carpentry and cooking (Horrell, 1970; Van der Ross, 2005).

The London Missionary Society (LMS) also started sending missionaries to South Africa. Initially they made less progress than the Moravians but by about the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century 1 200 people were being educated, ‘coloured’ teachers were being trained and a printing press was being operated in the Kat River<sup>123</sup> area in the Eastern Cape. They founded schools teaching the elements of agriculture and the three R’s (reading, arithmetic and writing). The LMS missionaries persuaded groups of nomadic ‘Hottentots’, freed slaves, and people of ‘mixed’ blood to gather in a small settlement west of Kimberley and in Namaqualand and convinced the people in these areas to change their name from Bastards to Griquas<sup>124</sup> (Horrell, 1970). Other mission societies established stations and schools – many of these schools catered for ‘white’ and ‘coloured’ pupils. The missionaries tried their best to keep alcohol away from people and many mission stations were ‘dry’ for many years.

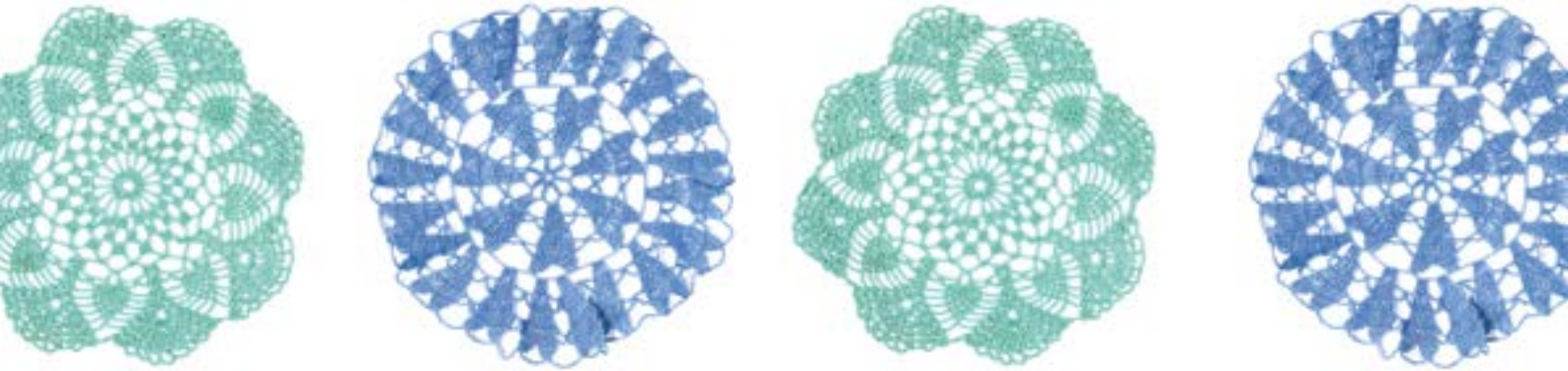
In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century changes such as mother-tongue instruction and professional training of teachers, were devised. However, the British occupied the Cape before these changes could be introduced, and the English system of education with English as the medium of instruction, was adopted. The children of Dutch colonists were targeted but some ‘coloured’ children were also admitted and a system of free education for ‘white’ and other children of poorer classes was introduced. The impetus for inclusion of the children of the enslaved was provided by the concern that if they were left ignorant, “they would fall prey to the zeal of Mohammedan priests”, who at the time were conducting classes for 372 slave children.

<sup>121</sup> Later known as Genadendal Further mission stations were established in Wynberg, Mamre, Elim and Piketberg.

<sup>122</sup> The first attempt to set up a mission was by German Moravians in Genadendal among the Hottentots in 1737. This station served as a model for the mission societies which followed; mission stations attracted farm workers, teaching Christianity, literacy, crafts and basic skills of European culture. Other than Moravian mission stations, there were Lutheran, Rhenish, London, Wesleyan, Glasgow, American Board of Commissioners, African Methodist Episcopal, Dutch Reformed, Seventh Day Adventists, Salvation Army, Berlin, Norwegian (Van der Ross, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Selected homeless Hottentots and people of mixed blood were settled here by the authorities in the area from which Xhosa tribesmen had been expelled. The allotments of many of the settlers were confiscated by the government after they rebelled against the government (Horrell, 1970: 7)

<sup>124</sup> The Griquas were a diverse community of Bastards, Oorlams and slaves from the colony, and Khoi, San and Tswana from beyond its borders; The South African Native Affairs Commission of 1905 defined Griquas as a people of mixed Hottentot and slave descent with an infusion of ‘white’ blood (Dicey, 2004).



After the emancipation of the slaves, the need for schools to counter vagrancy and instil discipline was acute, but although the government continued its non-discriminatory policy of admitting pupils, it had introduced school fees which few ‘coloured’ parents could afford. Since many of the colonists had been protesting against inclusive education, the government attempted to address this by introducing a ruling that all pupils should be “decently clothed and of good deportment”, which opened the way for ‘white’ parents to object to the attendance of poorer ‘coloured’ children. The introduction of school fees and a certain standard of dress, not only created a division along economic, and ultimately racial, lines but laid the foundation for education to be associated with decency and respectability and introduced an element of shame related to not being dressed well enough.

Viall, et al. (2011) refers to a study done in the 1940s in Tulbagh which found a reluctance on the part of parents to encourage their children to attend school for precisely this reason. To avoid the embarrassment of sending their children to school without clean and whole clothes or shoes, parents preferred to keep them at home. During the interview with my father, who had taught in an impoverished school in Elsie’s River on the Cape Flats for many years, he said that the school had earned a reputation for taking in poor children, many of whose parents could not afford uniforms. He expressed his disappointment and frustration regarding one of the principals of a nearby school who refused admission to children who were not properly dressed. He could not understand how this could be so when it was not an official departmental ruling, but clearly, the attitudes, though not entered into law, had filtered down from slavery (Kamies, 2016). Horrell, too, (1970) points out that ‘coloured’ people could be excluded from Adhikari’s “bulwark of civilization” for not being decently clothed or for not being able to pay school fees.





*Figure 20*

My father is proud of this well-preserved photograph of his athletics team, taken in 1973 in front of the banner bearing the school's name. The poverty of the children is evident in their ill-fitting sports clothes, no one is wearing shoes, and the sports track seems to be mainly sand. There is a lack of symmetry usually found in official school photographs, but an effort has clearly been made to make sure that the team members present themselves proudly, evident in the way they stand to attention with their arms at their sides. I imagine someone, perhaps my father, making sure that this important event in the school's almanac was recorded.

### **GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF SCHOOLS**

From 1841 onwards, the government started subsidising the mission schools, gradually exerting more and more control over the curriculum, the standard of work, and the employment of teachers (Horrell, 1970). By 1861 government schools had become reserved for 'white' children only which meant that 'coloured' children were confined to mission schools that did not provide for secondary education (effectively excluding 'coloureds' from acquiring secondary education).

In 1905 an act was passed providing for schools to be controlled by boards which were empowered to make compulsory education of 'white' children between the ages of seven and fourteen. Dr A. Abdurahman<sup>125</sup> and other leaders of the 'coloured' community, protested against the exclusion of 'coloured' children (Horrell, 1970). The African People's Organisation, of which Dr Abdurahman was the president, had emphasised the role of education in the advancement of the 'coloured' community, to achieve economic success, to eliminate social problems and to assimilate into the 'white' middle class. Teachers were regarded as important role-players in this advancement (Adhikari, 1994). Many of them were middle-class and the organisations they belonged to were considered to be "the moral conscience of the communities they served", according to

<sup>125</sup> President of the APO from 1905-1940 and the first 'black' person to be elected to the Cape Town municipal council representing District Six (1904).

Professor Crain Soudien (2002: 214). Their responses to the introduction of apartheid education varied from resistance to compliance. However, Soudien (2002) concludes that there was considerable opposition from teachers who worked within the system although much of this was disguised. He makes note of the commitment to non-racialism amongst the majority of teachers in the ‘coloured’ education system and says that a significant number sought ways of resisting the imposition of distinct ‘coloured’ identities on their schools. Although there were some who celebrated the arrival of a ‘coloured’ dispensation, many chose to leave the profession altogether rather than comply with the racial and cultural stereotypes of the apartheid government.

Soudien (2002) considers 1953, the year in which the Bantu Education Act was passed, to be the founding moment of the apartheid government’s separate education policy. The Act was first implemented in 1955 and then rolled out in 1964 and 1965, as the Coloured and Indian Acts. The curriculum stressed obedience and communal loyalty, acceptance of allocated social roles amongst others, as well as restricting appointments to women. Female teachers were paid less than their male counterparts, thereby reducing government spending on education. The government was intent on producing a compliant and suitably trained labour force.

### **CHRISTIAN NATIONAL EDUCATION**

Regardless of this separation of missionary and government education, and lending weight to Biko’s assertion that missionary education laid the foundation for the entrenchment of colonial ideology, when the Afrikaners came to political power in 1948, one of the resolutions it passed, was for the implementation of Christian National Education<sup>126</sup> (CNE), the thrust of which would be a Calvinist notion of Christianity to all areas of education.

The government exerted pressure on church schools to hand over control to them in order to establish “a racially differentiated curriculum”, according to Jenni Karlsson (2002: 343). Schools were threatened with closure as the apartheidists strived to wield absolute control over mass education. Yousef Eshak (1987) observes in his masters’ thesis that The Education Policy Act of 1967 (Act 39 of 1967) made it clear that South African education would be Christian in character, in order to Christianise the ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ population.

Afrikaner liberation theology was to play a seminal role in “initiating and sanctifying” apartheid, according to Sparks (2003: 29). The Rev Allan Boesak, Dutch Reformed Mission Church cleric, politician and anti-apartheid activist, concurs that the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was “the deepest source of inspiration” for the Afrikaner’s socio-political plan, causing other Afrikaner organisations to “fade into insignificance” next to the role of the church in preparing the Afrikaner to accept its ideology (Boesak, 2005: 141). Boesak (2005) posits that the Calvinistic<sup>127</sup> principles of the DRC, which calls for the establishment of Christ’s reign over all areas of life, played a fundamental role in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. This political theology inspired all believers

irrespective of status and privilege and institutions to participate in politics and public affairs; it was both “militant and revolutionary” and the Afrikaners insisted that apartheid was a church policy (Boesak, 2005: 141-142).

### **ZONNEBLOEM AND THE TRAINING OF ‘COLOURED’ TEACHERS**<sup>128</sup>

In 1858 the Anglican Church opened a school in Cape Town to educate the sons of African chiefs from beyond the borders of the colony (although until 1913 the school population was non-racial), says Francois Cleophas (2012) in his doctoral thesis. In a letter written by Governor Grey to Bishop Gray in 1860, he outlined the specific ethos of the school which was to remove children from “heathen and barbarous” influences and expose them to the full force of civilisation (Hodgson, 1975: 2). The school was moved to Zonnebloem<sup>129</sup> an old wine farm in the suburb of Woodstock. The site near District Six was chosen because it “was within reach of the highest civilisation in South Africa and yet separated from the contamination of the Town” (Cleophas, 2012: 66). The emphasis was on instilling students with discipline, good manners and the willingness to learn, Victorian values of decency, as well as loyalty to the British crown. Games and drilling<sup>130</sup> were used to this end. Sport, across gender, race and class, was seen as an important way to instil desirable social behaviour, reinforcing notions of masculinity, order and health.

Ross (1983) says that education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was as much about moulding character and socialisation into different roles as it was about literacy; discipline was strict and cleanliness emphasised. Later, girls were brought to the Cape to study at Zonnebloem, for the explicit purpose of providing Christian wives for the young men so that they would not marry heathen women who would drag them down again, writes John Ramsdale (2018) in the diocesan newsletter. In the early 1920s the school concentrated on the training of ‘coloured’ teachers, promoting decency and respectability as the path to civilisation (Cleophas, 2012).

The colonial attitudes to education which underpin the primary function of the establishment of Zonnebloem, are outlined in the letter written by Sir George Grey to Bishop Gray in 1860. The communication leaves no doubt regarding the civilising mission and advancement of Christianity:

In no other place could native children under our care be so thoroughly removed and kept apart from Heathen and barbarous influences as near Cape Town. In no other place could females be so secure from being taken away and disposed of to some Heathen husband, whom they had never seen, and for whom they had no regard. In no other place could all the force and appliances of civilization be brought to bear with the same uninterrupted effect upon the Children of barbarous and Savage Chiefs (Hodgson, 1975: 2).

<sup>128</sup> In 1891 the Battswood School for training ‘coloured’ teachers was opened by the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde* Mission Church in Wynberg (Horrell, 1970).

<sup>129</sup> After the proclamation of Group Areas, many ‘coloured’ people left their homes in well-established suburbs, leaving behind educational, religious, cultural, welfare, and other institutions that had been built up over generations, in areas zoned for ‘whites’ (Horrell, 1970: 99).

<sup>130</sup> training in military exercises

I interviewed Merle Stevens (Aunty Merle), who taught at Zonnebloem Boys' School for a total of 33 years, from 1966 onwards. She had started the first Sub A (Grade 1) class and was the acting principal when she retired. She explained that Zonnebloem “laid the grounding for life, a foundation of morals, ethics and good behaviour”. She recalls that these principles were drummed into the children and staff and remembers the principal of the girls' school, Madam Hartogh, expounding on how a lady should be dressed and her rule that “a lady never eats in public”. It made me remember lining up outside on the tarmac (we didn't have a school hall) after Monday morning assembly for inspection of uniforms, shoes, and nails, right down to whether we were wearing regulation navy knickers under our dresses. Handkerchiefs were counted every day and recorded on a board alongside the one that recorded the day, date and whether it was cloudy or sunny. We called our teachers “Madam” or “Sir” and we brought a serviette with our lunch every day so that we could spread it on the desk and sit down to “eat like ladies” before we were allowed to play outside. Pick (2007) recalls that the schools he attended in the 1950s had regular foot, fingernail and handkerchief inspections to maintain standards against the threat of corporal punishment. Schools, like churches, were important in spreading ideas of appropriate behaviour. Aunty Merle expressed dismay at the behaviour of children, quoting a recent incident of gross misbehaviour as related to her by a colleague at a school in Manenberg on the Cape Flats.

I asked her about the girls from Leliebloem House<sup>131</sup>, a home for vulnerable children from the Cape Flats, who had attended our school. “The home girls never looked scruffy or dirty and were never without a uniform,” she said. “They were taught to speak beautiful English. The rules and regulations were definite, and they were given the tools.” She reminisced about the sense of community, how everyone walked to school, and how independence was eroded over the years, due to the changes in the community after the Group Areas Act caused people to move away from the proximity of the school<sup>132</sup>. Referring to the dedication of teachers, she said, “We earned peanuts, but we just did it, we fell in and got on with it. You gave your life to Zonnebloem.” Aunty Merle had attended Zonnebloem from Sub A to Standard 8 (Grade 1-6) before doing her teachers' training at Wesley College. Generations of family, friends and neighbours had attended the school, so the school had been an important part of her life. “An old *boontjie*<sup>133</sup> never forgets”, she said proudly, referring to the nickname inspired by the green uniform (Stevens, 2018). Christianity, education and civilisation were inextricably linked with each other and with the need to be respectable. This respectability was reinforced on many levels – at home, at school and by the church. In spite of the oppressive, restrictive and heavily regulated nature of apartheid education, there were many ‘coloured’ schools where dedicated teachers stepped up and instilled pride in their pupils and schools.

The positive, self-affirming identity associated with Zonnebloem, evident in the conversation with Aunty Merle,

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<sup>133</sup> A green bean

engendered a sense of belonging precisely because of being part of the school and its larger community. These pockets of opportunity for creating positive images were important for confronting the negative images being propagated and perpetuated by an oppressive and divisive regime.

School photographs provide a record and bear witness to what Aunty Merle referred to as the laying of the “foundation of morals, ethics and good behaviour” (Stevens, 2018). In a time when few people owned a camera, this would have been an important record of the growth of their child each year, and his or her progress from one grade to the next. However, the school photographs taken of ‘coloured’ children did more than monitor growth. The performance of respectability, the proof that young ladies and gentlemen were being moulded, was frozen for inspection, and could be displayed to an audience beyond the family, propped up on mantelpieces or on top of display cabinets in the living room to be seen by visitors.



*Figure 21*

### **SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHS AS A PERFORMATIVE SPACE**

In the photograph above, taken in 1970, my brother and his Sub B (Grade 2) classmates pose in their Zonnebloem uniforms. My brother is on the far right of the second row and two of my cousins are in the same row. This was the ‘family’ school – my father had done his teacher’s training at the college across the avenue, an aunt taught at the boys’ school, that numerous cousins attended, and I attended the school for girls next door. Here, more than 100 years after the school had been started for the sons of African chiefs, we were still being taught to be decent and respectable. We all lined up and marched up the avenue to attend chapel every week, and every year at the end of May the South African flag was unfurled and we pledged allegiance to the Republic of South Africa.

I find it hard to imagine how Mrs Williams, the teacher in the photograph, controlled 47 lively young boys on her own, but Aunty Merle said that she taught a class of 52 six-year olds in her first year out of college. I notice that Mrs Williams' dress is very short, there were strict rules concerning the code of dress for teachers, and these would definitely have applied to the length of a female teacher's dress.

This “performative space” is “characterised by discipline, order and surveillance” and is typical of such photographs taken during apartheid (Karlsson, 2002: 340). The boys have been carefully arranged and sit or stand stiffly to attention, shoulder to shoulder. None of them are smiling, tightly constrained by their blazers and ties, hands resting obediently on their knees. My son and daughter remarked on how unhappy every boy appears to be – they zoomed in to study each expression and were amazed at the seriousness of each boy, remarking that this did not look like the place anyone in the photograph wanted to be.

From experience, I know that they would have been told to make sure that they came to school impeccably dressed and groomed and would have been warned about being on their best behaviour in front of ‘outsiders’, i.e. the school photographer. Karlsson (2002) observes that photographs such as these are part of “probably the most common photographic genre of the South African school experience”. She further notes that there would have been a “conspiratorial collaboration” between the role players – teacher, pupils and photographer – “to project a permanence of idealised Eurocentric norms and standards” which referenced colonial systems of classification and archiving (Karlsson, 2002: 345-346). An individual photograph of each child was also taken.



The photograph on the left is my brother, looking less gloomy than his classmates in the group photograph. Zain was likely to look exactly the same by the end of the day, whereas Enver was sure to have his socks at his ankles and his shirt hanging out by the end of the day. Zain never had a hair out of place, which prompted my mother's uncle to give him the nickname, Gentleman Jim.

*Figure 22*



*Figure 23*



*Figure 24*

In the photograph above my mother (back right) is with a cousin and a friend, when she was in standard two (grade 4), wearing the same uniform that I would later wear. The gymslip was difficult to iron. In order to get the pleats to align neatly, I had to position the folds and then, using a damp press-cloth, iron them into place, sending clouds of steam into the air. It's difficult to imagine my mother as a school child, but I am unsurprised by how carefully her hair is done, the neatness of her uniform and even the whiteness of her socks. This is how her mother expected her to look and what she passed on to me. I came home and washed my socks and underwear and polished my shoes, hung my uniform up in front of the cupboard in readiness for the next day. It seems my decency and respectability were pressed into place with steam, the feel of soapsuds and smell of shoe polish. Cleanliness, after all, was next to Godliness.

## **PRESENTING NEW IMAGES**

At the 2016 Olympic Games held in Rio, South African Wayde van Niekerk, set a new world record in the men's 400m, causing a social media storm over whether his win was a victory for 'coloured' people, 'black' people or for South Africa. Van Niekerk is a young 'coloured' male, a talented sportsman who has worked hard and achieved victory on the international stage while representing his country; his mother, a promising athlete in her youth, was denied the opportunity to compete for South Africa by the apartheid government. Van Niekerk challenges the negative stereotypes associated with 'coloured' identity — drug addiction, unemployment and gangsterism. Writer, Lynsey Chutel (2016) notes that,

The reaction in South Africa is a reminder that representation matters the world over ... In Van Niekerk's case, he's become a positive image for coloured people and all South Africans who could benefit from seeing talent and hard work lead to victory.

Van Niekerk is not the first 'coloured' person to excel. People labelled 'coloured' have been excelling at sports, music, art, academics, in fact, in every arena possible. What is remarkable is that 22 years into our democracy, Van Niekerk's achievement created a media storm over racial politics. Critical theorists and audiences argue that positive images and nuanced portrayals of different ethnicities contribute to the production of a positive identity and self-image" (Chutel, 2016). When we present a diversity of images, replacing the negative images with positive ones, it opens up new possibilities of identity, exposing and deconstructing the work of the stereotype (Hall, 1997). However, Hall (1997) says that it is difficult to rid ourselves of the language of racism because we want a guarantee of what we believe in; a religious, scientific or anthropological guarantee. He cautions that it is not enough to merely replace negative with positive images in order to reverse stereotypes, but to examine the images we are presented with and to question the messages which are being propagated rather than accepting at face value what the media wants us to believe. This is what he refers to as "the politics of the image" (Hall, 1997: 20).

After generations of exploitation, 'white' people in South Africa generally came to believe in the inferiority of the 'black' man; opportunities to prove their equality were limited and controlled by job reservation, lack of training in skilled work and denial of access to professions such as engineering, medicine or economics. This 'lack' of skills was then used against the 'black' man as proof of his inferiority (Biko, 2004). It is these stereotypical images that have deliberately been cultivated by the colonial mindset that need to be turned inside out and examined in order to reveal the diversity of previously unseen identities. We need to question the kinds of images through which 'black' people have been (and continue to be) presented: who creates the stereotypical representation of 'black' people? Who has the power to influence what is in the media? Through what channels is this being done, how is it being circulated, and who is being targeted? My study



contends that in an attempt to provide an alternative narrative to how they were being presented, ‘coloured’ families took and displayed photographs which portrayed themselves as they wish to be seen.

The family photograph has “the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a culture” (Sturken, 1999: 178). O’Connell (2012) suggests in her study that the family photograph forces us to reconsider conventional modes of representation of the oppressed and in so doing, provokes us to reconsider oppression itself” (O’Connell, 2012: 50). This process was facilitated by the democratisation of photography with the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888, resulting in the camera becoming

the family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and self-representation – the primary means by which ... the family’s story is told...record[ing] the ordinary moments and minute details of family life (Hirsch, 1999: xvi).

O’Connell (2012) emphasises the importance of the photograph as an image in connecting memories, histories and languages, conveying sets of meaning that are embedded in social, political and economic frames. As such the photograph generates conversations that challenge the dominant narrative of apartheid and offers “the opportunity to re-present history through the use of an ordinary archive” (O’Connell, 2012: 50). Speaking to this kind of ordinariness, Elizabeth Abel (1999) writing on intersections of culture and gender in African-American families, observes how the home became “a self-contained world whose self-representation pushes back the forces of ghettoization, a harmonious cultural domain that undoes the ravages of time by spatializing history and heals the ravages of racism by affirming the complexities of body and being” (Abel, 1999: 133).

All images make a claim on some type of identity, but images have no fixed meaning and it is the individual who projects him- or herself into the situation that is being represented in order to make sense of it (Hall, 1997). Professor Fourie, author and editor of works in the field of South African media studies, references Hall, saying that both the producers and receivers of information play a role in how the information is interpreted. The role of the media in the dissemination of dominant ideology needs to be considered as well as the audience who is able to create their own meanings within or against the dominant ideology (Fourie, 2007). Hall (1997) urges the need for ordinary people to regain control of an image-dominated world and to challenge the stereotypes in order to keep representation open by introducing new ideas, new knowledge, and new dimensions of meaning (Hall, 1997).

The photographs in the album of the oppressed, I contend, does this through presenting different images, capturing different ways of living and being. In so doing, a range of viewpoints is offered to both challenge and negate attempts to affix certain stereotypes. The onus then falls on the viewer to choose how to interpret what he or she is looking at rather than being told that there is only one way to view the image. We have the power to expose and destroy the stereotypes, says Hall (1997).



# CHAPTER FOUR

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*GOD'S STEPCHILDREN:  
SCENES OF SHAME*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **GOD'S STEPCHILDREN: SCENES OF SHAME**

*If all you represent – your history, your culture, your very self – is nothing but ugly, naïve and wicked, then it is not surprising that you do not see yourself in a kindly manner*  
(Sardar, 2008: xiv).

### **INTRODUCTION**

Underlying my research is the issue of shame as experienced by those classified 'coloured' by the apartheid government and the subsequent struggle to prove respectability and decency. This chapter looks at the genealogy of shame and the issues of paternalism, exploitation and mental subjugation which laid the foundation for shame. Psychosocial theories of shame and identity will be examined alongside the psychology of colonialism as discussed by psychiatrist and anti-colonial cultural theorist, Frantz Fanon. The central role that women played in managing shame and resisting the negative connotations of it within their home and families, is also addressed.

Social worker and researcher, Professor Brené Brown (2008) defines shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging ... shame creates feelings of fear, blame and disconnection” and is the source of destructive behaviour (like alcohol abuse and drug addiction) (Brown, 2008: 30). Shame, she says, permeates our personal and public lives because we are unable or unwilling to talk about it. It is used variously as a tool to teach, to discipline and to humiliate us and, is a serious social problem. Shame is about perfectionism and inadequacy, about belonging and acceptance. I agree with Brown when she says that shame is an effective tool in silencing us and the less we engage with it, the more power it exerts over our lives (Brown, 2008). This reinforces the importance of initiating dialogue about the experience of shame related to living through apartheid.

### **THE SINS OF THE FATHER**

In an attempt to understand and address the legacy of shame, I propose that it is necessary to trace its genealogy back to slavery and colonialism which has so fundamentally shaped the racially-determined structures and experiences of past and present South African societies. The thread of shame runs through literature such as Sarah Millin's 1924 novel, *God's Stepchildren*, set in 1821, with its central theme of the “sin” of miscegenation. Her protagonist, Rev Flood, has come to preach to the Koranna on the banks of the Vaal River. When Flood observes that we are all God's children, his servant, Cachas, asks if God Himself is

not ‘white’. As he hesitates to reply, she suggests: ‘Perhaps we brown people are His stepchildren’ (Dicey, 2004). This thread was further substantiated with the biblical reference to the curse of Ham in the Old Testament. As in the story of Ham, Millin’s novel, which follows four generations of ‘coloured’ people, shows how the sins of the father are visited upon the son. There is no escape from the curse, the implication being that oppression was something that ‘coloured’ people deserved for past wrongdoings. The thread of shame extended to the implementation of the Immorality Act, which Millin’s novel was used to justify. The power of the theological justification for oppression is a subject that I will return to in the next chapter. I assert that the thread of shame is entwined with the objectification of ‘black’ bodies as possessions, as sexual objects and only good as a source of labour. ‘Black’ bodies were viewed as less than human and imbued with disgrace and not to be mixed with. Khoisan bodies, especially, were considered to be less than human by some scholars and, as recently as 1913, the Cape Synod of the DRC debated whether or not Khoisan should be seen as human or animal (Mountain, 2003). Saartjie Baartman who was paraded around London and Paris between 1810 and 1815, illustrates the colonial exploitation of ‘black’ women’s bodies as perverse sexual objects and the “construction of woman as racialized and sexualized other; the colonization and violation of the body” (Wicomb, 1998). While she was alive, people paid to view her pronounced buttocks and genitalia. After her death her body was dissected and displayed in a museum<sup>134</sup> where it continued to be held up as an example of both racial difference and inferiority<sup>135</sup>.

### **‘BLACK’ BODIES AS SEXUAL OBJECTS**

Baderoon (2014) observes that, since indigenous and enslaved women were regarded as promiscuous and inferior to their colonial masters, “it is unsurprising that black bodies in South Africa have been imbued with unsettling sexualised meanings since colonial times” (Baderoon, 2014: 86). The Slave Lodge served as a *de facto* brothel to satisfy the sexual needs of garrison soldiers and passing sailors, making sexual violence fundamental to the colonisation of the Cape, and double standards existed from the beginning — ‘white’ colonists were granted sexual license to ‘black’ women’s bodies, while ‘black’ men’s access to ‘white’ women’s bodies was violently policed (Baderoon, 2014; McKinnon, 2004).

The sense of disgrace attached to those of ‘mixed’ descent, who are labelled with derogatory terms such as half-breed, half-caste, bi-racial, non-people or leftovers, has its roots in the colonial attitudes that the bodies of enslaved and indigenous women were available for abuse and exploitation. Miscegenation is bound up with shame — the shame of having had our bodies stared at and the shame of having mated with

<sup>134</sup> In 2002, after lengthy negotiations between the South African and French governments, Baartman’s remains were returned to SA and given a proper burial according to Khoi custom, a symbolic restoration of her dignity (Mountain, 2003).

<sup>135</sup> In 1817 French scientist Georges Cuvier, who had dissected Baartman’s body, published an article on his findings, reinforcing the idea that racial superiority/inferiority was based on physical characteristics (Mountain, 2003).

the coloniser (Wicomb, 1998; Baderoon, 2014). It is this shame which Hendricks says “has undergirded the social fabric of coloured identity and accounts for the ambivalence associated with it” (Hendricks, 2001: 35). It is this shame that was exploited by the apartheid government when it created a racial category ‘coloured’, and it continues to be exploited post-apartheid by some ‘coloureds’ who wish to establish a “pure” category of ‘colouredness’, observes Wicomb (1998).

### **‘BLACK’ BODIES AS A LABOUR SOURCE**

The prevailing attitude among Europeans was that ‘blacks’ were at a lower level of civilisation. As compassionate, Christian superiors then, Europeans felt duty-bound to uplift indigenous people (Pick, 2007; Viall, et al. 2011). Because race was linked to civilisation, it followed that at the bottom of the ladder were those considered racially inferior (or mixed) and on the top rung were those who were considered ‘pure’. The enslaved formed the labour force of the colony — in town<sup>136</sup> men worked in gardens and provided artisan skills; on the farms they worked in the fields. Women were cooks, nannies and wet-nurses, enslaved children were the playmates of the master’s children. Each group of slaves was perceived and ‘labelled’ differently depending on where they came from. Stereotypes were assigned according to their country of origin, so for example, slaves from the Bengal were thought to be good needlewomen, Mozambican slaves had mild temperaments and Malays were seen as “treacherous and inclined to run amuck” (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 53; Ross, 2004). Giliomee and Mbenga (2007) are of the view that it was the hierarchy of status, rather than colour or religion, that had a profound effect on the early running of the colony, determining where people could live, their right of movement, military service and land ownership. There were four status groups — Company servants, free burghers, slaves and natives. The Company distinguished between their servants and free burghers<sup>137</sup> firstly, then the enslaved, and the indigenous groups who were supposed to be outside of the Company’s jurisdiction. I challenge the idea that it was status rather than colour or religion that played a more important role, since the enslaved and the natives, the two lower status groups, were both ‘black’<sup>138</sup>. These hierarchical structures would be legalised 300 years later, when the NP came to power and based apartheid on definite groups with different rights and obligations<sup>139</sup>.

After emancipation, the missions encouraged the European ideas of men working, women at home and children attending school. The role of the man soon became that of an economic one while women took on the responsibility for maintaining the cultural values and ethics of the mission community (Viall et al, 2011: 71-

<sup>136</sup> For more than a hundred years, up to 1767, slavery was predominantly urban with 40% of slaves in Cape Town.

<sup>137</sup> free burghers were initially the nine company servants who were released in 1657 to become full-time farmers

<sup>138</sup> there were individuals who were ‘free-blacks’ or emancipated slaves who did move up this ladder.

<sup>139</sup> The premise under apartheid was that Afrikaners were a pure ‘white’ race and that having ‘black’ blood made one inferior (Du Preez (2004).

72). This correlated with the past roles of the enslaved women in charge of running the farm household while men laboured outside. In 1865 more than 90% of the almost 25 000 domestic servants in the Cape Colony were ‘non-white’, their subordinate place in society legally enforced by the Masters and Servants Act of 1841<sup>140</sup>, which favoured employers who were allowed to use certain disciplinary measures to regulate the behaviour of labourers (therefore serving the masters more than it did the servants). So vital a role did the domestic servants perform in society that brides could stipulate in marriage agreements the provision of servants who were bound by contract<sup>141</sup> to their mistresses. Social and racial hierarchies were replicated in the home and responsible positions such as housekeeper or cook were usually reserved for ‘whites’ while light-skinned ‘coloured’ women were employed as housemaids (Worden, et al, 1998). This preferential treatment of fairer ‘coloureds’ would reverberate during apartheid when employers turned a blind eye to ‘coloureds’ who could “pass”.

Domestic workers worked long hours and were estranged from their families as they usually came from outside town, conditions which were perpetuated throughout apartheid and continue post-apartheid in spite of legislation concerning minimum pay and working conditions. Wayward behaviour<sup>142</sup> on the part of domestic workers threatened the stability of the Victorian family so mistresses often saw their roles as “civilising missions” instilling honesty, obedience and cleanliness (Worden, et al, 1998: 206).

### **THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLONIALISM**

The power of the oppressors to manipulate the minds of the oppressed was something that Biko<sup>143</sup> (2004) cautioned about constantly in his speeches. Bogue (2010), with reference to colonialism in Jamaica, agrees that the effort by colonial powers to reform the so-called native mind was one of the most powerful structural legacies left behind, and O’Connell (2012) in her doctoral thesis on forced removals during apartheid, considers the mental subjugation of people the ultimate achievement of the NP government. Fanon examines the psychology of colonialism in *Black Skin, White Masks* and explains how colonialism is internalised by the colonised, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, ‘black’ people end up emulating their oppressors (Sardar, 2008). I concur that colonialism

<sup>140</sup> In 1826 the first Guardian of the Slaves was appointed, later becoming Office of the Protector of Slaves; in 1828 Ordinance 50 abolished the requirement for ‘coloured’ people to carry passes (Van der Ross, 2015; Viall, et al, 2011), and in 1834 slavery was abolished. In 1841 the Masters and Servants Ordinance was passed on how to accommodate ex-slaves and former ‘free-blacks’; legislation favoured employers who were allowed to use certain disciplinary measures to regulate the behaviour of labourers. When the Act was revised in 1856 it was harsher in its range of offences and the severity of penalties prescribed for servants (Viall, et al., 2011).

<sup>141</sup> In spite of being contracted to their mistresses their jobs were not guaranteed and maids could be instantly dismissed for misdemeanours such as getting pregnant or being drunk.

<sup>142</sup> Domestic servants sometimes practiced prostitution, but double standards existed where it was acceptable for lower class women to prostitute themselves and provide “a safety valve” for public morality, protecting the virtue of middle class women while satisfying the sexual needs of young men (Worden, et al, 1998: 234).

<sup>143</sup> Fanon inspired revolutionary leaders like Malcom X, the African American civil rights leader, and Steve Biko who led the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa in the 1960s. Steve Biko urged ‘blacks’ “to take pride in their blackness and to cast off the psychology of inferiority” (Sparks, 2003: 72-73).

succeeded, to some degree, in the creation of a slave mentality, or a mentality of subjection.

### **A SLAVE MENTALITY**

In 1994 the ANC won 62.65% of the national vote, and seven of the nine provinces<sup>144</sup>. The NP gained control of the Western Cape with the majority of ‘white’ votes and a “breakthrough” among the ‘coloured’ population<sup>145</sup> and secured for itself a prominent place in the first government of national unity (Jacobs, 2007; Sparks, 2003: 227-228). I recall the disbelief and shock that I felt on hearing that almost 70% of the ‘coloured’ population of the Western Cape had voted for the NP. I couldn’t understand how, against a background formed by pre-1994 ‘coloured’ political organisations aligned to the broader ‘black’ resistance, and ‘coloured’ activists, community organisations and unions central to the formation of the UDF, the majority of ‘coloured’ people could now align themselves with the former oppressors. Political parties across the spectrum had focused their efforts on gathering ‘coloured’ support in the four years leading up to the elections and they had chosen to join forces with the very same party that had persecuted, humiliated and criminalised their lives through legislation (Adhikari, 2006; Jacobs, 2007). The election results prompted descriptions of ‘coloureds’ as racist or having slave mentalities (Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999; Jacobs, 2007). Schoeman (2012) observes that it is likely that the vast majority of slaves would have been part of the lower classes in the countries from which they came and that they arrived at the Cape with “a mentality of subjection” which was encouraged by the slave owners and further entrenched by the legal system. Slaves were completely dependent on their owners and governed by uncertainty and unpredictability regarding food and clothing, how they would be treated, what work they would be expected to do, and whether they would be separated from their families<sup>146</sup>. Schoeman (2012) suggests that the physical and mental cruelty the enslaved experienced in the Cape might be more akin to that of inmates of concentration and labour camps in the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than to that of North American plantations. The violence with which the enslaved were treated would likely have led to repressed resentment, insecurity, and disorientation, and “a considerable degree of brutalisation and dehumanisation” (Schoeman, 2012: 887). I find it unsurprising then that a “slave mentality” or a “mentality of subjection” would have been superimposed on, or taken the place of the foreign culture they had brought with them, as Schoeman (2012) asserts.

Schoeman cites court cases where slaves have objected, not to being punished, but to the injustice of particular incidents, indicating that they would have seen no contradiction in insisting on certain rights within slavery while believing the institution itself was unjust (Schoeman, 2012: 888). This can be seen as a

<sup>144</sup> The Inkatha Freedom Party won KwaZulu-Natal, the NP the Western Cape.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Coloureds’ make up roughly 10% of the population of South Africa, are concentrated in the Western Cape (where they make up more than 50% of the population) and in the Northern Cape, and are mostly working class.

<sup>146</sup> Some of them earned privileges (not rights), e.g. earn money, own modest possessions, establish and live with families.

method of survival, since under the threat of violence, the enslaved were forced to accept the situation they found themselves in, and, perhaps, even try to use it to their advantage. In so doing, they came to accept the values of the slave-owning society and their position in it. This legacy of acceptance of the status quo, while lobbying within the system, I argue, played out over and over again, within the apartheid system and especially in the Tricameral parliament of the 1980s.

It cannot be presumed that violent domination was accepted, though, and Schoeman (2012) mentions two attempts at uprising in 1722 and 1788. He further reports that, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was evidence of widespread resentment among slaves, influenced by events in slave societies such as Saint-Domingue in 1791-1804<sup>147</sup>. Ross (2004) argues that, although few slaves rebelled, it does not imply that the large majority were peaceful and submissive. Resistance, he says, often took the form of attacks on individuals or on their property, desertion and escape into the interior, and even suicide. Although historians have been forced to turn to criminal records for insight into the daily lives of slaves, and those few who rebelled were labelled criminals, these instances can be seen as indicative of a wider resistance, though less violent (Schoeman, 2012; Ross, 2004). However, from the official records of complaints brought by the enslaved to authorities, Schoeman observes that slaves were able to hold onto “some basic sense of decency, justice and loyalty towards and solidarity with family members and fellow slaves, and even a basic concept of honour”.

The relatively small numbers of slaves, their cultural diversity and geographic dispersal, contributed to the fact that there was never a large-scale rebellion at the Cape. This became the pattern that characterised the way the descendants of the enslaved would resist oppression. Adhikari (2005; 2006) asserts that due to the small number of ‘coloured’ people and the heritage of slavery, dispossession and racial oppression, ‘coloured’ people as a group lacked any significant economic or political power, and the history of ‘coloured’ political organisations has “largely been one of compromise, retreat and failure” (Adhikari, 2006: 470). Added to this, I argue, was the ambivalent position ‘coloured’ people occupied within the racial hierarchy of South Africa, layered with nuances of language, religion and race. They were divided with regards to their relationships not only with ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ but also with Afrikaans- and English-speaking ‘whites’, as they wrestled to find a place where they belonged within the social and political landscape. It was these divisions, I assert, that were exploited by the NP in the run-up to the 1994 elections, and continue to be exploited by political parties across the spectrum.

Almost 200 years of violent subjugation, both mental and physical, left an indelible legacy on the

<sup>147</sup> Louis, a Mauritian slave, inspired by Toussaint l’Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian revolt, and another slave, Abraham van de Caab, organised about 300 slaves to rise up in revolt. The revolution lasted little more than 36 hours, and most of the protesters were captured. However, its significance lies in the display of awareness by the slaves of international change and in the following years slaves increasingly demanded their rights rather than running away (Schoeman, 2012; Worden, 2016).



descendants of slaves. Even after emancipation former slaves continued to be subjected to different forms of controls and segregation, such as the Masters and Servants Act mentioned earlier, control by the church and mission stations that were established to accommodate the landless and homeless former slaves, and later, by apartheid legislation (Vial, et al, 2011). As Sardar (2008) suggests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, if everything that you represent is seen only in negative terms, it follows that that is how you will eventually see and believe yourself to be. Kaufman (1996) concurs that people who are relegated to an inferior status begin to doubt their own worth and that of the group to which they belong, creating a conflict of identity. It follows then, that this shame that forms the basis of negative self-image, becomes a principal source of that identity.

### **OCCUPYING AN INTERMEDIATE ZONE**

Fanon describes the two dimensions of ‘black’ men where they behave differently with other ‘black’ people compared to how they would behave with the ‘white’ man; he attributed this to a direct result of colonial subjugation. Fanon gives a very graphic description of what it feels like to be trapped within his ‘black’ body, trying to make sense of his body image/schema within a ‘white’ world (France) and trying to remain rational in the face of the irrationality of racism. Fanon emphasises the incidences of comparison, of being a man, a physician, a teacher, qualified by the word “Negro”, although it is no longer considered unusual to be an educated ‘black’ man. As a psychiatrist, Fanon refers to the schizophrenic-like quality of occupying two places as a man and as a ‘black’ man in relation to a ‘white’ man:

Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle (Fanon, 2008: 88).

Occupying an intermediary zone between European and indigenous, ‘coloureds’ who had some European blood, were elevated to a status above the native, but below the European, producing a double contempt — held in contempt by their “superiors” and by their “inferiors” (Pillay, 2018). This is akin to American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness – the sensation of having your identity split into different parts – and of having to constantly view yourself through the eyes of different people, creating internal conflict and an impaired self-image.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others ... two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body ... (Du Bois, 2007: 8).

Hendricks (2001) and Adhikari (2006) both echo the same sentiment when they talk about the in-between

space occupied by people of ‘mixed descent, which was valued for its proximity to ‘whiteness’ but despised for its association with “bastardization/hybridity”. The “visibility of their body politic” carried the shame and embarrassment with which Europeans viewed the liaisons. Those of ‘mixed’ descent, the signifier of ‘colouredness’ were proof of the encounter between Europeans and those they considered inferior, the unwanted and unfortunate consequence of the colonisation of southern Africa (Adhikari, 2006: 482; Hendricks, 2001). The shame of whether one is good enough is measured against being equal to ‘whites’, any failure is seen as a measure of inferiority and any success is tempered by being ‘black’. The feeling of inferiority is in direct correlation to the European’s feeling of superiority. Bowler and Vincent (2011) take this a step further, describing a “triple consciousness” experienced by ‘coloured’ people whereby the ‘coloured’ person has to construct him (or herself) from within, as well as in relation to ‘black’ and ‘white’. I would agree with the authors that this is hardly a neutral space to occupy, and as Kaufman (1996) observes, when minorities compare themselves to the dominant members of a culture, they inevitably find themselves lacking.

In apartheid South Africa, dominance was violently enforced and rigorously policed and played out in what Kaufman (1996) calls scenes of shame and humiliation, such as being treated like children, using separate entrances in public buildings, sitting at the back of the bus, not being able to walk on a beach, or being beaten up during demonstrations. These shame-scenes lead to self-blame and self-contempt which, in turn, lead to a minority identity based on shame (Kaufman, 1996).

### **PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: IDENTITY<sup>148</sup>, CULTURE<sup>149</sup> AND IDEOLOGY<sup>150</sup>**

As an occupational therapist, I am interested in the development of the whole person, physically, socially and psychologically, and I am drawn to the theories of Erik Erikson, German psychoanalyst and contemporary of Freud, in trying to understand the legacy of shame and inferiority. Erikson described eight stages of psychosocial development during which the ego develops through successfully resolving social crises (McLeod, 2013). The idea of identity formation had been the focus of Erik Erikson’s work since the 1960s and he emphasised the role of culture and society in development, according to Wendy Sharkey (1997). Erikson examined the lives of historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi and Thomas Jefferson, maintaining that one cannot separate

the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crisis in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other (Erikson, 1968: 23)

<sup>148</sup> the fact of being who what a person or thing is

<sup>149</sup> the arts, customs and institutions of a nation, people or group

<sup>150</sup> a system of ideas and principles or a set of beliefs held by a particular group

The individual then defines society and vice versa. Kaufman (1996) agrees that identity and culture are reciprocal and that they impact each other, within a broader ideological background. Identity, culture and ideology, he says, are three phenomena that link individuals and families with society at large. Questions of identity – “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” – are shaped by the encounters we have with shame as a minority group and by employing contempt as a strategy to counteract shame (Kaufman, 1996).

According to Erikson, the development of a healthy personal identity forms the connection between childhood and adulthood and depends on the child receiving meaningful and consistent feedback regarding his or her achievements and accomplishments. Failure would mean the inability to develop into a psychologically healthy adult. He describes eight stages of development that involve establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future. Each stage builds on the successful achievement of the previous stage and the interruption of any of these stages could result in feelings of shame, worthlessness, or unresolved feelings of inferiority and inadequacy among peers. The failure to establish a sense of identity within society leads to people’s confusion about themselves or their place in society and this is of significant relevance in South Africa as we transition from oppression to democracy (McLeod, 2013).

I argue that Erikson’s first five stages of development, which span the years from infancy to adolescence (12-18 years), are relevant to my study since the focus of development during these stages is on building trust and self-esteem, developing autonomy and acquiring new knowledge and skills, and later developing a sense of identity and morality. I contend that the systematic infantilisation of the enslaved over centuries of oppression and paternalism, was a kind of violence enacted against ‘coloured’ people. Attempts were made to curtail their maturity and competence so that they could be deemed inferior, and be prevented from developing into independent adults. I will briefly expand on Erikson’s second and fourth stages of psychosocial development, namely, *Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt*, and *Industry vs Inferiority*, and illustrate how the navigation of these stages was impeded by enslavement

### **AUTONOMY VERSUS SHAME AND DOUBT**

According to Erikson’s hypothesis, children start developing a certain level of independence, decision-making and control, which lays the foundation for self-determination and independence during the *Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt* phase (18 months to three and a half years). For Erikson the development of shame is an integral part of identity development which occurs during this stage. If this stage is interrupted, it leads to shame, self-consciousness, and dependency (McLeod, 2013).

The enslaved were materially dependent on their masters and were fearful of what would become of them

if he or she died; they lacked the freedom of choice and movement and this coupled with the insecurity of their positions, inhibited the development of adult and responsible personalities within a social and political context from which they were excluded. Schoeman (2012) observes that this total dependence is more likely to have promoted subservience and insincere flattery and even infantilism, rather than industrious and independent workers (which may be considered to be modes of survival within a context of violent subjugation).

The enslaved were forced into submissive labour, brutalised and dehumanised and treated as “a sort of child in the family”, which laid the foundation for the kind of society which was to develop. This paternalism was a form of control since the enslaved were prevented from developing independence from the master; later this was replaced by the paternalism of the mission stations and reinforced by the farmers for whom the majority of the freed continued to work post-emancipation. The female enslaved, especially, were kept in the family, and bequeathed to family rather than sold to strangers, on the death of their owners. Although they were ‘part of the family’ they were never equal and remained ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ in the eyes of their owners and later employers.

Further socialisation into their positions as children was ensured by the enslaved only being known by their first names or being given new names when they were sold or transferred from one owner to another (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). The treatment of the enslaved as children meant that they were denied opportunities to exercise social and political autonomy and, being property in person, subject to restrictions and punishment by their masters. It is unlikely that their generally unskilled work would have earned positive feedback; this could have led to doubt about their worth and possibly inhibited the establishment of a positive identity. According to Erikson, an unresolved sense of identity leads to confusion about the self or one’s place in society which has significant consequences for South Africa as we transition from oppression to democracy.

### **INDUSTRY VERSUS INFERIORITY**

Erikson’s fourth stage of development, *Industry vs Inferiority*, is known as the apprenticeship of life since the child learns skills which will equip him/her for later life and learns to take pride in his/her work and the ability to provide for him- or herself and others (a family). With a sense of industry comes the ability to work well and to strive for recognition and success along with a feeling of accomplishment. The failure to navigate this stage, may result in feelings of uselessness, inadequacy and inferiority and a belief that they will not amount to much. It is important to point out here that, after emancipation, the enslaved were forced to serve an ‘apprenticeship’ of four years during which they were meant to be taught skills to prepare them

for freedom and independence. However, this was in effect a way of prolonging their actual emancipation and being taken advantage of as free labour and, when they were eventually freed, it was without the support or resources<sup>151</sup> to become independent (Viall, et al, 2011). Many of the descendants of the enslaved remain in a position where they have internalised the ideas that they will not amount to much and this is reinforced by the lack of opportunities for advancement academically or professionally, as evidenced in the high rate of unemployment<sup>152</sup> among people who live in ‘coloured’ communities.

After emancipation the formerly enslaved had nowhere to go and had few possessions, if any. The dependency thus created, served to tie many of the previously enslaved to their masters and the refuge offered to them by mission stations, is thought to have ensured a close and steady supply of compliant workers to the surrounding farms at which they were generally forced to continue working at. Many of the farmers saw it as their duty to uplift their *volkies*<sup>153</sup> (work folk) to their own so-called “civilised” Christian standards and to teach them morals and values (Viall, et al, 2011). The farmer could be like a father to his workers because they were considered to be childlike and lacking in moral maturity. In the rural areas of the Western Cape dominated by wine and wheat farms, families continued to live on the farms for generations, controlled through low wages, tied housing, corporal punishment and the *dop* system. There was neither incentive nor opportunity to break the cycle of dependency that workers were caught up in.

Mountain (2003) observes that the long history of master-slave and master-servant relationships, combined with the racially-based class structure, manifested in feelings of personal and community inferiority. This legacy continues post-1994 in the treatment of especially farm labourers and domestic workers. This is how colonialism inculcated a sense of inferiority which was internalised by the colonised, who becomes obsessed with emulating the ‘white’ man, to become like him and to be accepted by him (Fanon, 2008).

I have attempted, through reference to Erikson’s theories of development, to illustrate how the mental and physical subjugation of the enslaved and their descendants influenced the formation of independent personalities and a sense of identity. Slaves and their descendants were prevented from developing a healthy personal identity, and the enforced dependency on their masters prevented them from acquiring the skills necessary to become independent members of society. Furthermore, the circumstances under which slaves were forced to live made it difficult to pass on their customs and traditions, let alone develop a sense of identity. The chance for ‘coloured’ people then to navigate the “apprenticeship of life”, to become successful and achieve a sense of accomplishment and recognition, was strictly controlled and policed, creating the foundation for feelings of uselessness, inadequacy and inferiority and a belief that they would not amount

<sup>151</sup> While compensation of £1 247 000 was paid to farmers for the loss of their slaves, the slaves received nothing (Viall, et al. 2011)

<sup>152</sup> The unemployment rate in SA is around 27%, but almost 50 % amongst youth, according to Trading Economics (2018)

<sup>153</sup> Note the paternalism in the use of the diminutive of the word *volkies*

to much. The resultant pervasive sense of shame and inferiority presents a serious social problem and is a hindrance to the descendants of the enslaved seeking to take their place in a post-apartheid society.

### **INTERNALISED SHAME**

The introduction of shame is arguably the primary risk factor for later addiction and Hayley Julius (2004), in her clinical psychology masters' thesis, concludes that the creation of the drunk 'coloured' self is but one example of how shame is informed by negativity and 'racial' othering (Julius, 2004: 29). Julius (2004) suggests that "though drunkenness defies 'racial' categorisation, it is the attachment of shame in oppressive relationships (such as the *dop* system), that creates the idea of the psychopathological 'coloured' psyche (the alcoholic self)". It is of concern therefore, in the South African context of the socio-economic oppressive *dop* system, what effect the addiction of the parents would have on the younger generation. A sound parent-child relationship, with healthy interaction and consistent care in the first two years of life "creates the environment for a resilient child in the face of addiction, even where there is parental alcoholism". On the contrary, parenting that contributes to insecure attachment and high internalised shame is a predisposing factor for alcoholism later on in life.

Alcoholism existed on a large scale in Cape Town. Wine and Cape brandy was an important source of income at every level of Cape society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with numerous wine merchants and smuggling houses where drink could be bought when licensed premises were closed on Sundays. Pubs kept the impoverished off the streets. Alcohol was cheap and easily available; it dulled pain and alleviated the monotony of poverty and overcrowding. Labourers were often paid at the places where they went to drink, to such an extent that a law was introduced to forbid such practices (Worden, et al: 1998). This has echoes of the situation of teachers who would cash their cheques at bottle stores and is indicative of how widespread the problem of alcoholism was.

The search for an identity during adolescence is based on the successful navigation of the previous stages of development. The establishment of an identity is difficult in a period of rapid social change, such as after emancipation of slavery, as the older generation can no longer serve as adequate role models, family and community units are disrupted; leading the young person to either completely reject the old model or to follow the older generation in doing what is expected of them and not developing their own personality to meet the challenges of the changing social order. Young people are preoccupied by what others think of them, which could lead to a different kind of dependency (such as on a peer group or gang) replacing the dependency on their parents. A poorly formed sense of identity and poor self-esteem may lead to delinquency, behavioural problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and dropping out of school.

Difficulty with shame and feelings of inferiority at earlier stages may lead to an inability to develop work skills and successful relationships with parents and peers.

Julius (2004) investigated the internalisation of shame, and considered whether ‘coloured’ students have higher levels of internalised shame than students who ascribe to any other racialised identity, through the administration of the *Internalized Shame Scale* and a ‘racial’ identity questionnaire, on a sample of students at two Western Cape universities<sup>154</sup>. She hypothesises in her study<sup>155</sup>, that shame correlates with the ascription to particular racialised identities and is therefore a significant experience in the lives of South African students.

The results of Julius’ study indicate that ‘coloured’ university students do not experience significantly different levels of shame compared to students who ascribe to a ‘black’ or ‘white’ racialised identity. She notes that her study is limited by her sample of university students who, by the nature of their academic status and the universities they attend, can be considered to be relatively liberal. She concludes that the fact that university students are socially mobile and “engaged in cognitive and emotional alternatives to prescriptive ways of being” would reduce the likelihood of them experiencing a significant degree of shame (Julius, 2004: 61). The involvement of students in tertiary study and other related pursuits, serve to address the legacy of apartheid and mark a shift towards a different social identity. She suggests that a study targeting a ‘coloured’ suburb, with different mother-tongue speakers and parental occupations, for example, is likely to yield a different result since it would be more representative of the lived experiences of university students.

Of note in Julius’s study is her distinction between acute and chronic shame which may manifest within individuals or the communities within which they live; she references the work of Pattison (2000) who proposes that, “all shame is socially shaped” and that “groups of stigmatised and unwanted individuals can ... experience a profound sense of shame and unwantedness” (Pattison, 2000: 182). Pattison argues that the social, psychological, personal, and physical experiences and consequences of shame need to be addressed by communities in order for people to live full and responsible lives (Pattison, 2000). Julius also references studies by Lutwak, Ferrarib and Cheek (1998) that found that women are more prone to shame, “associated with maladaptive coping styles, personal distress, social anxiety and avoidance/distancing as coping mechanisms” (Julius, 2004: 27).

In her 2017 memoir, *Killing Karoline*, journalist Sara-Jayne King explores the questions surrounding her life as the result of an affair, illegal under apartheid’s Immorality Act, between a ‘white’ British woman and her ‘black’ South African colleague. Born in the 1980s, she was whisked out of the country before the

<sup>154</sup> University of the Western Cape (historically ‘coloured’) and University of Cape Town (historically ‘white’)

<sup>155</sup> *Internalised Shame and Racialised Identity in South Africa, with specific reference to ‘Coloured’ Identity*

transgression could be discovered, and adopted in Britain, where she was raised by a ‘white’ middle-class couple in the south of England. Doctors colluded with her mother to keep the secret and her mother returned to South Africa, claiming that her daughter had died from medical complications, hence the title.

King documents her search for meaning through adolescence and adulthood. So inherent is her sense of shame at being rejected for who she is (neither ‘white’ nor ‘black’, neither British nor South African) that she follows a path of self-destruction through eating disorders and addictions until she finally investigates her forbidden birth, only to be rejected by her biological mother a second time as the worst mistake she ever made. King explores feelings of insecurity and poor self-worth related to race, identity, rejection and belonging, while trying to make sense of who she is.

In her memoir King graphically describes the negative, othering experience of shame, of not being good enough, and being rejected by her own mother. She moves through a process of self-blame and self-contempt, internalising the shame of finding herself lacking. I believe that her self-destructive behaviour may have been an attempt to punish herself for the subconscious feeling of having done something wrong, which is integral to the experience of shame. Her search for her biological mother who rejects her a second time, could be seen as a microcosm of the struggle for many ‘coloured’ people in South Africa during apartheid who were rejected or denied because they were not ‘white’ enough. Her story is an example of how destructive shame, when internalised, can be if it is not addressed and lends weight to my argument that the legacy of shame needs to be dealt with in order to come to terms with the legacy of apartheid, colonialism and slavery.

### **WOMEN LIVING ‘COLOURED’ LIVES**

Because of the socialisation of women into the role of home-maker, the establishment of respectability in ‘coloured’ communities generally fell onto the shoulders of women, since ‘coloured’ men were stereotyped as problematic and ‘coloured’ families as dysfunctional. Later, the state and religious structures intervened in family life, granting housing allowances to women so that they could become “respectable” homeowners and community leaders (Ross, 2015: S98). Through the interviews I conducted, it was evident that the role of ensuring that ‘coloured’ homes and the people who dwelled within them were subjected to rigorous practices by the maternal figure in the home to appear “prim and proper”.

Jensen and Turner (1996) identified seven coping mechanisms to deal with the stereotypes of living ‘coloured’ lives in Heideveld<sup>156</sup>. One of these was a claim to respectability by keeping the home clean and orderly so that the chaos and disordered morality of the gang- and crime-ridden streets would remain on

<sup>156</sup> A lower socio-economic ‘coloured’ area on the Cape Flats where victims of forced removals were moved to by the apartheid government



the outside, thereby claiming ‘white’ through civility. They point out that by constructing a positive identity through the condemnation of ‘coloureds’ who behaved in negative ways, ‘coloured’ stereotypes were kept alive, reinforcing the existence of a group they wished to deny. While I agree that my mother and the mothers of Bennett, Hardisty and others, kept the chaos of Lotus River, Bonteheuwel and Parkwood, at bay through cleaning, I do not agree with Jensen and Turner (1996) that it was purely in order to “claim white through civility”. The condemnation of ‘coloureds’ behaving negatively, I argue, was also a condemnation of the stereotype that the apartheid government wished to portray as the norm. Keeping the home and their children clean and in good order, then, was a way for our mothers to distance themselves from those who wished to fulfil the prophecies of the colonisers and apartheidists.

Shame and respectability, I contend, are the central issues which mirror the daily struggle of ordinary ‘coloured’ people to prove that they were good enough in a social and political context wherein they were designated as less-than or other. For women, this largely played out in their homes, and through the way they raised their children. Lindsay Petersen, a resident of Pniël<sup>157</sup>, a mission station established in 1843 for freed slaves, described her mother as the home-maker, the one who cleaned, who sewed the clothes her children wore, and who kept the house in an almost “museum-like” state. Petersen laughingly wondered if her mother may have been a “*skoonmaker*”<sup>158</sup> in a previous life (Petersen, 2018). Pniël is an insular town, where residents inter-marry and generally live as they have for generations, with life centred around the church. Outsiders are viewed with suspicion and I believe that this contributes to maintaining the ethos of the mission station. As such, I would contend that the description of how her mother continues to live, is significant and can be extrapolated to similar families and communities.

Time and again, the need to be clean and in good order surfaced in my interviews and was reflected in the performance, dress and setting of the photographs shared with me. Cleaning rituals punctuate my memories of growing up. Smells of lavender floor polish, Sunlight soap and Robin Spray Starch are associated with holidays and festivals, as if we had to work to deserve the pleasure. There was pride in starched shirts and gleaming brass, dignity in the polished red *stoep* and the curtains bought on lay-bye from Ackermans every Eid and Christmas.

Early on in my PhD journey I conducted two interviews in Australia that I would like to discuss at this point. Wendy Fisher is a friend who I went to high school with during the 1970s, and who emigrated to Australia 30 years ago. Brigitte Rhode has been a friend for almost 30 years; she emigrated to New Zealand, and now lives in Australia. Both were classified ‘coloured’ during apartheid and grew up in ‘coloured’ areas, Wendy

<sup>157</sup> Set up as a mission station by the Apostolic/Congregational Church, on land donated by two farmers.

<sup>158</sup> A cleaner



*Figure 25*

in Mafeking and Brigitte in Port Elizabeth. I had not gone to Australia with the intention of conducting interviews. However, I was struck by the almost knee-jerk reaction of both of them to the news of my visit. Both had verbally referenced shame and the need to ensure that their homes were clean and tidy before I arrived.

### **PRIM AND PROPER DOWN UNDER**

Wendy invited me to stay for the weekend and, on my arrival, was at great pains to excuse the state of her sons' bedrooms and revealed that even the dog had been sent to the parlour to be groomed for my visit. Wendy didn't mind being interviewed or sharing her photographs but she was reluctant to be videoed because she didn't consider herself to be "properly" dressed every time we talked. Since I was only there for the weekend and we only chatted later at night, I felt it was more important to record her story. I knew how important it was for her to be recorded at her best. As a young high school girl, she was the one of the group of friends who always spent a little more time on her face and nails and even took the time to brush her hair 100 strokes<sup>159</sup> at night. She was always well- groomed and perfectly matching.

One of the photographs (the above) she chose to share with me is of her, aged about four years old, circa

<sup>159</sup> There was an old wives' tale that brushing your hair 100 strokes at night was good for you.

1965. The little girl in the formal dress with short socks and black baby doll shoes is seated on a cushion on a wrought iron chair, the curlicues on the back of the chair fanning out behind her like a peacock's tail. Her gaze is slightly off camera, probably at her mother who is telling her to smile. Her hair is neatly combed, her light eyes twinkle. She looks posed, her dress neatly fanned out over her legs.

Wendy didn't think that it was any special occasion in spite of the formal dress. She thinks that "someone with a camera" was probably visiting and so her mother dressed her up. She cannot recall her parents ever owning a camera. Her father was a teacher but didn't earn much and wouldn't have been able to afford one. The photograph of Wendy is in sharp contrast to the memories she shared of growing up in real poverty:

... pit toilets, candles and paraffin lamps, no electricity. We didn't have a bath. We bathed on Sundays in a zinc bath, girls first, then the boys. The bath of water was then ready for washing clothes on a Monday. We didn't have a car. My father learnt to drive at 39, the year before he died from leukaemia, I suspect<sup>160</sup> (Fisher, 2016).

She described how her father had built a house for them over many years, first acquiring the property.

We moved from the location when I was 13 years old. That was the first time I lived in a house with running water and electricity. He died 18 months later. After my father died, my mother, who had only completed grade 3, struggled to survive on a widower's pension. She took in boarders and we all slept in one room. Sometimes there were up to six boarders living with us. At one stage she lived in a shed with my three brothers on my grandmother's property so that she could rent out our house (Fisher, 2016).

There is no evidence of this struggle to survive in her photograph. On the contrary, this photograph depicts a well-dressed, perfectly groomed little girl, frozen in middle-class respectability and challenging the apartheid discourse that would have her family depicted as uncivilised. In spite of their poverty, an effort was made to take photographs, to document the image they wished to present to the world and to preserve the photograph for later generations.

I questioned Wendy about the need to make sure that her house was "spick and span" for my arrival. She could see nothing remarkable about it, replying that's just how she was. She elaborated further, saying that where she comes from there is "scandal" attached to "not being clean or polite". When I pressed her further, she replied

... because I'll be judged. *Kyk die Kleurlinge. Kyk hulle hare is nie gekam nie*<sup>161</sup>. I can't go to work if my house isn't cleaned. *Kyk die skande*<sup>162</sup>. I feel guilty (Fisher, 2016).

She couldn't articulate what the source of her guilt was, but I postulate that the sense of guilt which is related

<sup>160</sup> Wendy had been told her father had died of a heart attack. People didn't speak about cancer, she said, and she only heard many years later from an aunt that this is what her father had died from.

<sup>161</sup> Look at the 'coloureds'. Their hair isn't combed.

<sup>162</sup> Look at the scandal.



*Figure 26*

to having done something wrong, is part of the experience of shame. She also could not tell me why she felt the need to clean for my visit, but emphasised how important presentation was, saying that she refused to go anywhere with her husband if he wasn't dressed properly, "even if he's working around the house and needs to pop out to the hardware store to get something quickly" (Fisher, 2016).

Brigitte was much more direct about her need to clean. When I phoned to tell her, her immediate response was, "Of course, you will stay with us," followed shortly by a lapse into Afrikaans: "*Ek gaan sommer nou begin skoonmaak. Ek kannie vir jou in die skanne steek nie*"<sup>163</sup> (Rhode, 2016). She similarly, described growing up in extreme poverty, in a wood-and-iron shack, servant's 'quarters or someone's garage, "always last on the city council's housing list". They had lived in the city centre in Port Elizabeth, in an area which she describes as being "much like District Six", when they were forcibly removed to Korsten. Brigitte was the youngest of five; her four older siblings were born of her mother's marriage to an Indian man, which had ended in divorce. Brigitte's father had been classified 'white' and her parents were not able to marry and live together as a family with her older siblings who were darker in complexion (Rhode, 2016).

The above photograph that Brigitte showed me, which was the only photograph she had of her childhood, had the edges torn off and she told me that she only knew where it was because she had recently taken it out to photocopy to give to her brother-in-law whose moped they are sitting on, but he had died before she could send it to him. She joked about the fact that there were few photographs of her, wondering if she had been too ugly to photograph, but admitted that she couldn't remember her family ever owning a camera. This photograph was probably taken by a friend of her sister's when he visited. The wood-and-iron dwelling in the background, is typical of the poor neighbourhood where she lived. This poverty seems deliberately offset by the moped on which the three children are arranged (Brigitte is on the left). I contend that their association with this possession, even though it did not belong to them, endowed them with a sense of relative fortune which is preserved in the photograph, and contributed to why it has been kept for so long. I could not see any reason why either of them should make special arrangements to prepare for my visit, but

on the other hand I was familiar with this urge to present the perfect front. My mother would have expected nothing less. There are a number of points of note in both these interviews. Although I had not seen Wendy or Brigitte very often in recent years, we had been close friends. This, however, was the first time I heard the stories they had chosen to share. I contend that being asked to share photographs of their childhood created the platform to tell their stories. Sturken (1999) describes the personal photograph as an image capable of producing memory and says that, as a cultural object, it can move between personal and cultural memory and history. The photograph, she says is,

... an object of complex emotional and cultural meaning, an artefact used to conjure memory, nostalgia, and contemplation ... a talisman, in which the past is often perceived to reside so that it can be re-experienced. It evokes both memory and loss, both a trace of life and the prospect of death (Sturken, 1999: 178).

Sturken continues, saying that the quality of the photograph has no bearing on their effectiveness as a “container for memory”, which is certainly true for Brigitte’s photograph (Sturken, 1999: 178).

Another point of note was that Wendy had tried to pass on the same values to her sons, who had not been born in Australia. Unlike our mothers, her control did not extend to her boys who were more assertive in exercising their rights over their bedrooms, and had been raised without the burden of proving to their parents’ visitors that they were good enough. However, she did say,

... even though my boys don’t have the same background that I do, I taught them they can’t put us to shame by not respecting you. They can’t swear in front of you. I know that I probably don’t have to worry about them (Fisher, 2016).

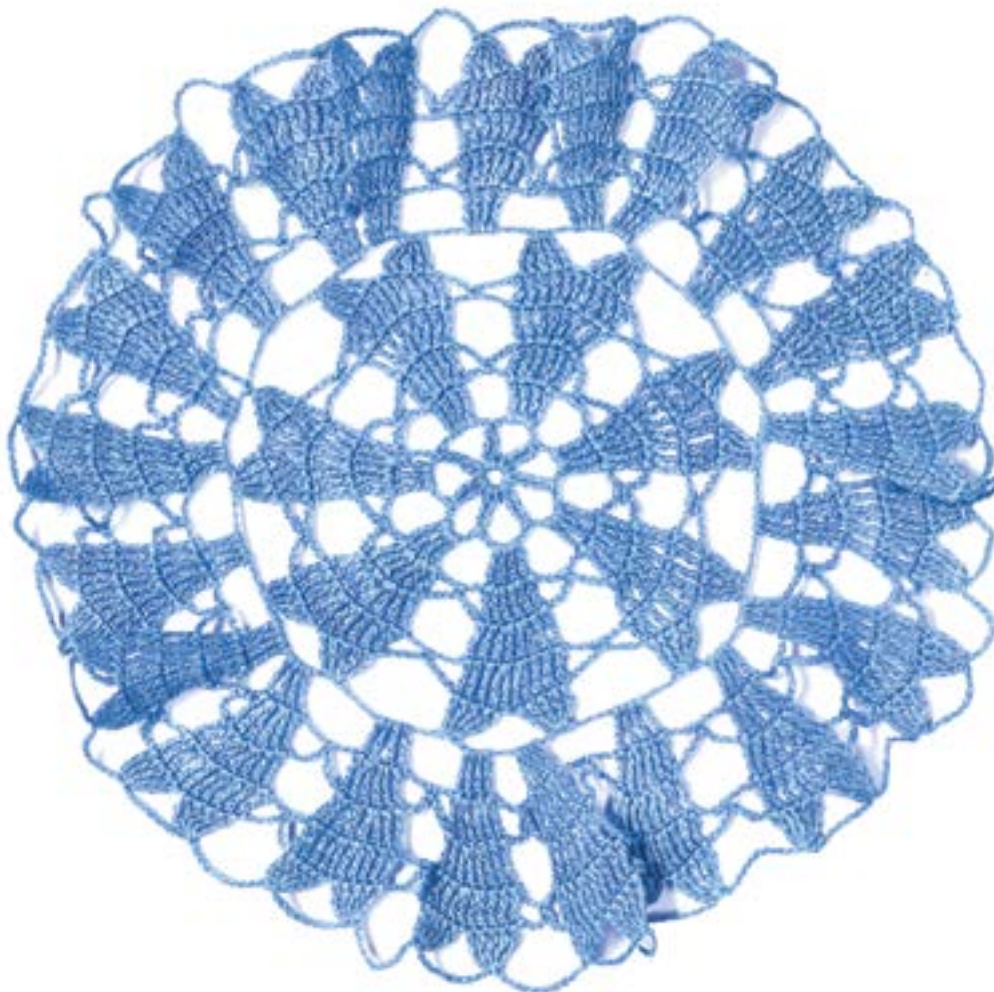
Remarkably, though, Wendy’s elder son lived by the words of Irish poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde, who said that you can never be too well-dressed or too educated. He had it printed on his business card for the men’s clothing shop he ran, while he was completing his third degree. I suggest that he would have made his grandmothers very proud.

Interestingly, too is that both Wendy and Brigitte slipped into Afrikaans when they referenced the need to be clean and presentable for me, in spite of both having lived in Australia for many years where, I suspect, they would not have been speaking Afrikaans daily. Our medium of communication has always been English (Wendy and I were at an English medium school) and I am intrigued by this lapse into a language that must have reminded them of South Africa, as did my visit.

Through the interviews and research in this chapter I have attempted to show how fundamental the concept of shame is to the experience of living ‘coloured’ lives in South Africa and how the long reach of an oppressive past continues to inform the present. In the case of Wendy and Brigitte this past continues to

influence how they live their lives despite the fact that they had chosen to leave the country and in a manner of speaking, voluntarily exile themselves from a place which had limited how they might live and be free. What other memories were triggered by my visit, the reminder of a past both of them had chosen to emigrate from?

How deep-seated is this feeling of shame that needs to be cleaned away in order for us to present our best, even to those who we are closely associated with, such as friends and family? Do we always carry the burden of proving that we are good enough? I am reminded of Andre Brink's character, Anna Vigilant in his novel, *Praying Mantis* (2006), whose obsession with 'whiteness' and cleanliness is ironically supported by her job as a sought-after soap maker. The soap that she makes with secret ingredients, boils "like an angry beast" which almost kills her in her desire to be 'white', "but this does not stop the yearning". Anna, a Hottentot, has known since she was a small girl, that "brown isn't something that one wants to be. There is nothing that one can do about it. But no one in his right mind would choose it of his own free will" (Brink, 2006: 74).





# CHAPTER FIVE

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*RESPECTABILITY:  
"ARMOUR AGAINST INFERIORITY"*



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **RESPECTABILITY: “ARMOUR AGAINST INFERIORITY”**

*The establishment of respectable society, on terms essentially established in Great Britain, was a global undertaking, an insidious, because totally informal, expression of cultural imperialism (Ross, 2004: 5).*

*Respectability became “a central structuring principle in demarcating social status and shaping interpersonal relations” (Ross, R. in Ross, F., 2015).*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will look at respectability as a key defining principle in demarcating social status, and the roles of religion, British occupation, and clothing and material possessions as markers of respectability, rooted in slavery. The role of Islam as a unifying and humanising element has been discussed in chapter one.

This chapter will focus more on Christian evangelism and the role of the mission stations as the setting to shape the behaviour of the previously enslaved which at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a core element of respectability. This is done against the background of efforts by both the Dutch and British at the Cape to inculcate respectability and includes the fundamental role played by the Dutch Reformed Church in advocating and justifying apartheid.

### **A SHRINE TO RESPECTABILITY**

My questions around respectability were triggered by mother’s new lounge. A few years ago, I moved my parents into a smaller house in an area previously zoned “whites-only”. It was both more central and in a safer area than where they had lived since the 1970s. I envisaged that, because of their age, they would declutter and down-size. I was surprised by my father’s initial reluctance to move. The reasons he gave were that they had lived in Lotus River “for 30 years without any issues”<sup>164</sup>, he was an integral part of the local mosque, and the shopkeeper on the corner kept his newspaper every day. None of these reasons were substantial enough that they could not be addressed, especially the issue of finding a mosque as the mosques which had served the area before the Group Areas Act, were still operational in the area. His resistance, I believe, stemmed from the reluctance to leave behind a community that he felt comfortable in.

When they eventually did move, it was with all their stuff that went straight into the garage and they built a carport for the car. Into the spare room went my grandmother’s collection of craft encyclopaedias and

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<sup>164</sup> Meaning that they had not been victims of any criminal activity



Reader's Digest books (yellowing and no longer read), and photo albums with photographs tumbling off the clear, sticky plastic pages that no longer kept them tidy. My mother bought a new lounge suite and created a formal lounge and dining room with gleaming surfaces, polished brass, ornaments in a glass cabinet, silk flowers and candles on drape tables, where no one sets foot except for my father to perform his daily prayers — which seems almost fitting since the room is like a shrine to respectability. He continues to visit the barber and the mosque in Lotus River. Like Bennett's mother who continued to "live" in District Six after they were forced to move to Bonteheuwel, my father is "sleeping in the suburbs but living in the townships" (Dlamini, 2009: 108).

Ross (2015) remarks that the idea of respectability has always carried particular weight in the Cape and has been supported by racial dynamics based initially on the difference between the enslaved and free, and transforming over the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a point where religion, especially Christianity, became the central feature of respectability. Respectability, she says,

implies an ethical stance in the world ... reliability in the conduct of social relations ... caring for appearances (respectability) and caring for persons (decency), molding relationships so that people will be considered moral beings (Ross, 2015: S98-99).

The idea of respectability is an historically important mode of structuring the unequal social relations in the African and 'coloured' worlds, according to Fiona Ross (2015). During Dutch rule, there existed a variety of statuses in the colonial Cape, as discussed in an earlier chapter. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century British ideas of respectability became the driving force for advancement in society, and were imposed upon these existing hierarchies, (Ross, 1999). It became the norm to assume that the way of the English was best and "Englishness" became "the major symbol used to determine what was right and acceptable in the political life of the Cape Colony", observes Robert Ross, in his book on status and respectability at the Cape during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ross, 2004: 43).

### **ORDENTLIKHEID**<sup>165</sup>

Ross (2015) uses the Afrikaans word *ordentlikheid* to describe the process whereby women (usually) are able to mould people with morality, people who know their place in the hierarchy and respect and conform to the dictates of authority. Viall, et al. (2011) posit that this role has its roots in slavery when enslaved women ran the farm households while men laboured outside. This was later reinforced by ideas propagated by missionaries after emancipation. Through respectability, people, particularly women, are able to produce decent people even in immoral conditions, says Ross (2015).

<sup>165</sup> a combination of decency and respectability (Ross, 2015)

In her study, conducted in an impoverished community in the Western Cape, in which she explores the histories of the two concepts of “rawness and respectability” and the social practices that accompany them, Ross (2015) found that women gravitated towards roles as community leaders and were the core around which households were formed. In spite of the conditions under which they were forced to live, they strove to be *ordentlik*, to live with dignity and to establish and maintain the household’s social status. Schoeman (2012) notes that, it has always been a struggle for women to create the stability and to preserve a sense of decency and respectability, because of the instability and flux in early Cape society due to the transient male population and scarcity of women. In my own experience, and through the interviews I conducted, I found that in many households it was indeed the women who had taken on the roles of homemaker, cleaner and moral compass. Often, they were also the breadwinners, while ensuring that respectability was established not only in the family but also within the community. “Anybody’s mother or aunt could discipline you or go to your parents to complain about your behaviour,” said Aunty Sylvie, concluding that the children today “have no respect” (Wentzel, 2018).

Mothers, in general, also assumed the role of record-keeping or, as Trudy Rushin referred to it, “the keeper of the photos. My mother added a wall of photographs to their new home, an archive of important events – births, weddings and graduations – in the lives of her children and grandchildren. Like the photographs that captured the special occasions and outward material signs of respectability to challenge the popular representation of ‘coloured’ people during apartheid, my mother’s archive continues to do so a generation later. It not only records but conveys her pride in her family’s achievements.

This *ordentlikheid* which has its roots in colonial times would have been seen as the difference between the ‘civilisable native’ and the ‘Bushmen’. Ross (2015), however, points out that respectable behaviour is often learned through violence (as in farm workers being beaten, or children being beaten for not showing proper respect) as it would have been during slavery when the enslaved were not subservient enough. She concludes that while respectability may be seen as an indicator of social status, it has its roots “in oppression and subjugation, exclusion, and marginalization” (Ross, 2015: S99). I propose that, while on the one hand, respectability may be seen as a way of moulding the enslaved and colonial subjects to European colonial ways of behaving and being, on the other hand, respectability became a way for the enslaved and colonial subjects to challenge their designation as uncivilised or unrespectable. This became a way to prove that they were equal or better than the coloniser at being respectable and well-behaved. The idea of respectability then is not without contradiction, but I argue that the underlying shame (as a result of oppression, subjugation, exclusion and marginalisation) played a key role in the drive for respectability.

In Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Isabel Wilkerson’s work of narrative non-fiction, *The Warmth of Other*

*Suns* (2011), she chronicles the migration of ‘black’ people who fled the American South for a better life in the northern and western cities and examines the psyche of the emigrant. One of the characters in her book, a doctor, reflects on the effect desire to provide a better life for his family has on raising his daughters; he describes his obsession with appearances and how he spent a fortune on clothes, ballet lessons, deportment, education, demanding more of them than was necessary, so that they didn’t have to “suffer the pains of racism” (Wilkerson, 2011: 489). Wilkerson’s (2011) doctor is cognisant of the fact that he would always be seen as inferior to the lowest person in the ruling class, irrespective of what he achieved, he would always have to work to prove the system wrong “because it had been drilled into him that he had to be better than the system construed him to be” (Wilkerson, 2011: 84). He had watched his parents (both teachers) “exercise exquisite control over the few things they were permitted to preside over in life” (Wilkerson, 2011: 77).

I believe that this “exquisite control” was also demonstrated by my mother and grandmother and many of the women in the community who made sure that we were properly dressed, the house was clean, and the *stoep* shone. These were the areas over which they could exercise control, since, as Ross (2015) observes, apartheid legislation controlled almost every aspect of their social lives. The personal body and home of the oppressed was the canvas on which to write a counter-narrative to that propagated by those in power. This exquisite control usually meant that our mothers insisted on doing the cleaning with their own hands. My mother only recently accepted that she needed help with the house now that she and my father are getting older. The house is cleaned from top to bottom every week, carpets beaten outside, brassware buffed and floors scrubbed and polished. Rushin (2018) also recalls her mother cleaning the floor on her hands and knees and tidying the house *before* the domestic worker arrived, as if there were shame attached to her not doing the cleaning herself.

Hardisty (2018) described how they would prepare for the weekend by grooming themselves on Thursdays. Fridays was for “turning out” the house and for baking.

My mother is 81 and she still prepares herself on a Thursday. I still religiously put time aside every Thursday to do my nails and hair (Hardisty, 2018).

Wendy, referring to her cousins who still lived in Mafikeng, said that they,

still spend all Saturday doing their hair because on Saturday afternoons they may get visitors. It’s the weekend so my mother still cleans, puts out clean doilies.<sup>166</sup> Every weekend we cleaned and got dressed up. There was nowhere to go but what if visitors came? (Fisher, 2016).

Because there were so many limitations on where you could go, people’s lives revolved around visiting friends and family, and so you prepared your house in case anyone visited over the weekend. When I asked

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<sup>166</sup> a small ornamental mat made of lace (Oxford Dictionary).

Brigitte about the need to clean her house before my visit, she didn't see anything out of the ordinary about it, saying that cleaning was about taking pride in what we did and a way of making visitors feel welcome. When I pressed her further, she wondered aloud if all 'coloured' people really had clean houses. She considered that it might be a "slave instinct" to show pride and, that, "definitely as coloureds we felt that we needed to show that we were well-dressed and decent. "But to whom do we have to prove that to now? Could it still be coursing through our veins?" she asked. I didn't have the answer for her but as I continued with interviews, the theme of keeping our houses clean and in good order, recurred continually. Paulse (2002) suggests that the political economy in general encouraged people to spend their leisure time within their neighbourhood. I don't agree with this. While it may have played a role in where and how people chose to relax, I believe that entertaining at home came with a sense of freedom and relaxation that was difficult to find in the racialised and restricted spaces outside of it.

This hard-worked-for respectability challenged the way apartheid dictated that 'coloured' people should be and was a frontier to fight on without fear of repercussion. Good manners and cleanliness became a way for those in the community to prove to each other and to society in general, that they were of value. This respectability was reinforced on many levels, in dress, behaviour, at home and at school, not only as far as cleanliness was concerned, but also in presenting the best version of themselves and their homes. And if this meant having a room in the home that hardly anyone in the family entered, just in case a visitor came, that is what was done. When I ask my mother about this she shrugs her shoulders, not comprehending how I can question the need for this perfectly orchestrated space in which visitors were welcomed. This discipline appears to be self-imposed, motivated by the pervasive threat of the shame of not being good enough. How she is seen reflects on her family, and on her community. The thread of shame runs from one generation to the next.

At this point I will turn my focus to the religious practices of the enslaved and the 'civilising' mission of religion.

## **RELIGION AND SLAVERY**

The Dutch Church, the dominant church in the Netherlands and the only one permitted in its overseas possessions, lacked a strong missionary tradition and evangelising was not a priority, especially not amongst the slaves (Schoeman, 2012). This was further discouraged by competition with Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, coupled with differences in culture and language. Besides, the few ministers and teachers who would have come out from the Netherlands were more likely to have concentrated on educating and saving the

souls of the Dutch congregation rather than that of the enslaved. According to Vink (2007), 17<sup>th</sup> century ordinances declared that slaves were to be cared for as “the children of slave-owners”, and the purchase of slaves was seen as an act of compassion to save them from poverty, producing “a paternalistic, benevolent slaving discourse with a Christian humanist face”, which salved Dutch consciences (Vink, 2007: 46). Since the Dutch government “completely dominated the church” and paid the salaries of the priests and their assistants, the church was expected to be compliant (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 45).

Although the Dutch had forbidden the practice of any religion other than the Dutch Reformed one (1642), many slaves who came to the Cape brought their religion with them, especially those from Indonesia, where Islam was the dominant religion (Gqola, 2010; Viall, et al, 2011). As mentioned in an earlier chapter, because of the preservation of a cultural identity (dress, customs, food, language, and education), Islam offered a connection to a pre-slavery identity (Gqola, 2010). Imams were prepared to perform marriages<sup>167</sup> and birth and funeral ceremonies, drawing the enslaved who desired a spiritual connection, to Islam (Sparks, 2003). It also bestowed a sense of pride and respectability denied them by the Dutch, since, for one, baptism came with certain privileges and baptised slaves were prohibited from being sold<sup>168</sup> (Viall, et al, 2011). By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the enslaved were Muslim and the benches in the *Groote Kerk* that had been reserved for the enslaved, were no longer needed (Viall, et al, 2011; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). It would have been exceptional for an adult ‘free-black’ to be baptised or to have converted to Christianity in those years, since baptism bestowed certain rights upon the individual (Schoeman, 2012; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). Ross (2004) concurs that religious ceremonies were considered important in creating social hierarchies in society, and baptism especially was a “crucial sign of status”, privilege and acceptance (Ross, 2004: 31). The baptism of slaves was left to the personal initiative of the slave-owner, often with a view to social acceptability rather than religious conviction. According to Schoeman (2012), the possibility of slaves receiving religious instruction had not arisen before Georg Schmidt<sup>169</sup> arrived in 1737. The Khoi had been a subject of interest in Europe and, when Schmidt arrived, it was in order to work with them. Even though 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch democratic republicans argued for the equality of all men, irrespective of race or creed, it was with the “possible exception of the Hottentots at the Cape of Good Hope” who were allegedly “closer to unintelligent cattle than humans” (Vink, 2007: 36-37). Ross (2004) points out that Schmidt was allowed to continue his work among the Khoi unhindered until he started baptising them, which would have

<sup>167</sup> Slaves were not allowed to marry legally before the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>168</sup> In 1812 Rev Vos appealed successfully for the restrictive ban on the sale of baptised slaves, saying that it was of mutual benefit to owner and slave, as Christian slaves were “better than heathens or Mohammedans” (Schoeman, 2012: 451).

<sup>169</sup> Georg Schmidt, a German missionary of the Moravian Church, an evangelical Protestant denomination, had been the first full-time missionary in the Cape. He ministered to a small group of Khoisan on the fringe of the colony from 1737 to 1744. In 1792 three Moravian missionaries found a convert of Schmidt’s at the place where he had preached. They founded Genadendal on the spot and resumed his work. Genadendal was the first of hundreds of mission stations in South Africa (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

been construed as increasing their status. Local ministers vehemently opposed this and he was sent back to Europe in 1744.

The Moravians had been instructed by their founder to obey the law of the land and, from Schmidt's diaries, it is evident that he accepted the phenomenon of slavery and encouraged slaves to accept their lot passively. Both the Dutch and the Moravian Churches emphasised spiritual rather than physical freedom, in the east as well as at the Cape. The church which could have been a critical voice against slavery and the treatment of the enslaved, chose to work within the framework provided by the state. The Dutch Church, especially, would play a much more dominant role in the implementation and support of apartheid as will be seen later in this chapter.

A change in attitude of the local Christians to the slaves occurred with the arrival of a young Dutch minister, Van Lier, in 1786. He had been influenced by the English Evangelical movement and had a simpler and less conventional approach to ministry than his conservative predecessors, leading to a revival in the congregation at the Cape. In the Boland<sup>170</sup> a new attitude is evident from 1794 when Rev MC Vos returned from studies in the Netherlands as an ordained minister, himself a descendant of European and Asian forebears. He began instructing his own slaves and those sent to him by some of his neighbours (Schoeman, 2012).

Unlike the Muslim leaders whose work was done quietly among the slaves, the Christians began their evangelisation with enthusiasm, culminating in the arrival of the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society<sup>171</sup> in 1799, the year that the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Zending Genootschap* (Slave Church)<sup>172</sup> was founded. Schoeman (2012) observes that up to this time slaves had little reason to be attracted to the religion of their oppressors and this would have been the first time that the slave masters would be showing any concern for their well-being. At the same time, though, this was an acknowledgement of their personal dignity (however limited) and would have contributed to some sense of identity and self-respect (Schoeman, 2012). The Slave Church, however, did not have the full support of the Reformed congregation and had difficulty finding a leader, and it was forced to meet in private houses or rented meeting rooms. In 1804 it had raised sufficient funds to open a chapel in Long Street for the instruction of slaves but could not describe itself as a formal congregation due to objections by the Church (Worden, et al, 1998).

<sup>170</sup> The area north-east of the Cape, the primary wine-growing region.

<sup>171</sup> The London Missionary Society had been founded in 1795 with the purpose of spreading the word of Christ to the 'heathen' and other 'unenlightened' nations. This was part of the larger Wesleyan movement which took place in England from the mid-1700s and emphasised personal discipline and righteousness.

<sup>172</sup> This was the first local missionary society, founded by local colonists at the instigation of Rev M. C. Vos and Dr J Van der Kemp in 1799. The society erected chapels, called *gestichten*, as places where 'coloureds' could worship. Van der Kemp, a Dutch member of the London Missionary Society later established the Bethelsdorp mission station (1802) which became a refuge for Khoi from settlers; he married a slave girl and campaigned actively against the labour practices of the Boers (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

Worden, et al (1998) describe mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Cape Town as a religious society<sup>173</sup> where church attendance was regarded as a mark of respectability by the ‘white’ middle-class and mission societies attempted to impose the same values on the poor. Islam was officially recognised as a religion in Cape Town with five mosques<sup>174</sup>. Emancipation, improved prosperity, and the introduction of a steam ship to Zanzibar improved the previously isolated Cape Muslims’ contact with mainstream Islam; teachers came from India and Arabia to work in Cape Town (Worden, et al, 1998). Religion then, it may be concluded, shaped the morals of colonial society. In a personal communication, Rev Boesak (2018), expressed the view that the church has been “the centrepiece in the struggle for dignity and respectability” since colonial times.

### **THE CHURCH AND EMANCIPATION**

After emancipation, many of the formerly enslaved flocked to the mission stations which offered them a home. Those who had been allowed to work for themselves and earned “*koeliegeld*”<sup>175</sup> or had benefitted from wills had some experience with dealing with money, others would have skills which equipped them with for finding jobs on emancipation. Some had the support of family or friends who were free and could help with the transition. However, the majority of them, would have found it difficult to establish and support themselves in a free society and it was to the mission stations that they turned, substituting the paternalism on the farms for the paternalism of the church (Schoeman, 2012; Viall, et al, 2011).

The mission station was seen as the setting to shape the behaviour of freed slaves, to ‘civilise’ and ‘humanise’ them, and to inculcate ‘respectability’ and decency in them – these were all qualities that had previously attracted slaves to Islam. By 1884 numerous missionary societies ran at least 380 mission stations, building up their churches, providing education and teaching agricultural skills. Those who lived on the mission station had to belong to the church and were to abide by strict rules governing their behaviour. Control of the slave masters was thus replaced by control of the church, creating a pliable group of people, obedient to the *baas*<sup>176</sup>.

When I interviewed Petersen, on my visit to the former mission station in Pniël, she described how the church had played a central role in her life growing up. Church services and Sunday school were the main events of every week; children belonged to the Brigades (separate for boys and girls) which she described

<sup>173</sup> Up until 1778, the VOC promoted the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Dutch language; thereafter the Lutherans were granted permission to worship in public. After the British occupation in 1795, both the DRC and the Anglican Church were kept as established churches, subsidised by the British government, and Islam was allowed to be practised publicly. In 1804 freedom of religious association was extended to Catholics and Jews and all those who worshipped an Almighty Being (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Van der Ross, 2005).

<sup>174</sup> The *Jami’a* or Queen Victoria Mosque was built in 1850, on the first land to be granted by the government for the erection of a mosque; this was a deliberate attempt to secure the loyalty of the Malay Corps during the frontier war of 1846 (Worden, et al, 1998: 187)

<sup>175</sup> Besides working for their masters, the enslaved could be used to earn money for the latter outside of the domestic situation and occasionally for themselves; this was known as *koeliegeld* = literally coolie money, after the term for an unskilled native labourer in some Asian countries

<sup>176</sup> Afrikaans for boss, master, employer; used to denote social status usually based on race, during apartheid SA.

as “something like Girl Guides or Scouts but with religious activities”. The church bazaar was the “biggest event of the year”, besides other fundraising activities. The congregation dressed up for church in suits and dresses with hats, women did not wear trousers and no jeans were allowed (Petersen, 2018).

Petersen, who is a master’s student in Historical and Heritage Studies, contemplated whether the first families to settle on the land donated to the church by two farmers who owned adjoining plots of land in the area, had really been free. They had been governed by rules and conditions set by the church, especially curfews enforced by the first church minister, who rode through the town on horseback to ensure that everyone had obeyed the curfew heralded by the ringing of the old slave bell. She expressed incredulity that a 20-year-old pastor<sup>177</sup> had been placed in charge of the mission station and had wielded so much authority (Petersen, 2018). Residents also paid a levy to the church for living on the land although they never owned it. She said that the donation of the land, which lies between Franschoek and Stellenbosch, the heart of the wine-growing areas of the Cape, could have been to ensure that the farmers continued to have a steady supply of labour after the emancipation of the enslaved. Giliomee and Mbenga (2007) say that the enslaved were indispensable to the farms and it was generally thought that the economy would collapse if slavery were abolished, which would support Petersen’s hypothesis that the donation of the farmland might have been to keep the labour source close.

People in Pniël had lived there for generations and have intermarried. I was struck by the insularity of the community and how outsiders such as the advent of the Bangladeshi shopkeeper, the ‘white’ gallery owner and even ‘coloured’ people from other communities are viewed with suspicion<sup>178</sup>. Given the history of the mission stations, with its strict conformity to Christianity and the control over how those who lived there were meant to behave, this insularity is perhaps not surprising. However, the community has failed to adapt to the changes happening around it, such as the influx of migrant farmworkers and how the different demographics impact on housing and schooling.

## **THE BRITISH AT THE CAPE**

In the 1820s, after the second British occupation<sup>179</sup>, the English system of law was introduced. English became the only official language of the colony and the immigration<sup>180</sup> of British<sup>181</sup> settlers was encouraged. “White skins, the English tongue and bourgeois values were the defining hallmarks” and English identity

<sup>177</sup> Rev Stegmann of the Apostolic Union was in charge of the mission station from 1843 until 1908; he served as pastor, teacher and administrator (Viall, et al, 2011).

<sup>178</sup> Petersen’s husband is from Elsie’s River and the community was initially concerned about him coming from an area where there was so much poverty and crime.

<sup>179</sup> The British had occupied the Cape briefly at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the request of the Dutch after the French invaded Holland, but the Cape took on a new importance for them once they commanded the sea route to India and they were back in 1806 to stay for the next 155 years (Sparks, 2003).

<sup>180</sup> In 1820, about 4 000 settlers arrived from Britain in the Eastern Cape, as the beneficiaries of a major scheme of assisted migration (Ross, 2004).

<sup>181</sup> Jews, Indians and Africans immigrated to the Cape but Northern European Protestants were preferred.



(which embraced Scots and Anglicised Dutch) dominated business, municipal, educational and cultural institutions (Worden, et al, 1998: 213). When the Cape was granted responsible government by the British, money was poured in to improve the harbour and railways; the Cape railway was extended to Beaufort West<sup>182</sup> and Kimberley<sup>183</sup> and the economy leapt forward from that of subsistence farming when diamonds and gold were discovered.

Ross (2004) refers to the rise of English nationalism at the Cape, saying that the English held strong negative opinions of the ‘whites’ they had conquered, including that they were lazy and pampered by their slaves, and interested only in eating and gambling. English values were affirmed in the media while poverty was stereotyped as destructive to family life, resulting in crime and moral degradation. This stereotyping of the poor became racial, and by the 1830s these stereotypes were also reflected in the targets of the law, according to Worden, et al (1998). Malays, Khoisan and the enslaved were all suspects of crime, whereas a propertied ‘white’ man was never suspected although the Irish were considered to be drunkards and soldiers and sailors disorderly (Worden et al, 1998).

The British were afraid of the degeneration of the imperial race, through contact with the Dutch, Asians and Cape Town’s mixed population, according to Ross (2004) and British settlers were encouraged to come to the Cape to boost the ‘white’ population. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Worden, et al (1998) report that legislation began to exclude undesirable aliens and those who couldn’t write in European characters<sup>184</sup> and residential segregation was becoming more common. The affluent were able to separate themselves from the less desirable through racial restrictions in title-deeds of estate developments. This spatial segregation along economic lines continues to separate Capetonians post-apartheid. Segregation was also happening in institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals and asylums, and sport clubs and theatres. This was seen by the ‘white’ middle class as a way of controlling and ordering the town and they were supported by immigrants who were eager to establish their place in the social hierarchy. This was part of an international trend and Australia and the southern states in the USA provided models of segregation (Worden, 1998). Zinn (2016) recalls the influence that Miss Molly, her grandmother’s employer had on her grandmother and “her desire to be English and ‘prim and proper’”. She recalls the ritual around the visits of Miss Molly for whom her grandmother worked as a domestic worker, as both “fascinating and terrifying”,

We had to dress up in our Sunday best ... our hair was done, clothing neatly pressed and our shoes shone ... We had to sit quietly with our hands on our lap and we were only allowed to speak when spoken to [in] our best English” (Zinn, 2016: 12).

<sup>182</sup> The first municipality in the Cape; about 570 km from the Cape in the central Karoo; mainly sheep farming area

<sup>183</sup> A town in the Northern Cape; the first place where diamonds were discovered in South Africa.

<sup>184</sup> Chinese especially were excluded, registered and controlled

Adhikari (2006) references the shame attached to speaking the Afrikaans vernacular distinctive of some ‘coloured’ communities, and says that as early as 1910, ‘coloured’ people were urged to perfect the English language, which was considered more civilised and respectable. February (1981) argues however that ‘coloured’ people were aware that mastering English would give them access to a wider culture and world. “English” he says, “was the language of Shakespeare and not of the ox-wagon and the musket”, whereas “Afrikaans was the language of apartheid, Afrikanerdom, insularity and oppression” (February, 1981: 94). February (1981) argues that this choice was politically inspired. English was also the language of the workplace and certain public institutions, according to Paulse (2002), and women who did domestic work often had English employers. It was therefore advantageous economically to be able to speak English. Bennett (2018) revealed in her interview that her grasp of English afforded her certain advantages as well as appearing to compensate for the darkness of her skin,

I was the darkest in my family; my father’s friends called me *kaffirpoppie*<sup>185</sup>. People used to say, ‘she’s so dark but she speaks good English.’

Bennett shared that because she was so quiet, she had been presumed to be ‘slow’. At her mother’s request, she was allowed to sit in the Sub A class at the art table as a concession. While she drew and painted, she absorbed the lessons of the day and when assessments were done, she was top of the class. “What if I had spoken Afrikaans instead and was placed in the *aanpassingsklas*<sup>186</sup> and stayed there? This story might have had a very different ending, but because I was English-speaking and there was no adaptation class I was given the chance to prove myself”. In effect, being able to speak English meant that she had a better chance academically than her Afrikaans-speaking peers and could well have been the difference to her success or failure at school and later university (Bennett, 2018).

### **CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECTABILITY**

In 1848 Bishop Robert Gray took up appointment as Anglican bishop at the Cape at the time when there were only six Anglican clergymen and five churches. Urban mission work became a feature of Cape Town Anglicanism and education lay at the heart of Anglican reform. Diocesan College (1849) and St Cyprian’s (1871)<sup>187</sup> were founded for the middle classes and Zonnebloem College<sup>188</sup> or the ‘Kaffir College’ was started to inculcate western values in the children of African chiefs.

<sup>185</sup> Kaffir = derogatory term for a ‘black’ person, coupled with *poppie* = Afrikaans for doll

<sup>186</sup> An adaptation class for children considered ‘slow’. She pointed out that at her school there would have been more classes for Afrikaans- than English-speaking children and that there were adaptation classes for ‘slow’ children in the Afrikaans stream.

<sup>187</sup> Both Diocesan College and St Cyprian’s School have retained their status as private or independent Christian schools in post-apartheid SA, catering largely to the middle class, still predominantly ‘white’ South Africans, while Zonnebloem College has changed its demographic as a result of forced removals out of District Six and surrounds and now caters mostly to ‘black’, underprivileged children who are bussed in from outlying areas.

<sup>188</sup> Zonnebloem was discussed in the previous chapter

Orphanages and refuges for prostitutes were developed by a group of young British women. “Reclaiming the poor from Islam” was the driving force behind urban mission work and part of a larger movement to create respectability through dress, time discipline, basic literacy, drill and games, forging a church-going urban working class. Ironically, the education offered at church schools also attracted Cape Muslims in the 1850s (Worden, et al, 1998: 186).

Organisations such as the Salvation Army helped create a culture of respectability and contributed to the formation of a ‘coloured’ petty bourgeoisie with British values. Anglican societies such as the Cowley Fathers, and the YMCA, played an important role in the socialisation of young male immigrants. Self-help societies which were popular amongst the ‘coloured’ elite and Dutch, also contributed to the culture of respectability. Temperance societies along with legislation that curtailed drunkenness, laziness and immorality, were an important source of respectability among lower middle class ‘coloureds’ who lived alongside bars and shebeens and wanted to separate themselves from the stereotypical ‘coloured’ drunk (Ross, 2015; Worden, et al, 1998).

### **THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH AND SEGREGATION**

The fundamental role of the DRC in the formulation of apartheid has variously been described by Rev David Botha (2000), Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) and Rev Allan Boesak (2015). Tutu (1999) says that the DRC had provided the theological rationale for apartheid and had even preceded it with proposals for legislation to separate the races. Rev Botha (2000, 2018) agrees that the missionary policy of the DRC was integrated with the political strategy of the NP to win the elections in 1948, while Boesak (2015) maintains that the theological justification for apartheid was provided by the DRC. He refers to an address given by Rev Botha in 1980 in which he showed conclusively that the policy of apartheid was essentially the missionary policy of the ‘white’ DRC. This is further supported by Giliomee and Mbenga (2007) who point out that many of the principal themes of apartheid were developed among missionary leaders in the DRC who wanted to fulfil their Christian missionary duty towards ‘blacks’ without threatening ‘white’ supremacy and the building of a *volkskerk*<sup>189</sup>. In fact, they say that first printed record of the word *apartheid* appeared in a DRC pamphlet publishing the proceedings of a conference held in 1929 in Kroonstad in what was then the Orange Free State to discuss the expansion of the church’s missionary efforts. Apartheid meant that,

the Gospel had to be taught in a way that strengthened the African character, nature and nationality ... blacks had to be uplifted on their own terrain, separate and apart ... to ensure the survival of a handful of [Afrikaner] people cut off from their national ties

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<sup>189</sup> People’s church

in Europe (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 259).

The DRC ministers and missionary strategists were therefore the first to formulate an ideology of apartheid, not only providing the theological justification but also working out the practical details of the policy. Dr Boesak (2015) in his book on the influence of Calvinism on apartheid and liberation, quotes from the 1958 edition of *Die Kerkbode*, the official mouthpiece of the DRC, thus,

As a church we have always worked purposefully for the separation of the races. In this regard, apartheid can rightfully be called a church policy (Boesak, 2015: 106).

Even though not much focus had been on the conversion of slaves until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, about 2 000 slave children had been baptised in the DRC between 1665 and 1834 and marriages between ‘non-whites’ had been performed in the church. As late as 1829 the Synod laid down that baptised “persons of colour” were to receive communion along with born Christians; marriages were also recorded without any distinction. The DRC expanded greatly during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly through missionary work with the poor, which had been previously neglected (Worden, et al, 1998). By 1857, however, the church declared that the congregations arising from its missionary work would have to worship in separate buildings or institutions. Although it actively worked to convert the ‘heathens’ it was not prepared to share its ‘all-white’ space with the converts. In 1923 the DRC’s Federal Council convened a meeting of ‘black’ and ‘white’ leaders and called for “differential development” rather than “complete segregation”. In an interview with Rev Botha<sup>190</sup>, a priest in the DRMC from 1948 until his retirement, this ‘middle way’ had already been proposed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century so that those congregations who wished to worship together could do so; in reality this was difficult because of the resistance of the upper classes (generally ‘white’) against social integration with the lower classes (generally ‘black’). The aim of missionary policy laid down by the DRC in 1857, in accordance with the international missionary strategies, was to “establish indigenous young churches and lead them towards self-rule, self-support and self-extension” (Botha, 2000).

While Schoeman (2012) posits that colour consciousness and prejudice were largely a characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century British occupation, Vink (2007) says that spatial/racial segregation had long been a feature of Dutch occupation in the East Indies as well as at the Cape. In essence, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) was the ‘black’ arm of the church while the DRC became established as the spiritual home of the Dutch, the *volkskerk* of the Afrikaner people (Botha, 2018). The church maintained its spiritual control over the mission churches and all priests were ‘white’ although those who preached in

<sup>190</sup> Rev Botha studied to become a priest at the seminary in Wellington that had been started by the DRC moderator, Andrew Murray, in 1873. I met him after a visit to the NGK Archives, where I discovered his book, *The Rise of our Third Estate* (in Afrikaans); in the opening paragraph of this book he expresses shock and concern regarding the events at Sharpeville and pleads for the full integration of ‘coloureds’ and ‘whites’ on the grounds of religion, language, culture and geography.

the mother church were called *dominee*<sup>191</sup> and those in the mission church were considered of a lower status and called *eerwaarde*<sup>192</sup> (Botha, 2018), creating further divisions.

Furthermore, autonomous self-governing ‘black’ churches had to be developed to counter the English missionaries who were converting ‘blacks’ by “copying western civilization and religion” and it recommended that education must be based on each group’s national culture, language, history and customs in order for ‘coloureds’ and ‘blacks’ to develop into “self-respecting Christian nations”. Two significant differences to previous DRC policies should be noted – ‘coloureds’ were now included as ‘a separate nation’ and the church emphasised “the equal worth of nations” before God rather than “the equal worth of all individuals” as they had previously done. The church was less likely to condone outright racial discrimination but ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ people could now be separated without guilt, because of their different *cultures* (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007: 279).

Botha (2000) describes the concept of apartheid as essentially “ambiguous” since there was an endeavour to uplift ‘non-white’ communities while at the same time safe-guarding the identity and security of the Afrikaner people. This conflict of interest led to the formulation of separation, politically, economically, socially and territorially — otherwise known as apartheid. The idea of separate development was legitimised by the success of the British native reserves, the practice of separate church development and the support of prominent social scientists and anthropologists at leading Afrikaans universities. This was further legitimised by the model of separation provided by the DRC and DRMC (Botha, 2000). In an interview Botha (2018) said that there was no doubt in his mind that the DRC fully supported the aims of the government. The churches, specifically the Reformed churches, concludes Boesak (2015), played a unique role in the oppression and exploitation of South Africans.

### **SUNDAY BEST: “ARMOUR AGAINST INFERIORITY”**

Jefferson, in her 2016 memoir, *Negroland*<sup>193</sup>, in which she chronicles the rise of America’s ‘black’ upper class from a personal perspective, refers to her mother’s clothes — “suits and furs, gloves and well-fixed hats – the cloche, toque, beret and turban, the pillbox, the angled brim – as armour that protected her against “exclusion and inferiority” (Jefferson, 2016: 222). She remembers her grandmother and her friends in “woollen suits and fox pelts with head and feet; pants suits and silk shirtwaists; crisp hats with half veils” (Jefferson, 2016: 232). She could have been commenting on my own family as I recall my mother similarly attired for a wedding at which I was the flower-girl, the photograph taken in the Company Gardens, one of the popular places for brides to have their photographs taken.



*Figure 27*

My mother is wearing a very fashionable suit and I remember that bag, which may have been made of real ostrich skin, with matching shoes. Her hairstyle is also the very stylish beehive, and on her head, she wears a pill-box hat with the half-veil. With the addition of her pearls, she looks fit to meet the queen. Weddings, like funerals, were community affairs, and everyone pitched in to help, contributing food or helping out on the day, or sewing dresses for brides and their attendants, in the case of weddings. Weddings and 21<sup>st</sup> birthday parties were opportunities to demonstrate respectability and to show the signs of material wealth, such as cars, clothing and the spread of food and number of invited guests. This occasion depicted above was for a Christian wedding. Later that same year I remember that I was a flower-girl for a Muslim wedding of one of our neighbours, who was also a dressmaker. I remember that she sewed all the dresses herself, including mine. Since it was traditional for the bride and her retinue to have two outfits on the day, I was permitted to wear this dress in the morning, changing into the one she had made for the afternoon.

So tied up with the church was respectability and proper presentation that it was common to call your best clothes your “Sunday best”, as borne out by many of the interviewees. I remember that Sundays often provided the occasion for photographs to be taken so that we could be recorded in the best presentation of ourselves, before heading home to hang it up for the next time we would need to show our best selves.



*Figure 28*

The photograph above of my mother and Aunt Merle, (circa 1956) must have been taken on a Sunday, says Aunt Merle, “because we are in our Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. You had your weekday clothes which you put on when you came home from school, and then were weekend clothes that you put on after cleaning the house on a Saturday afternoon and then we had Sunday clothes that we could stay in after church”.

After church they would come home and have tea with the cake that had been baked the day before. She said her parents were not church-goers, but “the sabbath was truly observed,” and she and all of her siblings were baptised and confirmed, and her brothers were choir boys or servers in the church. She can recall her mother sitting with a hymn book on Sunday evenings, listening to the service on the radio. No one was allowed to knit or sew, for fear of “pricking the Lord’s eye” with a needle, a superstition that her mother had. Aunt Merle observed that it was strange that her parents did not attend church services because they believed that they “first had to put their lives in order”. This indicates an element of judgement of whether or not they were good enough to go to church.

One of the photographs that Hardisty chose to share with me was taken on a Sunday after church, in the Claremont Gardens<sup>194</sup>. An aunt, who was the only one in the family who owned a camera, would have taken the photograph. There are very few photographs of them as children as it was expensive to have photographs developed. Before the interview she had gone to her mother for photos which she says her mother kept in a cigar box (an upgrade from the cake tin that her mother had kept them in). In the photograph, six-year-old Hardisty wears what she referred to as her “Sunday best” and she is wearing a hat, because as a

“Pentecostal<sup>195</sup> child I was forced to wear a hat”. She describes the church as extremely conservative; they

<sup>194</sup> Ardenne Gardens, commonly referred to as Claremont Gardens, was founded in 1845, in line with the Victorian passion for collecting plants from around the world. In the 1920s it became a public park. The gardens, with its gracious trees, ponds and sweeping paths, was very popular as a backdrop for photographs for wedding parties.

<sup>195</sup> Pentecostalism is not a church in itself, but a movement of renewal or revival that includes many different churches. Most Pentecostals think that

were expected to dress formally and cover their heads. The church had great influence over their social lives, which revolved around church youth or family picnics, Sunday school and sing-a-longs where hymns were sung and the closest that they came to dancing was in the *juig* or rejoicing that went along with the hymn-singing.

In the photograph on the left, her hat and bag look too grown up for her. Although she poses obediently for the camera, she seems distracted, as if she would rather go off and explore the gardens. She reminisces that after this they would have returned home, where they were expected to handwash their Sunday clothes, to be ironed by her mother and returned to the bottom drawer of her chest of drawers, until the next Sunday or when there would be an occasion that required dressing up. She comments that she is keeping her mouth tightly closed because her front teeth had been extracted by the school dentist, without any reason and her mother had been outraged and refused for the school dentist ever to see her again. In spite of poor finances, her mother paid for her to be seen by a private dentist (Hardisty, 2018).



Figure 29

We were *brandarm*<sup>196</sup>, but I had beautiful clothes that my mother knitted and sewed, because you had to dress a certain way. So many twinsets (Hardisty, 2018).

The photograph on the right that Bennett shared of herself as a toddler, reminded her of being dressed up “appropriately” for church, even though she could not remember much about the actual photograph. “It’s the hat,” she said, pointing to the photograph, “we had to wear a hat to church.” She remembered always dressing up for church, in outfits made by one of the many seamstresses in District Six where they had lived. Two outfits were made each year, one for Christmas and a less formal one for New Year (usually a slacks suit, with a gilet), to be saved for best wear for the coming year.



Figure 30

their movement is returning Christianity to a pure and simple form. Pentecostalism is particularly strong in the developing world where it poses a serious challenge to other, more established, denominations.

<sup>196</sup> Very poor





*Figure 31*

When she showed me the second photograph, she immediately commented, “it must be Sunday; I only wore stockings on Sundays” (she is on the right in the image above). As with Petersen and Hardisty, Bennett stressed the confines of what was respectable dress for church, which also extended to “best wear” even though all three had grown up in very different neighbourhoods in the greater Cape Town area. All three of them also shared how ingrained it had become in their nature, that even now, when dress codes at church have become less rigid, they still found it difficult to not dress ‘properly’.

Many of my family photographs were taken on religious holidays such as Eid and Christmas, when we would be kitted out in new clothes from top to bottom. Often this would be the set of special clothes that would serve as our “Sunday clothes” for the next year, to be worn on all occasions which required us to dress up. Irrespective of whether people were Christian or Muslim, they posed in their best in Maitland Gardens, on their *stoeps* on Sundays or other holidays, as this photograph below of my brothers, a cousin and me, taken in the gardens on Eid day, demonstrates. All four of us are squinting into the sun, but stand obediently to be recorded.



*Figure 32*

From a young age, many of the photographs shared with me, and those in my own collection, show the females kitted out in dresses, wearing gloves, handkerchiefs and handbags, hair perfectly coiffed and, I

know that we would have bathed and rubbed our faces, arms and legs with Nivea cream, to make sure we had no grey knees and elbows. I am struck by how closely this mirrors Jefferson's (2016) description of "good Negro girls" in the 1950s and 1960s, who

... mastered the rigorous vocabulary of femininity. Gloves, handkerchiefs, pocketbooks<sup>197</sup> for each occasion. Good diction for all occasions; skin care (no ashy knees or elbows); hair cultivation (a ceaseless round of treatments to eradicate the bushy and nappy) (Jefferson, 2016: 165).

### **CLOTHING AS A MARKER OF STATUS**

Ross (2004) attributes the use of clothing as a marker of status to the Dutch<sup>198</sup> governing class that at the time, unlike England, was relatively open. Newcomers to the upper levels of society were required to show their status through their lifestyle and way of dress. Anyone could aspire to the ideas of respectability and gentility, in terms of possessions, behaviour and education, and this way of thinking was exported to the colonies. In 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa, therefore, it would not have been deemed proper for the enslaved or those who had been freed to be seen as respectable as the burghers (Ross, 2004). However, this I argue would have provided an opening later, for clothing to be used a mark of upward mobility and may have inflated its importance among those who were previously restricted by rules.

Laws governed the lives of the enslaved, including their dress, down to the type and colour of fabric which was acceptable to wear<sup>199</sup>. A blanket rule in the colonial world was that the enslaved could not wear shoes<sup>200</sup>, making the barefoot the mark of the enslaved. Hats were banned and women wore mostly castoffs from the slave-owners wife (Schoeman, 2012; Ross, 2004). Towards the end of the century, after emancipation, it became fashionable to clothe 'black' male house servants in simplified versions of 'white' boys' clothing known as "*piccanin suits*", signifying their infantilisation, rather than their freedom (Ross, R. 2004: 87).

The strict control over attire for slaves severely restricted them from not only expressing individuality and culture, but also prevented them from demonstrating any signs of upward mobility, no matter how small. Not only was it used to designate their inferior status, but it allowed Europeans to exercise further control over them and also gave them an opportunity to punish the enslaved for any misdemeanours related to

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<sup>197</sup> handbags

<sup>198</sup> However, the dress code for the enslaved was similarly stipulated under British rule in South Carolina by the Natives Act of 1735 which outlawed anything deemed too extravagant for the enslaved. This served both to distinguish them from their European masters and entrenched the superiority of the latter. In the Spanish colony of Louisiana, the Edict of Good Government dictated that slave women's hair be covered and prevented them from wearing the same jewellery and other adornments as European women. The wearing of the head-wrap was supported by European women as a way to make Creole and mixed women less attractive to European men; the head-wrap also prevented any confusion with regards to any enslaved women or their descendants, who might have passed as 'white' (Mtshali, 2018).

<sup>199</sup> The first distinction would have been between the clothed and the unclothed – respectable people had most of their bodies covered while savages (indigenous people as well as the poor) exposed their torsos and limbs; distinctions also developed between "slave and free, Christian and Muslim, young and adult, man and woman, town and country, military and civilian, Dutch-speaker and English-speaker, the mourning and the celebrating, clergy and laity" (Ross, 2004: 86).

<sup>200</sup> By 1813 the VOC stipulations regarding dress had been removed except for the prohibition of shoes and stockings.

dress. I propose that the issue of dress illustrates how slaves were prevented any control over a life skill that is mastered by children of 18 months to three and a half years, and teaches them independence, decision-making and control, undermining their ability to lay down the foundation for self-determination and independence (as discussed in the previous chapter).

The extent to which clothing was considered to be a marker of status can be seen in the dress of Krotoa, interpreter for the Dutch and Khoi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who traversed the space between European and indigenous; not only did her name change (to Eva in Van Riebeeck's household) but she is said to have changed clothes as well, moving between Dutch dress and Khoi skins as she presented her two selves (Worden, et al, 1998). Given the strict control over how the enslaved were allowed to dress and the markers attached to dress, I contend that it is likely to have led to the over-emphasis of dress post-emancipation, when those who were free could exercise more control over how they wished to present themselves. I further assert that dress became a more permanent marker of status and respectability among the descendants of the enslaved. The importance of clothing as an indicator of status and respectability is evident in many of the photographs that were shared with me. In a similar vein, material things became an important indicator of respectability. The enslaved were not allowed to own any personal possessions although some did manage this, either secretly or as a result of the 'goodwill' of their owners, or in cases where they were allowed to work for themselves and earn money. Both Schoeman (2012) and Ross (2004) point out the importance of outward signs of gentility and respectability amongst the colonists being tied up with material things.

### **THE ACCUMULATION OF POSSESSIONS**

In *Portrait of a Slave Society*, Schoeman (2012) lists the possessions of numerous slaves, whose assets were recorded on their death. Alima van Mozambique's belongings on her death in 1825<sup>201</sup>, included: a bed with curtains, two bowls, six cups and saucers, a sugar bowl, pewter teapot and a chest with padlock containing "a good deal of clothing as well as four shawls, a pair of gold earrings and two new pillowcases" as well as money. Sanna van de Caab's possessions in 1828 included eight chairs and a table, a mattress, six pillows and a blanket, a trunk, small items of jewellery, household equipment, and wardrobe with clothes. Elisabeth van de Caab (d 1771) and Magdalena van de Caab (d 1775) possessed similar items. Schoeman comments that "there was nothing to distinguish it from any respectable middle-class home in the town" (Schoeman, 2012: 539). Magdalena was a free 'coloured' woman who lived in a small house consisting of a *voorhuis*<sup>202</sup>, a second room and a kitchen. In addition to her bedding, clothes and tableware, she also owned "emblems

<sup>201</sup> Under the British administration, rules had changed to officially declare that property possessed by a slave (acquired by honest means) remained the property of the slave and not the owner, except in the case of suicide (Schoeman, 2012).

<sup>202</sup> A front room

of modest middle-class respectability such as a small tea table, a tin teapot, a corner shelf with a porcelain teapot and three cups and saucers, a four-poster with its hangings and a blue pull-up curtain, as well as a Bible with two silver clasps, a tortoiseshell comb with silver mountings and a few small silver items (Schoeman, 2012: 582).

This inventory of possessions has echoes in my grandmother and mother's display cabinets which house ornaments or glassware and crockery "too good" for everyday use. My mother can identify every object in her cabinet according to who she received it from, or on what occasion it was given, or who it once belonged to. Hardisty too recalls her mother's cabinet where the best crockery was kept, to be taken out only for special guests. "I also have a cabinet," she confessed. This inventory was also often recorded in photographs taken when a big purchase was made, such as a car, on birthdays, and other celebrations that show tables laden with food, set out on tableware reserved for special occasions. This is portrayed in the photograph below taken in the 1950s, of my grandmother and her sister-in-law and niece and nephews.



*Figure 33*

Trophies that someone had won have been displayed on the table with the food and drink. So important was it to include this proof of achievement and record it for posterity, that the photographer has not considered that it obscures two of his sitters. The photograph includes shows some of the cakes, fruit and cold drinks which were standard fare. Bowls of sweets, chips, nuts and raisins and *konfyt* would also be expected. Later, the spread would be replaced by "savouries". Similarly, the photograph taken on my first birthday, seems more concerned with recording the spread on the table than on the guests in the background.



*Figure 34*

My mother continues to lay out a spread like this every Eid, or birthday. Although she no longer bakes herself, she still has cake every weekend, in case visitors drop by. Smith (1999) and Willis (1999), referring to the photographs ‘black’ people took in the pre-civil rights era in America, say that this documentation of the evidence of outward signs of material wealth and achievements, creates a sense of self-worth. Abel (1999) asks for whose gaze these attempts at self-presentation were meant. I argue that these frozen slices of everyday life were taken to prove that we were not nothing, that we were decent and respectable. The photograph below taken of my mother on the day of her confirmation, defies her designation as a second-class citizen, it disrupts the official apartheid narrative of what it meant to be ‘coloured’ and proves to those who would take the time to see, that she dressed a certain way, owned certain things. She seems to be unconsciously mimicking the girl in the print hanging on the wall behind her, in the way she holds her hands and turns her head to the side. The images convey this negotiation of respectability; the photograph tells a story and enables “knowledge to be passed down, validated, absorbed and refigured in the present” (Edwards, 2005: 39).



*Figure 35*

Paulse (2002) points out that residents in Tramway Road and Ilford Street, compensated for the general working-class<sup>203</sup> conditions of their homes, by signalling the distinctions in class and status through language and respectability and through the ownership of material possessions such as a telephone or a car, both of which indicated an elevated status. I recall that my grandfather was one of the first to have a television in 1976 in Walmer Estate, and that it conferred a certain status on us, besides making our house very popular at certain times of the evening, when neighbours found excuses to visit.

### **CLEAN AND IN GOOD ORDER**

In spite of the areas that apartheid confined us to, our mothers and grandmothers ensured that our homes were clean and in good order and that we behaved according to a set of principles set down by them.

Wilkerson (2011) observes that trying to stay within the narrow confines of acceptability put pressure on everyone — to be “a certain kind of Protestant, hold a particular occupation, have a respectable level of wealth or the appearance of it and draw the patronisingly appropriate lines between oneself and those of lower rank of either race in that world” (Wilkerson, 2011: 33). Jefferson (2016) points out that their inferiority complex shows itself in a “pathological struggle for status with the Negro world and craving for

<sup>203</sup> Because of tenancy conditions and landlord neglect

recognition in the white world”<sup>204</sup> (Jefferson, 2016: 35).

Hardisty, said she grew up with fear — fear of what she was allowed or not allowed to do, a feeling of being watched. This was partly because of the strict policing of boundaries in every aspect of our lives, but there was a lot of pressure to excel, to be somebody, she said. “You had to have the right job. People looked down on you if you didn’t matriculate or work at the bank” (Hardisty, 2018). When her family was forcibly removed in 1971 from the area she was born and relocated to a sub-economic area, her mother was deeply troubled by the stigma of having to live in a council house.

Jefferson (2016) observes that she was taught to distinguish herself through presentation and to excel through deeds and manners. However, this did not condone showing off, unless it reflected well on your community, and as long as you did not demonstrate “basic racial traits” such as loud voices or bad manners or poor taste which could paint you, your parents or your community as “vulgar, coarse and inferior” (Jefferson, 2016: 4-5). You had to have

... manners to please grandparents and quell the doubts of any white strangers loitering to observe your behaviour in schools, stores, and restaurants (Jefferson, 2016: 165).

“We teased my mother that her accent changed when she spoke to white people or our play-white aunties,” said Hardisty whose ‘white’ grandfather had been reclassified to ‘coloured’ to marry her grandmother, a dark-skinned woman from St Helena Island. This meant that some of her mother’s sisters could ‘pass’ for ‘white’. She related how her mother and aunt would go out together and the aunt would climb into the ‘white’ carriage on the train while they had to sit in the ‘coloured’ one and reunite again when they got to their destination.

The pressure to reflect well on your family and community is also described by Bennett when she talks about an aunt who was an opera singer with the Eoan Group. The children in the family were often “rewarded” by being taken to shows at the City Hall by this aunt and, says Bennett, “our mothers had to make sure that we were dressed appropriately and we had to make sure that we behaved”. Bennett referred to this experience as a kind of “distancing” from the community, as if the way they normally dressed and behaved was not good enough to be seen by the patrons of the City Hall. The Eoan Group<sup>205</sup> was founded in the 1933 in District Six by an Englishwoman, Mrs Southern-Holt, who was concerned that ‘coloured’ people were handicapped by their “poor speech and social graces”; speech classes were started in the primary schools followed later by a wide range of arts, including ballet, opera and painting (Van der Ross, 2005: 150; SA History, 2018). Van der Ross (2005) quotes the vision of the founder as one that “could realise the dawning of a new cultural expansion” for ‘coloured’ people and “a new understanding of well-being,

<sup>204</sup> Quoting E. Franklin Frazier author of *Black Bourgeoisie* published in 1957

<sup>205</sup> Apartheid legislation, forced removals and bans on playing to integrated audiences took its toll on the company but it continues its work in

physical and mental, for their race” (Van der Ross, 2005: 150).

Rushin remembers watching her mother, as one of the distinguished voices of the Eoan Group, get ready for performances as an opera singer<sup>206</sup>. She loved seeing her transform into a glittery stage persona, taking the curlers out of her hair, and finishing off with lashings of hairspray. Rushin’s mother, May Abrahamse, became one of the household names in Cape Town, along with Royal Ballet dancer, Johaar Mosaval<sup>207</sup> (Van der Ross, 2005).

There was a sense of dignity and pride, we were not nothing (Rushin, 2018).



*Figure 36*

The photograph of Rushin and her family was taken at the Durban airport in 1971 by her godfather who was a professional photographer. Her mother’s stance, the way she holds her head and the hands which are placed on Rushin’s shoulders, all speak of a life on the stage to me; this is someone who is used to being looked at, who needs to constantly present herself at her best and this extends to the rest of the family. Her hands are not at rest, they remind me of those of a dancer, drawing attention to her daughter whose shoulders she seems to be drawing back, encouraging her to stand tall.

Rushin describes her father as “debonair”, always with a sense of formality, who proudly wore the blazers of

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Athlone on the Cape Flats

<sup>206</sup> The Group held its first arts festival in 1957 at which an Italian opera was presented for the first time by a South African company in South Africa (Van der Ross, 2005).

<sup>207</sup> Mosaval grew up in District Six and began dancing in the late 1940s; he was forced to pursue his career overseas and became a senior principal dancer at the prestigious Royal Ballet.



the sports committees he served on. She recalls living in Durban as the happiest years of her life and this image is a treasured memory of their time there. As a young child of ten, she was unaware that her parents' marriage was over at this point and that her mother would move to Cape Town with her and her sister. Although she is aware of the sense of always having to be on good behaviour, she thinks that the façade of all being well was more about preserving appearances to friends and family about the marriage.

Bennett expressed similar sentiments related to her parents' divorce and says that she cannot understand why she felt the need to pretend that they were still a nuclear family when she went to school. This was also in the 1970s, as with Rushin's family, and divorce was not a common phenomenon in the community. "We were a family of interest," notes Bennett, "on the edge of respectability". Later, she would discover that she was not the only child of divorced parents in her class. However, she remembers her mother saying that "people didn't need to know what's going on in our house". In both Bennett and Rushin's stories, I suggest that keeping up the façade of the nuclear family, and the avoidance of the stigma of divorce, was intrinsic to the portrayal of respectability in the eyes of the community. My brother reflects that much of his life has been about proving himself at work and on the sports field. He feels constantly judged, although he can hold his own at work and believes that he is just as good as anyone else.

The pressure to be good enough seems relentless. As Fanon (2008) illustrates,

The Negro is comparison ... he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises ... The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one's own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other (Fanon, 2008: 163).

I have to examine why my mother's formal lounge continues to bother me so much. Perhaps because more than 20 years post-apartheid, I see it as a sign that she still feels the need to prove that, in spite of being 'coloured', she is decent and respectable? When will she feel good enough?

Fanon (2008) speaks about the collective unconscious of the Negro, which makes him feel that he is a 'Negro' to the degree to which one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of these Negro modes of behaviour is white ... In the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality. In other words, he is Negro who is immoral. If I order my life like that of a moral man, I simply am not a Negro (Fanon, 2008: 148-149).

Ergo, if I present myself as respectable and decent, I am not a 'coloured'.



# CHAPTER SIX

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*CONFRONTING OUR PAST:  
FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY*



## CHAPTER SIX

### CONFRONTING OUR PAST: FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

*Acknowledgement involves an acceptance not only of the existence of a phenomenon, but of its emotional and social significance. It presupposes a sense of responsibility for the occurrence, an understanding of the meaning that it has for the persons involved and for society as a whole (Sachs, 2009: 79).*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the promise of the 1994 democratic elections, the persistence of racialised identities in post-apartheid South Africa, and what Adhikari (2006) refers to as “the surge of colouredism” (Adhikari, 2006: 472). This chapter examines the positioning of the ‘coloured’ in the current political terrain of a post-apartheid South Africa against the background of the pre-1994 period, and attempts to make sense of the cycles of reification and rejection associated with the identity. I examine the question of remembering and ask if South Africans are doing enough to confront, acknowledge and come to terms with their past.

### FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

At the opening of parliament on 2 February 1990, President FW de Klerk announced the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress, the Pan-African Congress, the South African Communist Party and other liberation movements (SAHO, 2012). I was at work at the Eros School for Cerebral Palsied, a special education school for ‘coloured’ children with cerebral palsy and learning disabilities. The school was humming with excitement and anticipation, and Fiona, one of my colleagues, and I decided to slip out during the tea break to buy a newspaper. On our return we were summoned to the principal’s office to be chastised for leaving the school premises without permission — an ironic example of what it meant to work for the hierarchical and regimented Department of Coloured Affairs, while the promise of freedom beckoned. A few months earlier, Fiona and I had been arrested together during what became known as the Purple Rain<sup>208</sup> march. We had started working at Eros together in January 1988 and had become friends. Fiona was English-speaking and ‘white’, a graduate of the University of Stellenbosch, and was married to an Afrikaner, a conscientious objector<sup>209</sup>, serving his time as a dentist in Gugulethu<sup>210</sup>. Our

<sup>208</sup> A protest march held on 2 September 1989 in Cape Town city centre; the police responded to a sit-in with batons, and teargas as well as a water-cannon, spraying purple dye to stain demonstrators, making them easier to identify and detain

<sup>209</sup> He had refused to do military service based on religious grounds.

<sup>210</sup> The township was established in 1958 to accommodate migrant workers who had come to Cape Town seeking work, Gugulethu also absorbed the overflow from Langa which had been the only ‘black’ residential area since 1927 (SAHO).

friendship offered many reasons for hope.

On 11 February Nelson Mandela was freed, “ending the forced ‘legal’ division of people by the colour of their skin” (Pilger, 2006: 189). In his book, *Birth: The Conspiracy to Stop the '94 Elections*, Peter Harris (2010) echoes the unstoppable nature of what had been set in motion, and details the logistical nightmare of pulling together an election for 20 million people in a country that had only ever catered for 2 or 3 million voters. The election was to be held in the midst of imploding homelands, incompetency, anarchy and the possibility of civil war; millions of people were without identity documents, there was no voters’ roll for the majority of the population and little infrastructure to deal with the logistics difficulties. There was a very real threat of derailment by right-wing forces, and the reluctance of homeland leaders to give up power. Deaths mounted up over this period, including the assassination of Chris Hani<sup>211</sup>, massacres in Boipatong<sup>212</sup> Tembisa<sup>213</sup>, and at St James Church<sup>214</sup> in Cape Town, but there was no stopping the process which had been set in motion with De Klerk’s announcement four years previously (Harris, 2010). Birth is an appropriate analogy, recalling the blood, pain and trauma that brought our democracy into being, and a reminder that this democracy needed to be nurtured so that South Africa could be truly free.



*Figure 37*

On 27 April 1994 it was fitting that Fiona and I went to cast our vote together, each with our baby daughters, full of hope for the future that our girls would grow up in together. The photograph above was taken on our return, after standing in a queue for hours (not nearly as long as people who voted in townships all over the country). It is not a great image, our attention clearly not on the photographer, but it holds the joy and promise of the great social change that was to be ushered in with the first democratic elections.

<sup>211</sup> The general secretary of the Communist Party, gunned down on 10 April 1993 in front of his home in what appeared to be a deliberate ploy to start a race war on the eve of the elections.

<sup>212</sup> On 17 June 1992 a group of armed hostel dwellers, affiliated to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), attacked residents of the Joe Slovo informal settlement, killing 45

<sup>213</sup> 2 August 30 1993 people in the ANC stronghold of Tembisa were killed by IFP hostel-dwellers

<sup>214</sup> Azanian Peoples’ Liberation Army (APLA - the armed wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress) attacked the St James Church on 25 July 1993, killing 11 people

## **VOTING FOR THE OPPRESSORS**

Adhikari (2006) contends that the voting patterns reflect the vulnerability and sense of alienation from the African majority that most ‘coloured’ people felt. Jacobs (2007) attributes the support for the NP to propaganda (reinforced by the ‘white’ media) which emphasised the similarities between Afrikaners and ‘coloureds’, and the exploitation of the Christian history that Afrikaners and ‘coloureds’ shared, both of which appealed to the ‘coloured’ voters. ‘Coloured’ people had enjoyed relative privilege<sup>215</sup> during apartheid, had never had to carry pass books or been “deported”<sup>216</sup> and the NP had played on fears of *swart gevaar*<sup>217</sup>, in order to get the ‘coloured’ voters to throw in their lot with them (Jacobs, 2007). Levenson and Jacobs (2018) suggest that the term relative oppression would be more appropriate, and this is supported by Mountain’s (2003) assertion that the ‘coloured’ community remain on the lower socio-economic scale, largely because of the failure to address the economic legacy of apartheid which has ensured that the ownership of resources remains in the same hands as before 1994. Added to this, is the “deep-seated psychological damage, manifested in feelings of personal and community inferiority and a racially based class structure entrenched by law and custom” (Mountain, 2003: 74).

In grappling to understand the shift from the pre-1994 non-racist struggle to the resurgence of a ‘coloured’ identity, and more recently, the rise of a reactionary ‘coloured nationalism’, I interviewed anti-apartheid activist and journalist, Ryland Fisher. Fisher is a former editor of the *Cape Times*, a daily newspaper distributed in Cape Town. He first of all emphasises the problems related to the broadness of a binding ‘coloured’ identity that was officially described as “a person who is not a White person or a Bantu”. He articulates the contradiction of embracing Black Consciousness and a non-racist struggle, the dichotomy of identifying as ‘black’ on the one hand and struggling for a non-racist society. Fisher believes that, in order to rid ourselves of the smaller, divisive apartheid identities (such as seven different categories of ‘coloured’) it was salient to sacrifice a smaller ‘coloured’ identity for the larger ‘black’ identity. This makes sense to me since the different divisions of ‘coloured’ served to fragment the community and create divisions within the community, apart from the effect that it had on the larger community of oppressed.

With the rise of Black Consciousness<sup>218</sup> ideology in the mid-1970s, and the revival of the Mass Democratic

<sup>215</sup> In the absence of a homeland for ‘coloured’ people, the Western Cape had been declared a “Coloured Labour Preference Area” (‘coloureds’ had been considered for jobs to the exclusion of Africans). During apartheid ‘coloured’ people received certain benefits designed to co-opt them (and prevent a united opposition), while still being victims of colonial segregation and subjugation (Pillay, 2018).

<sup>216</sup> When PW Botha succeeded BJ Vorster in 1978 he revived Verwoerd’s idea of ‘black’ homelands, each with its own chief minister, cabinets, legislature and civil service; however, no separate territory could be identified for ‘coloureds’ and indirect rule was exercised by co-opting ‘coloured’ people into the President’s Council. In 1982 the President’s Council proposed a three-tier parliamentary system made up of 60 members (‘whites’, ‘coloureds’ and Indians) 15 of whom were directly nominated by the State President who also retained additional powers to assure a ‘white’ majority (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Van der Ross, 2015; SAHO, 2014).

<sup>217</sup> literally, ‘black’ danger

<sup>218</sup> During the BCM, ‘black’ unity was emphasised and labels such as ‘coloured’ were rejected as part of apartheid ideology. The repression following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 effectively quelled opposition from within the ‘coloured’ community, until the mid-1970s with the Soweto uprising and the BC ideology which attracted ‘coloured’ support (Adhikari, 2006; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

Movement of the 1980s, the nature of ‘coloured’ identity had been an extremely contentious issue as increasing numbers of educated and politicised people, who had been classified ‘coloured’ under the Population Registration Act, rejected the identity as a construct of apartheid (Adhikari, 2006; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). ‘Colouredness’ came to be viewed largely as an artificial categorisation created to serve the purposes of the ruling government’s divide-and-rule strategy (Adhikari, 2006). This kind of thinking, says Sparks (2003), had a profound impact on ‘coloured’ people who were able to shed the shame associated with “the dark side of their parentage” and “the fawning desire to be patronized by whites” and to identify instead with the ‘black’ cause (Sparks, 2003: 72-73).

This rejection was evident too in the refusal to cooperate with the NP when they created a Tricameral Parliament<sup>219</sup> in 1984. The implementation of a ‘white’ House of Assembly, a ‘coloured’ House of Representatives and an Indian House of Delegates – four-fifths of ‘coloureds’ and Indians, the “beneficiaries of the constitutional amendments” – was rejected in a massive boycott. Instead, the United Democratic Front<sup>220</sup> (UDF) which identified with the Freedom Charter of 1955 was formed, with affiliated student groups, civic associations, political organisations and sports clubs (Sparks, 2003). The non-racial agenda of the UDF reinforced the rejection of ‘coloured’ identity. Nonetheless, Levenson and Jacobs (2018) believe that the Tricameral parliament served to “formalise” ‘coloured’ politics, which survived in the form of the New National Party (NNP) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) post-1994<sup>221</sup>. This ‘coloured’ identity appears to have endured post-1994, with a resurfacing of the assertion of ‘colouredness’ due to fear of ‘black’ majority rule and a perception of marginalisation.

The fact that South Africans continue to think in terms of race is demonstrated by a number of reports in the media that range from protests at a largely ‘coloured’ school in Johannesburg against the appointment of a ‘black’ principal<sup>222</sup> (Andersen, 2017), to the incident at the Reitz Hostel at the University of the Free State, where four ‘white’ students subjected elderly ‘black’ cleaners to gross humiliation. In spite of racism being illegal in South Africa, “blatant acts of racism” continue to surface in the form of violence against farmworkers and discrimination in centres of learning (especially in schools and universities formerly for ‘whites-only’) according to Joel Netshitenzhe, executive director of the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (Netshitenzhe, 2015: 117). More recent is the conflict between the residents of Siqalo (a mostly

<sup>219</sup> At a ‘whites-only’ referendum held in 1983 two-thirds of the ‘white’ electorate approved constitutional reforms which would extend political rights to ‘coloureds’ and Indians while excluding ‘blacks’. This was an attempt to deepen the racial divisions between ‘blacks’ on the one hand and ‘coloureds’ and Indians on the other.

<sup>220</sup> Launched in Mitchell’s Plain in 1983 with Dr Boesak as the main speaker. Within a few months 700 organisations representing two million people had joined the movement, reviving the anti-apartheid movement (Sparks, 2003).

<sup>221</sup> ‘Coloured’ Tricameral politician Peter Marais was to become mayor and then premier of the Western Cape as member of both NNP and DA, after 1994 (Levenson & Jacobs, 2018).

<sup>222</sup> Pupils from Klipspruit West Secondary School were prevented from returning to school after the holidays because parents say they want a ‘coloured’ principal not a ‘black’ one (Makhetha, 2017).

<sup>225</sup> Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters accused the majority of Indian people of being racist.

<sup>226</sup> *Gatvol* means to be fed up or disgusted

Xhosa informal settlement) within Mitchell's Plain, the largest 'coloured' township in Cape Town, the debates around the renaming of the airport and the recent comments by the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters about Indian racism<sup>225</sup>. Confrontations between residents of Mitchell's Plain and Siqalo turned violent, with police resorting to firing rubber bullets; the protest activity is slowly spreading across the city and has seen the rise of a 'coloured' ultra-nationalist organisation, *Gatvol Capetonian*<sup>226</sup>, led by three men from the Cape Flats, who claim that minority groups ('white', 'coloured' and Indian) are being unfairly treated by a racist government, and claiming indigeneity. Responses to these events have varied from the view that there are legitimate grievances concerning marginalisation of the 'coloured population', to the need for a more affirming 'coloured' identity<sup>227</sup> (such as Khoi or Griqua) (Pillay, 2018).

Adhikari (2006) attributes the stability of 'coloured' identity from 1910 to 1994, to four core characteristics: the desire for assimilation with the dominant society, the intermediate status of 'coloureds' in the racial hierarchy, the shame associated with miscegenation, and the marginality of the community which limited options for social and political action (Adhikari, 2006). Erasmus (2001: 20) argues that the end of formal apartheid has not enabled the establishment of a less constricted 'coloured' identity since it focuses on a multicultural rainbow nation discourse and does not consider "the power relations inherent in cultural formation and representation, and the emergence of an African essentialism" which "denies creolisation and hybridity as constitutive of African experiences". This, she says, is at the heart of the ANC's continued inability to successfully articulate a broader 'black' identity which includes 'coloured' people, particularly in the Western Cape (Erasmus, 2001). Soudien (2001) believes that the events surrounding the dismantling of apartheid in 1994 emphasised the depth of the "identity conundrum" in South Africa (Soudien, 2001: 114). He adds that the official and counter-official identities created by apartheid and the struggle against it, complicates the articulation of post-apartheid non-racial identities.

### **THE POLITICS OF BEING 'COLOURED'**

The wavering between support for Afrikaans- and English-speaking 'whites' and the failure of the NP to gain 'coloured' support can be attributed to a number of reasons, according to Van der Ross (2015). It was the Dutch who had imported slaves, the English who had set them free; during and after the Anglo-Boer war the British soldiers stationed at the military camp in Wynberg<sup>228</sup>, had formed close ties with the 'coloured'

<sup>227</sup> 'Coloured' is a racial identity as opposed to the cultural identity of Khoisan; those with a racial identity were relatively better off compared to those with ethnic identity under colonial rule; post-colonially people with ethnic identities are more eligible for redress than those who are from different races which implies that they are from elsewhere (Pillay, 2018).

<sup>228</sup> Early Wynberg was multi-ethnic in character with British, Dutch, German, 'free-blacks' and emancipated slaves owning land; its healthy climate attracted visiting British officials and visitors from India until the 1850s. It remained a separate municipality until 1923 when it was incorporated into the City of Cape Town. Wynberg, with good schools and churches of different denominations, was seen as an upper middle class 'coloured' area; After the Group Areas Act was implemented, the lower part of Wynberg (below the railway line) was zoned as 'coloured' (Bickford-Smith,

people who lived across the railway line. Friendships and lasting relationships were formed. On the other hand, the Dutch and ‘coloured’ people were related by blood, language and religion (Van der Ross, 2015), and it was British capital that ‘opened up’ South Africa in the 19th century and laid a foundation of racial division and ‘white’ supremacy<sup>229</sup>(Pilger, 2006). Adhikari (2006) attributes the emergence of a ‘coloured’ identity to the social changes in the country in the late 19th century, in the wake of the mineral revolution when “acculturated colonial blacks” asserted a separate identity because of their assimilation with western culture and partial European descent (Adhikari, 2006: 469). Around the same time, Bickford-Smith, et al. (1999) and Welsh (2000) indicate that ‘coloureds’ and ‘blacks’ in Cape Town started to organise themselves politically as a consequence of the Anglo-Boer War in which they had participated on behalf of the British. Since the primary drive was to assimilate into the dominant society, ‘coloured’ political leaders at first avoided forming separate organisations until increasing segregation forced them to mobilise for their rights. In 1902, the African Political Association<sup>230</sup>(later, the African Political Organisation, or APO) was started with FZS Peregrino<sup>231</sup> and John Tobin<sup>232</sup> as its first leaders. They were succeeded by Dr Abdullah Abdurahman<sup>233</sup> in 1905, who the previous year had become the first ‘black’ person to be elected to the Cape Town municipal council, representing District Six. His background and education<sup>234</sup>, along with his leadership qualities, earned him respect in the ‘coloured’ community and the APO was to dominate ‘coloured’ politics for four decades (Adhikari, 2006; Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999; Van der Ross, 2015). Abdurahman, as the grandson of a freed slave and a medical doctor, epitomised the founding principles of the APO, which were the promotion of education as the means to advance the ‘coloured’ community, the achievement of economic success, the elimination of social problems, and the assimilation into the ‘white’ middle-class. The APO was an organisation for the advancement of ‘coloured’ people only, and its broader aims were to fight for the franchise for, defend the rights of, and promote unity among ‘coloured’ people (although the concept of ‘coloured’ was not clearly defined). The general election held in the Cape in 1904 created divisions within ‘coloured’ organisations with regard to whether or not to support a ‘white’ party, and if they did so, which party it would be. APO members were also divided about whether or not they should include ‘black’ people in the fight to retain the franchise for ‘coloured’ people or whether the two ethnic groups should fight

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et al, 1999).

<sup>229</sup> With apartheid legally enforced in the 1950s and 1960s and the ‘black’ resistance progressively crushed, British investment rose correspondingly, doubling between 1956 and 1970 (Pilger, 2006: 241).

<sup>230</sup> While African in name, the party appealed predominantly to the ‘coloured’ elite, especially teachers

<sup>231</sup> A Ghanaian who, along with Trinidadian, Henry Williams, spread ideas of American BC leaders and Pan-Africanism among Capetonians (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999); an organiser for the mines and harbours, he also founded a newspaper, *The Spectator*, with the rallying call of “race pride” to try to mobilise the ‘coloured’ people (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Van der Ross, 2015: 35).

<sup>232</sup> Tobin was from Kimberley; he was expelled from the APO for his alleged divisive behaviour since he supported alignment with the Afrikaners rather than the more Anglophile leaning of the organisation (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

<sup>233</sup> President of the APO from 1905-1940 (Van der Ross, 2015)

<sup>234</sup> Educated at a Dutch Reformed Mission School, a Catholic private school and matriculated from the South African College Schools, he earned his medical degree from a university in Glasgow.



separately. Van der Ross (2015) observes that as segregation became more entrenched, divisions within the organisation became more serious.

Abdurahman's daughter, Cissie Gool, became president of the National Liberation League (NLL) of South Africa in 1936, in opposition to the APO whose moderate approach the NLL rejected. Founded on 1 December, Emancipation Day, the organisation appealed to Cape Town's slave past and rejected the more moderate approach of the APO. Like her father, Gool's appeal could also be seen in the representation of what could be construed as a truly Cape identity — her immediate ancestry included an Indian grandfather, a Malay grandmother and a Scottish mother. Furthermore, she exemplified the ideals of the APO concerning education (she attended Trafalgar High School<sup>235</sup> and studied at the University of Cape Town) in spite of the NLL's opposition stance. She was a member of the Cape Town City Council from 1938 to 1960, representing Ward Nine, which included District Six (Vahed, 2012). She protested against the extension of the franchise to 'white' women only<sup>236</sup>, and refused to support the war effort (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999). During her activism she was served with a banning order, arrested during the 1960 State of Emergency and placed in solitary confinement<sup>237</sup>.

The NLL and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), founded in 1943, became the more radical bodies, although neither succeeded in bridging the racial divisions within society (Bickford-Smith, et al, 1999; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). By the 1940s the political identity of 'coloured' people had changed significantly. There was a significant division between the majority of the population which was desperately poor, and the small 'coloured' elite. The Wilcocks Commission<sup>238</sup> (1942) had found widespread poverty, malnutrition and alcoholism among the 'coloured' population; 'coloured' life expectancy was half that of 'whites' while infant mortality was twice as high.

In 1955 the Congress of the People was held in Kliptown, Johannesburg, and an alliance between the African National Congress, the Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress<sup>239</sup> (CPC), the ('white') Congress of Democrats and the (non-racial) South African Congress of Trade Unions, was formed. At this meeting the Freedom Charter<sup>240</sup> was adopted, offering a vision of a democratic non-racial South Africa beyond apartheid, (Sparks, 2003; Van der Ross, 2015). However, the differences both within and between organisations such as the CPC and the Unity Movement, and the conflicts between those who opposed apartheid and those who sought to benefit from it, did not create a climate conducive to a unified resistance.

<sup>235</sup> The first high school for 'coloured' pupils in the Cape, of which her father was one of the founding members

<sup>236</sup> which diluted the 'coloured' vote

<sup>237</sup> In 2003, Gool was posthumously awarded the Order of Luthuli in Silver, one of South Africa's highest accolades.

<sup>238</sup> A commission of inquiry set up by the government to report on the condition of 'coloured' people

<sup>239</sup> The South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO) was formed in 1953 and organised protests and demonstrations, especially against the removal of 'coloured' people from the voters' roll; later changed to the Coloured People's Congress

<sup>240</sup> A statement of the core principles drawn up by the Congress of the People

Additionally, in the aftermath of the state's clampdown from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, 'coloured' political organisations and activists were forced into exile, or other types of confinement and harassment, leading to different kinds of political engagement from different centres in the country. These included those co-opted by the apartheid government into the Tricameral Parliament (from politicians and leaders in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng) or from the Cape Flats, where people had been forcibly removed. Another centre of resistance came from mainly Afrikaans-speaking, rural 'coloured' students and academics, such as Jakes Gerwel, rector of the University of the Western Cape, and trade unionist, Johnny Issel, who had come to Cape Town (Jacobs, 2007).

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by government efforts to find a place for 'coloureds'. In 1968 the 'coloured' representation in parliament — four 'white' people represented 'coloureds' in parliament and two 'white' people represented them in the Cape Provincial Council — was done away with and, in 1969, the Coloured Persons Representative Council (CPRC) was created by the Coloured Persons Representative Council Act of 1964<sup>241</sup>. The Labour Party<sup>242</sup> and the Federal Coloured People's Party were co-opted into the apartheid system (Adhikari, 2006; Van der Ross, 2015). In 1973, the State President appointed the Theron Commission<sup>243</sup> to inquire into and report on affairs of 'coloureds' (Van der Ross, 2015). Once again, like the Wilcocks Commission 30 years previously, Theron found widespread poverty and a high infant mortality rate. These ambivalences pertaining to which 'whites' to support, whether or not to fight as 'coloureds' only, or whether or not to join with other population groups, became the hallmark of 'coloured' politics, from the 1940s with the creation of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department committee<sup>244</sup>, through to the Tricameral parliamentary system of the 1980s. The diversity of the organisations involved and the small number of 'coloured' people made it difficult to affect any meaningful economic or social change on their own, as asserted by Adhikari (2005, 2006).

Adhikari (2006) further asserts that the erosion of civil rights was the most consistent feature of 'coloured' political history from the British administration up until the latter days of apartheid. Starting with restrictions imposed on the franchise in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and segregation measures implemented in the early 1900s, the compromise of labour and economic policies in the 1920s and 1930s, and the enfranchisement of 'white' women, through to the implementation of apartheid legislation and the removal of 'coloured' people

<sup>241</sup> This was dissolved in 1980.

<sup>242</sup> In 1975 the Labour Party won the majority of seats on the council and its leader, Sonny Leon, was appointed chair of the CPRC with the Rev Allan Hendrickse as Minister of Education

<sup>243</sup> this was the second time a commission was set up - the Wilcocks Commission had reported on the same issues in 1936

<sup>244</sup> The Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) was established in 1943, resulting in the formation of the Cape Coloured Permanent Commission (CCPC) made up of 'coloured' representatives from Cape Province, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal. In response, organisations such as the New Era Fellowship (NEF), the NEUM and the APO called a conference of all the anti-apartheid organisations (including sports clubs, community organisations and church groups) in the Western Cape to form the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department committee. Non-collaboration at all levels underpinned the movement's ideals.

from the common voters roll in 1956, ‘coloured’ people were systematically stripped of their civil rights (Adhikari, 2006).

### **THE RESURGENCE OF THE ‘COLOURED’ QUESTION**

I argue that the rise in ‘coloured’ nationalism is akin to the rise in Afrikaner nationalism in the period after the Anglo-Boer War when the Afrikaners had been humiliated and brow-beaten by war, and had to resort to compete with ‘blacks’ on an equal footing for jobs. In the same way that the Afrikaner forged an identity, history and language, ‘coloureds’ are inflating a part of their heritage and claiming indigeneity in a reversed process of othering. Similar to the way that Afrikaners deemed European descent important, Khoisan heritage is now being claimed. The shame of being ‘coloured’ is being used to manipulate a small group of people to reify themselves to a position from which they can look down with contempt at others. While it is unlikely that the small numbers of ‘coloureds’ who are part of the surge in ‘colouredism’ will constitute a force equivalent to the NP circa 1948, this kind of reactionary nationalism is divisive, and counter-productive to building a more humane and equal society. The political history of ‘coloured’ people illuminates the problems related to trying to establish an organisation, party or movement with a ‘coloured’ identity, with integrated ideals and objectives. In the absence of any consensus it seems a futile exercise, doomed to failure.

Adhikari (2006) posits that a surge of “colouredism” is tied up with the desire to counter negative stereotyping with a more positive self-image. The fear of African majority rule and resultant marginalisation is evident in the “first we were not white enough and now we are not black enough” refrain (Adhikari, 2006: 472). Subsequently, post-apartheid South Africa has seen an assertiveness rather than a rejectionist attitude to the identity (Adhikari, 2006; Jacobs, 2007). Fisher (2018) believes that the creation of funding for traditional leaders has brought to the fore “self-proclaimed leaders who never existed before”, although he concedes the relevance of exploring Khoisan roots. The adoption of a Khoi heritage by many may be attributed to the sense of pride in a pre-colonial culture and negates the insult that ‘coloured’ people have no heritage, language, or culture to call their own<sup>245</sup> (Mountain, 2003).

Adhikari (2006) and Erasmus (2001) attribute the motivation to present ‘coloureds’ as “true indigenes” to the fact that the status of relative privilege is no longer of consequence in the new South Africa. A Khoisan identity, though, is a modern invention, an amalgamation of two distinct groups the Khoikhoi and the San, and these two cultures are deeply connected with the Xhosa culture<sup>246</sup>, as indicated by Levenson and

<sup>245</sup> An example of how this affront continues to reverberate in a post-apartheid SA, and how much focus still needs to be put on the dismantling of apartheid-era myths and stereotypes, is evident in the extract from Trevor Noah’s memoir, as discussed in chapter three.

<sup>246</sup> Nearly one in seven Xhosa people in SA are estimated to be of San descent and there are Khoi clans among the Xhosa (Levenson & Jacobs, 2018).

Jacobs (2018). This reinforces the difficulty of trying to forge a ‘pure’ identity in a country marked by what Erasmus (2001) refers to as creolisation and hybridity. Levenson and Jacobs (2018) attribute the rise in ‘coloured’ nationalism to the crisis in the DA’s hold over ‘coloured’ voters<sup>247</sup>, a history of reactionary ‘coloured’ nationalism as a result of the apartheid strategy of using ‘coloureds’ as a buffer between ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’, and the failure of the left in ‘coloured’ neighbourhoods<sup>248</sup>. This divisive politics is not new and neither is it limited to coloureds<sup>249</sup>.

The stripping away of rights described by Adhikari (2005, 2006) coupled with a denial of history, serves to designate a group of people as inferior, as not deserving of the same rights. It renders the group powerless which magnifies the humiliation and shame experienced by the group. As Kaufmann (1996) asserts, minorities resort to contempt as a strategy to deal with shame, rendering the focus of that contempt as lesser in order for them to feel superior. Finding themselves in no better a place than during apartheid in terms of relations with the majority, ‘coloured’ identity and nationalism have been revived with contempt for ‘black’ people who are seen to be encroaching upon their rights as evidenced in the protests around the appointment of a ‘black’ principal to a ‘coloured’ school and the protests over the perceived threat of ‘blacks’ appropriating houses meant for ‘coloureds’. The combination of powerlessness, frustration and contempt leads to hatred and to violence, according to Kaufmann (1996). This threatens the vision of unity in a post-apartheid South Africa.

According to Fisher (2018), ‘coloured’ people have started to examine what was sacrificed during the non-racist struggle. He believes that it is important to explore the identities that were rejected, as well as the ‘black’ identity that was held during apartheid. He stressed the importance of reclaiming the debate around race and exploring roots in a progressive way. Adhikari (2006) however, observes that the rejection of a ‘coloured’ identity was never a widespread phenomenon but rather a rejection of racist thinking and a desire to promote unity against apartheid policies by a minority of politicised ‘coloured’ people in the anti-apartheid movement. The attempt to co-opt ‘coloureds’ onto the Tricameral parliament was also convincingly rejected, effectively denying the government the opportunity to entrench racial divisions between ‘blacks’ on the one hand, and ‘coloureds’ and Indians on the other, perhaps indicative of a wider rejection at the time.

According to Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) the meanings of African, ‘black’ and ‘coloured’ have proven to be even more ambiguous post-apartheid than during the 1950s or 1980s. Additionally, ‘coloureds’ have

<sup>247</sup> The majority of the people on the Cape Flats, both ‘black’ and ‘coloured’, continue to live in poverty, in sub-standard housing, inadequate school services and rampant gang violence, without basic services such as water and sanitation; added to that is the recent mismanagement of the water crisis, Zille’s defence of colonialism and the party infighting (Levenson & Jacobs, 2018).

<sup>248</sup> Contrary to the 1980s when there were organisations mobilising for housing and basic services, there is little activity on the Cape Flats (Levenson & Jacobs, 2018).

<sup>249</sup> There has been a revival of Zulu-ness, and ‘white’ supremacist groups such as Afriforum

been marginalised by the emerging Africanist lobby within the ANC; while ‘black’ people are in power, a negotiated post-apartheid settlement has left ‘white’ people in a position of privilege and exposed the rainbow nation discourse as superficial. Bowler and Vincent (2011) believe that South Africa remains stuck in apartheid ways of thinking about race, and continue to speak of four distinct races, each with distinct characteristics. Adhikari (2006) agrees that, in spite of the dramatic constitutional changes ushered in with democracy, South Africans continue to live in a society fragmented by racial discourse. South Africans, in general, far too easily fall back into familiar past patterns of relating to each other, predictable perhaps given a past when artificial concepts of race governed where people lived, went to school, who they loved and what careers they chose. The sense of inferiority and shame associated with attitudes of racial superiority and negative stereotyping by colonisers, slave and apartheid masters over the last 356 years needs to be urgently addressed. O’Connell (2012) accurately concludes that “racial subjugation was not marked on the body under apartheid, it was, and continues to be, marked on the mind” (O’Connell, 2012: 221).

The apartheid constructs are deeply embedded in our psyche and I believe that more needs to be done than simply remove the laws that entrenched apartheid racial hierarchy. A new language needs to be found to talk about the past, new terminology needs to be used and intergenerational discussions should be encouraged. The weight of the past hangs so heavily on the shoulders of South Africans that there is an immobility associated with moving forward to a true democracy.

I agree with the view of Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) who say that to now reify ‘colouredness’ and attempt to define the essence of ‘coloured’ identity is akin to what the apartheid government attempted when they divided the ‘black’ population into distinct ethnic groups. What makes ‘coloured’? There is no homogenous identity — instead ‘coloured’ people constitute a multicultural diverse group of people with multiple ancestry. Bowler and Vincent (2011) contend that in order to define any identity requires that there is a specific set of characteristics inherent to that group and there has to be consensus about what constitutes that identity. The social experience of being ‘coloured’, in being lumped together in one category, going to the same schools, living in the same communities and even being buried in the same cemeteries, is the primary source of identity for some South Africans, they contend. However, I argue that differences existed within the sameness of these apartheid structures. I suggest that, rather than trying to claim one source of ancestry, ‘coloured’ people should perhaps subvert the apartheid notion that miscegenation is shameful and imbue their diverse history with positivity, claiming European, Asian and African ancestry with pride.

### **NO FUTURE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS?**

Twenty-four years into our hard-won democracy, there is a reluctance to engage with issues of racial

discrimination and a simmering anger about the lack of transformation in our neighbourhoods and academic institutions. Questions of race and identity are intimately related in contemporary South Africa, entwined with feelings of inferiority and superiority; our performance always measured against being ‘white’, any success tempered by the fact of being ‘coloured’, any failure a reinforcement of our inferiority. I argue that we cannot forge a South African identity, nor can we be free in a post-racial society without addressing the pain and suffering which we are constantly urged to forget, since “apartheid is over”.

As I conducted interviews, I was struck by the simple need that ordinary people have for a platform to share their experiences and memories. People carry the hurt with them; it’s not spoken about and it’s often dismissed or trivialised in comparison with the suffering of others. Earlier this year, I attended a reunion of former residents of Harfield Village who had been forcibly removed from the area during apartheid. The emotion and sense of loss in the hall where the meeting took place, was palpable. Grown men were moved to tears as they shared the sense of loss and the feeling of “being dumped” on the Cape Flats. I was amazed at how real the emotions were forty years later, and also humbled by the simple need for people to tell their stories and feel that they are being listened to. People of all ages arrived with photographs taken during the time that they lived in Harfield Village, wrapped in paper or plastic shopping bags and there were joyful reunions and exchanging of news. For hours after the meeting had ended, they stood around in the parking lot, catching up with former neighbours. I assert that we cannot move forward as a country without properly acknowledging and resolving these issues.

The TRC, while being seen as a model of effective conflict resolution, was limited to gross human rights violations, and the structural violence of apartheid – the institutional racism, forced removals, discrimination, impoverishment and resulting psychological trauma – were not investigated; the emphasis on forgiveness encouraged South Africans to forget the past; the Commission focused on the actions of individuals rather than on apartheid as a system and major political leaders like PW Botha, refused to participate (Wiley & Kornbluh, n.d.).

I contend that a culture of secrecy surrounds apartheid, resulting in a failure to grapple with the past. The oppressors and the liberators appear to have been complicit in keeping the secrets, while ordinary people struggle on their own to move forward.

### **THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

Dullah Omar, democratic South Africa’s first Minister of Justice, introduced the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995 that brought the TRC into being, part of a process of attempting to come to terms with the atrocities committed during apartheid. Omar had been a lawyer who

had defended anti-apartheid activists and had himself been on the death list compiled by a South African government hit-squad (Tutu, 1999).

... a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation (Wiley & Kornbluh, n.d.).

Headed by Nobel Peace Prize-winner, Tutu, the TRC was set up to investigate the crimes committed on all sides in the name of apartheid, granting amnesty in return for complete honesty about offenses. It was to form a bridge between the divided sections of our country, a bridge to unite the

... past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex (Constitution of South Africa as quoted in Tutu, 1999: 45).

The TRC effected its mandate through three committees: The Amnesty Committee, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee and the Human Rights Violations Committee. In addition, a Register of Reconciliation gave members of the public a chance to express their regret at failing to prevent human rights violations and to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation. The Commission sought to expose the violations committed in the name of apartheid so that South Africans could come to terms with the past and move towards freedom, where the rights of all human beings are respected.

However, the TRC process exposed South African society to but a fraction of the horrors imposed upon people by the apartheid hit-squads and third forces, says Sparks (2003). The atrocities committed, and which were revealed during the TRC proceedings, were perpetrated by those who believed that the bodies they sought to subjugate were not human. Once the perpetrators, some of gross human rights violations, were granted amnesty, the victims were then unable to sue for civil damages in compensation. Not only were the victims forced to share their pain publicly, but they did so across from the very people who were responsible for that pain. It seems that it was the victims who were paying a high price for the healing, redressing and restoration of society.

Max du Preez, who headed the Special Report on the TRC on SABC television, observes that although many 'white' South Africans questioned the authenticity of the stories brought before the commission and many 'black' South Africans were unhappy regarding the amnesty, many of those who had testified reported a level of closure, an acknowledgement of their pain and suffering (Du Preez, 2004). On the contrary, constitutional court judge Albie Sachs, comments, there has been little acknowledgement of the cost of repression in human terms (Sachs, 2009).

O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) who explored the transition from authoritarian states to

democracies in Europe and Latin America, stress the need to come to terms with a painful past in order for a democracy to function:

By refusing to confront and to purge itself of its worst fears and resentments, such a society would be burying not just its past but the very ethical values it needs to make its future liveable (O'Donnell, et al., 1986: 30).

Tutu (1999) in his book, *No Future without Forgiveness*, grapples with the question of whether true justice had been served through the proceedings of the TRC. He ponders the morality of granting amnesty to the perpetrators of violence after the simple confession of what he or she had done (Tutu, 1999). However, he defends the kind of restorative justice of the TRC as the African alternative to retribution, the spirit of Ubuntu, that “heals breaches, redresses imbalances and restores broken relationships” (Tutu, 1999: 51). This kind of justice, he says, seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator. TRC commissioner, Mary Burton, expressed her frustration with the process, and the failure of the commission to live up to its grand vision; however, she asserts that, at the very least, the commission had opened up a window on the atrocities that had occurred, and that it would be impossible to deny it. Transitional justice, she says, “is always a compromise born out of past conflict and injustice” but has to be measured against the alternative of destructive conflict (Burton, 2016: 135).

Boesak (2005) notes that in the TRC process, the basic requirements for forgiveness – confession and remorse – were not required by law; furthermore, he contends that victims of abuses were subtly coached into forgiveness as the only option, rather than as a willing response. Boesak argues that there is a rightful place for anger, especially at what happened under apartheid, and that the process of the TRC denied this expression and thus closed the door to forgiveness and reconciliation. In so doing, powerless victims remained so, while the powerful perpetrators were protected by the powerful institution. The elements necessary for reconciliation,

... restitution, reparation, restoration, justice – are left to languish on the ash heap of the stories, told, listened to, not acted upon, and forgotten (Boesak, 2005: 198).

Boshomane (2016) points out that the TRC operated under the tagline, *Healing our Nation through Truth And Reconciliation*, but that there is little evidence of its impact on the lives of ordinary South Africans 20 years later. Because of its focus on politically-motivated crimes and human rights abuses, she contends that it reduced apartheid to politics, making it easy for those who benefitted from apartheid to claim ignorance<sup>250</sup>, and for ‘white’

<sup>250</sup> FW de Klerk expressed “sympathy” for the victims of gross human rights violations in his submission to the TRC hearings, but stopped short of an official apology, claiming that the violations were “due to bad judgement, overzealousness or negligence of individual policemen” thereby abdicating responsibility (Krog, 2002: 105; 126) and “qualifying his apology virtually out of existence” (Tutu, 1999: 202). Tutu (1999) goes so far as to say that if he had known in 1993, when approached by the Norwegian Nobel Committee for his opinion regarding the awarding of the Prize to Mandela and De Klerk, what he knew after De Klerk’s appearance at the TRC hearings in 1996, he would have vehemently opposed it.



supremacy and racism to continue. The TRC was a political compromise, which served to expose the worst of the apartheid atrocities, and, for some, provided a platform for catharsis and healing and has been lauded internationally as a model for reconciliation and healing. As such, I believe that it is up to South Africans to take this forward and to build on the findings of the commission. Too little has been done to bridge the divide between the privileged minority and the majority who lived under violent subjugation and dehumanisation. The TRC was only the start.

## **REMEMBERING SLAVERY**

*Memory and recognition of slave roots in South Africa has been marginalised by decades of subsequent subjugation and selective promotion of settler histories (SAHO, n.d.)*

In the *World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, Dutch Integration Minister, Roger van Boxtel, expressed deep remorse over slavery. In 2002 Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands unveiled a national monument to the victims of slavery. However, a royal apology is not forthcoming, since it would open the door to demands for compensation/financial reparation and the Dutch government is not prepared to go that far. On a visit to Suriname in 2008 former Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende referred to the words of the Van Boxtel's 2001 expression of 'deep remorse', but no government has ever officially apologised for the Dutch slave trade past (Coughlan, 2002; UNESCO, 2009). As Judge Albie Sachs notes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, acknowledgement involves an understanding of how the phenomenon affected individuals and society, emotionally and socially (Sachs, 2009). The Dutch were involved in the slave trade for more than 200 years and used slaves in their colonies; the Dutch dominated the Atlantic slave trade brief spells during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it is estimated that a quarter of Africans transported across the Atlantic did so in Dutch ships, funded by Dutch bankers and revenue from the goods produced by slaves funded much of the Dutch Golden Age<sup>251</sup> (Mitchell, et al, 2012; Vink, 2007).

In research done by international non-profit organisation, Humanity in Action in 2012, the authors discuss the reminders of Dutch slavery and colonialism, such as the Dutch royal carriage<sup>252</sup> which depicts 'black' people as slaves, and that continues to be used by the Royal Family, in spite of criticism that the imagery is racist. They point out the slave monument (designed by a Surinamese artist) is situated far from the Amsterdam city centre and, in spite of the annual commemoration festival, there is little awareness of the Dutch slavery past (Mitchell, et al, 2012).

Mitchell, et al (2012) quote Quinsy Gario, Dutch-Antillean activist and founder of the *Black Piet is Racism*<sup>253</sup>

<sup>251</sup> A period renowned for its artistic, literary, scientific and philosophical achievements

<sup>252</sup> The carriage was presented to Queen Wilhelmina at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century years after slavery was abolished by the Dutch.

<sup>253</sup> *Zwarte Piet* or Black Piet is *Sinterklaas*' (Santa Claus') helper – Dutch people dress up in blackface and march in the street, a tradition defended as harmless. It is possible that Black Piet was inspired by a slave bought by one of the royal family; some nobles gifted each other with enslaved

movement, as stressing the importance of the responsibility of commemorating slavery. Although the National Commemoration Festival of the Slavery Past, known as *Keti Koti (Breaking the Chains in Surinamese)* is held annually on 1 July at the slavery monument, it is not a national holiday and is hardly taught in schools according to Gario. The authors observe that the lack of visual representation of slavery and the siting of the monument at a distant location contributes to the lack of awareness. The erection of the statue in 2002 seems to have been more of an appeasement strategy than any real desire for dialogue, observe Mitchell, et al, (2012). Lisa Francisco (2003) made a similar point in her earlier paper, saying that the statue appears to have signified the healing around slavery as completed.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1863, many former slaves and their descendants came to Amsterdam from Suriname and the former Dutch Caribbean. Afro-Amsterdammers have been a part of the city since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but this did not prevent ‘black’ people from being exhibited at the 1883 World Fair<sup>254</sup> in Amsterdam. Many Dutch people are ignorant about why they have Surinamese, African or Antillean neighbours, or that a number of the Dutch soccer team’s best players are descendants of slaves. Centuries of exploitation and subjugation have made it difficult for the descendants of slaves to acknowledge and honour their past. The lack of a discourse about slavery and colonialism not only inhibits recognition of the past but contributes to racism, discrimination and inequality (Mitchell, et al, 2012). A new language needs to be found to talk about slavery and colonialism; a language without stereotypes, in order to make sense of a multi-cultural society and the racism it engenders, urges Francisco (2003). It is important to discuss slavery from the perspective of the slaves, to step outside of the dehumanisation view, showing that slaves had an identity apart from their victimisation under slavery. Present-day issues need to be addressed and discussed in relation to the past (Mitchell, et al, 2012; Francisco, 2003). More needs to be done than simply wall-papering over the brokenness of the past, more than erecting statues and opening museums.

Earlier this year I assisted Dr O’Connell with the curation of an exhibition at the Slave Church Museum in Long Street, Cape Town. On our first visit there I was dismayed by the chaos we encountered as the pews had been pushed aside and a market was being set up, in spite of the museum being open to the public:

I had expected to enter the space with a sense of reverence, to hear the gentle creak of the floorboards whisper the names of the first four slaves baptised here – Domingo ... Job ... Arend ... Durenda.

I wanted to sit quietly on one of the oak pews, and trace my finger along the carved wood pattern

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children, who are shown in paintings in Moorish clothing, wigs, gold earrings and exaggerated red lips. Thanks to the work of activists like Gario, some communities are phasing out *Zwarte Piet*, but in November 2017 ‘white’ extremists confronted anti-racist protesters at a parade, in a primary school and in an Amsterdam city council meeting. The connection between *Zwarte Piet* and slavery is painful for many ‘black’ Dutch people who “brace themselves to be called ‘Black Pete’ ... every holiday season” (Little, 2017). In 2015 a U.N. special committee called the *Zwarte Piet* practice discriminatory, drawing widespread condemnation from the Dutch, and death threats for the head of the committee (Attiah, 2017).

<sup>253</sup> 27 Surinamese “Maroons” former slaves, who escaped, were recaptured and brought to the Netherlands for six months as a public exhibition (Mitchell, et al, 2012).

and think about Rosina ... Dina ... Spasie Helena ... Frederik Johan Hendrik, the second group of candidates ... I wanted to imagine their voices lifted up in songs of worship as a gust of southeaster wind ruffled the hair or upset the hat of someone in the congregation. I wanted to hear the mutterings of a community broken up because of forced removals, saying goodbye to their spiritual home. I wanted to pause and reflect on where we it was we had come from (Kamies, 2018).

Dr O’Connell had been approached to curate an exhibition that was to form part of the 220<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations<sup>255</sup> of the church. The short notice, limited funding and resources, are all indicative of the lack of importance that the slave history is treated with not only in South Africa, but globally. Fisher (2018) contrasts the support for traditional leaders in South Africa with the lack of a financial incentive to explore the roots of slavery in a similar fashion. This disregard of a slave heritage is complicated by the challenges of tracing a legacy in the absence of adequate records, the absorption of the enslaved into the ‘white’ population, and the shame associated with having been enslaved.

Museums in South Africa, have a vital role to play not only in preserving culture and educating the public, but also in correcting the misrepresentations of the past and encouraging dialogue. Ideally, they should bring to life the stories of the past and convey the humanity of the individuals who lived in those times. They ought to foster pride in our cultural diversities and correct stereotypes in their representation of those cultures. At the very least, one should leave a museum with a sense of what happened, to whom it happened and what that meant then and now. Chinua Achebe, the prominent Nigerian novelist and essayist, in a 1994 interview said that storytelling “is something we have to do, so that the story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail — the bravery, even, of the lions” (Achebe, 1994).

## **REMEMBERING DISTRICT SIX**

I would like to contrast the experience at the Slave Church with a visit to the District Six Museum<sup>256</sup> with my parents two years ago. I had visited the museum previously and was overcome with nostalgia, evoked by the familiarity of the simple exhibits, original street names, photographs, and memorabilia donated by former residents.

The museum is situated on the outskirts of what was District Six, across the road from Caledon Square Police Station, where I was taken when I was arrested after the Purple Rain march, and a block away from

<sup>254</sup> The opening of the exhibition coincided with a church service, the first one since the congregation had been moved to Belhar in 1978. It was an emotional gathering for many but I especially was overcome with pride and humility when the congregation sang the national anthem, standing in the pews that bore the names of the first eight enslaved people to be baptised at the church, their voices resounding against the vaulted ceiling.

<sup>256</sup> The District Six Museum was opened in December 1994, eight months after the first democratic elections held in South Africa, to preserve the memory of the area. The museum is housed in a church that was considered a site of grassroots struggle and has come “to be seen as *the* place of District Six, as the guardian of its memories, speaking for its past, and securing its future”. The photographs, memorabilia and artefacts on display in the museum continue to be used as “tools of mediation” for the “validation of lives” (O’Connell, 2012: 112).

the Sacks Futeran Building that used to be a general wholesaler where I remember my brothers and I riding the ancient lift with my parents. The museum is near to the Grand Parade where my parents would take us to buy soda floats, and close to Darling Street where the Movie Snaps photographer took the photograph of my parents.

I wanted to share this longing that I felt, with especially my father who had lived in District Six, and had been trying to get him to go with me for months. “Why must I go there? I know what happened. I don’t need to see it again,” were his standard protestations when I asked. There had been few conversations, about this period in our family, an absence which speaks loudly of the pain and hardship caused by apartheid and how the previously oppressed continue to survive through selective memory. Perhaps my father was wary of the deeply buried memories which may have been released by the visit? At the reception of the museum, we were told that the entry fee was waived for former residents, and I imagined that he signed the guest book with a flourish.

My father’s demeanour is calm and quiet, but as he walked around the museum he became more and more animated as he recognised people and places — the barber shop where he had his hair cut, an old school photograph of his standard five teacher, the public washhouse and the picture of Bolla, the gay hairdresser who converted to Islam and performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. The recipes on the wall for traditional ‘Malay’ dishes that my grandmother used to make, brought a smile to his face. So did the wall-hanging bearing the name of his rugby club and the original street names displayed in columns.

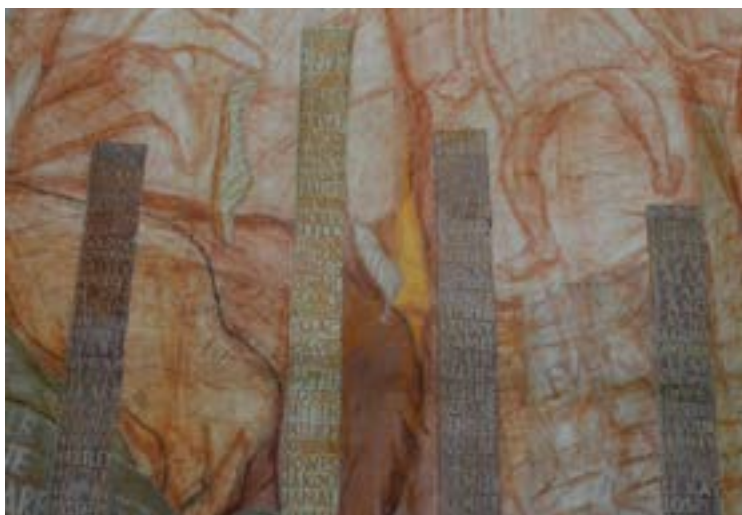
I followed him around with book and pen in hand, feverishly making notes. I had wanted to capture these memories which were being triggered by the photographs and memorabilia, for a while but somehow, I had never asked the right questions. Now, however, walking over the plastic-covered map of District Six on the floor, and through the installations, I didn’t have to ask any questions as he was transported back to a time that pre-dated the forced removals. His animation attracted the attention of Noor Ebrahim, a former resident and now guide at the museum. They spent a few minutes reminiscing about people and places. It was when we sat down for tea afterwards that a stream of words tripped out of his mouth, memories unleashed by his visit:

The first time I took your mother out on a date we went to the Avalon bioscope, to the 4pm show to see *Trapeze* with Burt Lancaster, Tony Curtis and Gina Lollobrigida. Your mother was only allowed to go to the afternoon show. It was 1958. Chat Frieslaar was the manager of the bioscope (Kamies, 2016).

The Technicolour film had been released in Britain in 1956, one of the top earning movies of the year. Burt Lancaster plays an acrobat who is disabled after attempting to perform a triple mid-air somersault. Tony

Curtis co-stars as an aspiring trapeze artist and Gina Lollobrigida plays the circus tumbler love interest. The Internet obligingly provided images of the three. Tony Curtis with pretty boy looks and slicked back black hair — ducktail and forelock copied by my father, from what I can make out from a blurry black and white image in the family photo album. Lancaster shows off his great physique in a gymnastic kit very similar to what I had seen my father wear in a photograph. A photograph of my mother shows her also striking an athletic pose in her gym clothes. Perhaps this had influenced their choice, but, more likely, that had been the only film on offer at the Avalon Bioscope, on the corner of Hanover and Russell Streets.

I am humbled by these revelations, privileged to share a glimpse of my father aged 23, a young man with hopes and dreams. I am in awe of the power of the museum to not only cathartically give voice to the experiences of the past, but to convey the humanity of those who survived and to honour their struggles. And I am motivated by the power of the photographs to unleash memories, to facilitate the telling of stories and to bring about healing. Perhaps more powerful even, is the simple record of names on the museum wall upstairs in the photograph above which was supplied to me by the museum. Both my parents' surnames are listed in the third column, and this simple acknowledgement, of names written on a wall, makes me want to stand taller too. I feel that our lives mattered, and the museum makes me feel both validated and dignified.



*Figure 38*

## **HISTORY IN OUR SCHOOLS**

The way that history was glossed over in the apartheid-era curriculum, laying the ground to render slavery and colonialism unimportant, justifies the urgency to address a more inclusive history syllabus post-apartheid. The past needs to be atoned for through a process of healing through story-telling, documentaries, and the teaching of history in schools, so that slavery, colonialism and apartheid are not merely footnotes in our history. South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, recently released a report from a ministerial task team that recommends making history compulsory in the final three years of high school

from 2023 (Chisolm, 2018). The History Ministerial Task Team (MTT) team came to this conclusion after it spent three years investigating how 12 other countries – including Russia, Zimbabwe, and Rwanda – have taught history in schools. There are a number of challenges surrounding capacity, teacher development and training, content, and budgetary implications which will need to be addressed, but this is a step in the right direction in trying to engage with the burden of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, to generate dialogue and to come to some understanding of the context in which we live. However, educators and historians caution that a multi-vocal approach is necessary in constructing the syllabus to address the complicated history of our country’s past (Umraw, 2018; Pather, 2018).

### **POST-MEMORY**

Many ‘white’ South Africans today have an amnesia about apartheid, claiming that they didn’t know what was happening ... across the road, at the back of the post office, in the bioscope, at work, in church. It was as if “we inhabited two separate and alien worlds, physically and psychologically” (Tutu, 1999: 171-172).

Archbishop Tutu asks, how it was possible

... to have turned a blind eye to a system which impoverished, oppressed and violated so many of those others with whom they shared the beautiful land ...? Apartheid could not have survived for a single day had it not been supported by this enfranchised, privileged minority (Tutu, 1999:171).

How could they not have known, asks Tutu, when there were ‘whites’ who actively opposed the system and were condemned by those who enjoyed the benefits of the same system? (Tutu, 1999).

I am aware that my experience of living through apartheid is relatively mild compared to the majority of people who live in this country. I was fortunate to start out my life in a stable neighbourhood such as Walmer Estate, attending one of the “good ‘coloured’ schools”, in a family that valued education and sacrificed for me to get it. My parents also protected us from the negative influences of living in Lotus River. My brother sharing that he first realised that he was ‘coloured’ when we moved to Lotus River, caused me to wonder when that moment was for me. I cannot think of a definite event, but rather layers of realisation come to mind — coming face to face with restrictions on where we, as a family, could live or go to school, school holidays at Steenbras Dam, or more often, waiting in a queue to enter Sunset Drive-in with my family, while in the lane on the right, cars whizzed through because they were going to park on the ‘white’ side which had ample space. Probably it was cemented by the acceptance letter that arrived from UCT in 1979. After the paragraph that expressed pleasure in informing me of my acceptance, the dean continued thus:

If you are an applicant who in terms of current legislation requires a permit to attend this university, your acceptance is subject to production of such a permit before the date of registration

(McKenzie, 1979).

It was there, in black and white, I was academically good enough to study occupational therapy at the University of Cape Town, but the colour of my skin was all wrong.

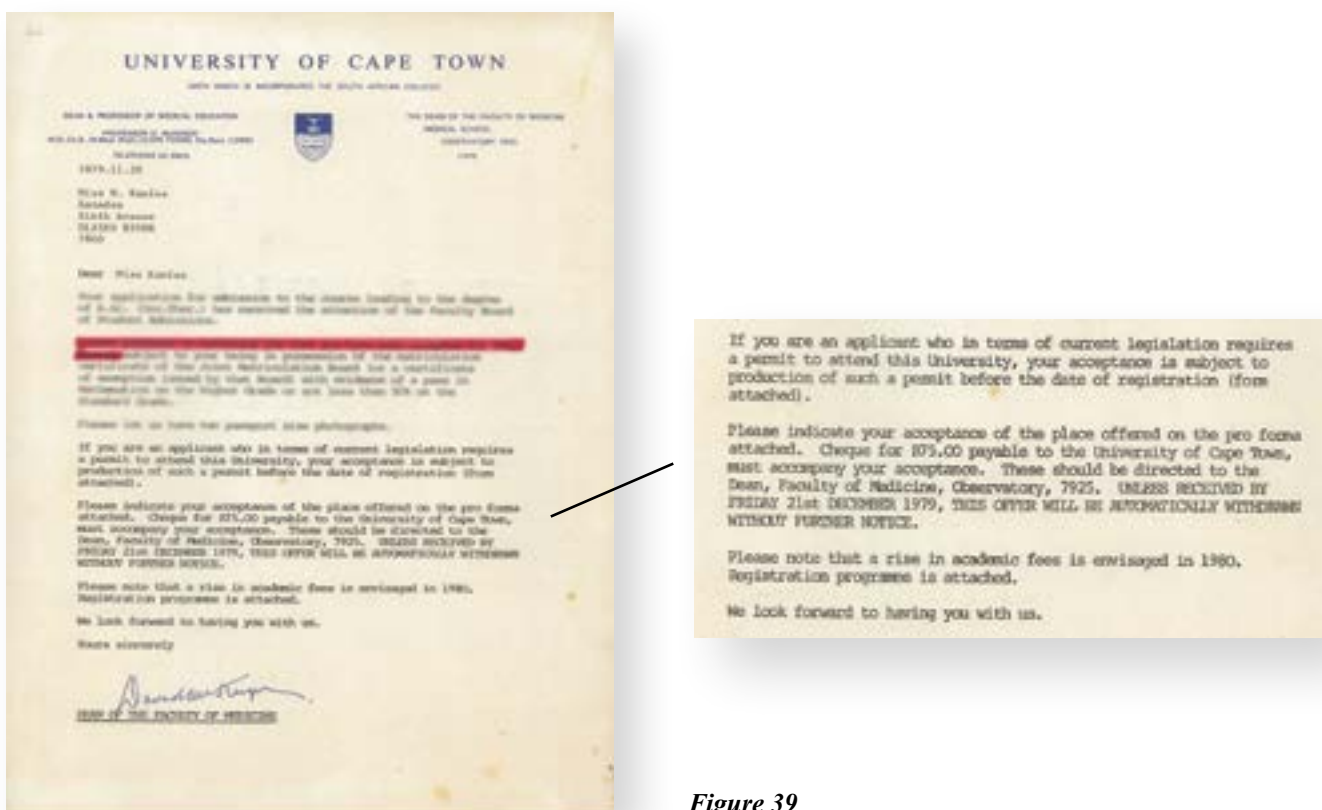


Figure 39

The people I interviewed, for the most part, carry the same seemingly small injuries of apartheid, reminders of not being good enough because of the colour of their skins, not speaking of it because it doesn't seem important now and we are urged to forget, to embrace the rainbow nation. The shift, I propose, was too sudden, one minute there was murder and violence confronting South Africans almost on a daily basis, and the next reconciliation and rainbows. South Africans have not accounted for the past, and the trauma that was lived through will continue to dog the generations that come after.

In spite of raising a daughter and son in a post-apartheid country, under conditions vastly different to those under which I was raised, they are shaped by the experience of their parents, of apartheid, injustice and oppression. I am aware that they have faced institutional racism in their schools and universities, and in their social lives, as they traverse spaces still largely 'white'. They are both more aware than many of their peers of the history of colonialism, slavery and apartheid. Their subject choices, involvement with community organisations, the way they interact with their environment have been influenced by the experiences of the parents and extended family who have raised them. I ask myself whether it is fair that they carry this baggage and when they will be not only free, but equal too.

Hirsch (2012) coined the term "post-memory" to describe the relationship that the generation that comes

after has with the one that came before, and the personal, cultural and collective trauma that they bear through stories, images and the behaviour of the people they grew up with. So in touch with the trauma of the previous generation are they, that it seems that they suffered it too, that it's their own memories of events that happened in the past but continue to haunt them in the present.

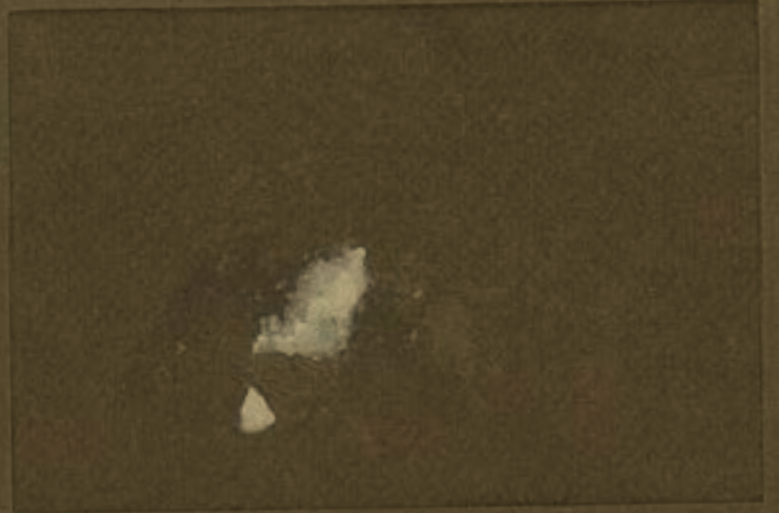
To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors (Hirsch, 2012: 5)

Hirsch (2012) suggests that her approach to memory should be seen as a “reparative reading”, open to different experiences, approaches or affiliations to see what vantage points may be offered to reconsider the past without its tragic dimensions making an indelible mark on the present and future (Hirsch, 2012: 24). Photographs, memory and family are key elements in post-memory — analogue photographs (especially) allow us to see and to touch the past; while we do not have literal memories of others' experiences, their experiences have been transferred through the sharing of history; within families the children of those affected by collective trauma, carry the responsibility, the awareness of a sense of loss and the desire to make amends (Hirsch, 2012). I believe that this telling of stories through the photographs of the oppressed as a way of transformation and healing, is justified by Hirsch's concept of post-memory. Through the conversations that have been started in my study I hope to generate further conversations which may lead South Africans to more closely examine how they may live together. I want my children and grandchildren to know what it is to be viewed as human, to be both free and equal.

Fanon (2008) in the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, proclaims his freedom from a history of oppression, hatred, inferiority vengeance. He refuses to lock himself into “retroactive reparations” and urges both the Negro and the ‘white’ man to “turn their backs on the inhuman voices of respective ancestors” so that they may communicate with each other authentically (Fanon, 2008: 180). It is through recreating and scrutinising the self that “men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world”, he concludes (Fanon, 2008: 181). He throws off the mantle of burden, refusing to be “the slave of the Slavery that dehumanized my ancestors”, recognising that his only duty is “that of demanding human behaviour from the other ... of not renouncing my freedom through my choices (Fanon, 2008: 179). In conclusion, he urges us to move beyond concepts of superiority and inferiority, in poignantly simple words he asks,

Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? (Fanon, 2008: 181).





# CHAPTER SEVEN

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*NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS SPACES:  
RACE, IDENTITY AND COLOUR*



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS SPACES: RACE, IDENTITY AND COLOUR

*The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Someone says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing (Morrison, 1975).*

### INTRODUCTION:

This chapter is about passing through spaces, physically and metaphorically. Many of the spaces that 'coloured' people traversed were ambiguous, uncertain — 'coloured' people could speak different languages, belong to different religions, and be of various hues, which enabled them to move through different spaces. 'Coloured' people could also pass for 'white', passing from their previous existence and occupying a different space in the South African hierarchy of race. I examine race, identity and colour, and the concept of 'colouredness' through a visit to Australia as well as visits to rural communities which originated as mission stations after the emancipation of slavery.

### TRAVELLING TO FIND MYSELF

Travel has been an integral part of my life and that of my family's over the last 25 years. The journeys were largely motivated by a conscious desire to expose my children to different cultures and philosophies as an antidote to my own experiences of growing up during apartheid. Through travel we have crossed borders, both personal and physical, juxtaposing the isolation of apartheid with the freedom to explore that which was foreign. Our aim was always to be travellers rather than tourists, leaving home to extend our view of self in relation to the world. Consequently, we tried to learn as much as we could by interaction with local people, and by immersing ourselves in the culture through food, books, music and theatre. Returning home offered the opportunity to examine thoughts around identity and a sense of belonging in the context of a country struggling to emerge from its mantle of oppression. At the very least the aim was to inculcate in my children values of respect and tolerance for the other.

Early on in this journey to explore the notion of 'colouredness' and its attendant ideas of shame and respectability, I visited friends in Brisbane and Perth, Australia, who happened to have been classified

‘coloured’ in South Africa before their emigration “for better lives” down under. I was intrigued to find that the Australian culture and identity eluded me. Instead, what I did find was not only South Africans who were more South African, but ‘coloured’ people who clung on to some of the stereotypical posturing that could be seen as representative of ‘coloured’ identity in South Africa.

“We call it Perthfontein<sup>257</sup>,” said the son of a friend, warning me not to use Afrikaans to speak about anyone in the mall, since they might well understand me. All the reminders of home still came as a surprise though. The South African flag above the *South African Essentials* shop which greeted me every time we went to the yoga studio, the Nando’s<sup>258</sup> chicken outlet, the wine farm in Western Australia which was a replica of Groote Constantia<sup>259</sup> (including the slave bell) and, of course, all the South Africans who I met, eager to exchange at least a few phrases of Afrikaans and to remind me that they had to do without house help<sup>260</sup>. “Proudly-South-African-in-Perth” websites and Facebook pages bear testimony to the 155 000 South Africans who live mostly there and in Sydney.

Australia was also unexpectedly familiar. There was the obvious British influence — the English language, driving on the left side of the road, and children wearing almost-recognisable school uniforms. There was more than a smattering of America in the chain stores and restaurants, from K-Mart to McDonald’s and KFC. The landscape was recognisable; I knew the vegetation. I could have been travelling to Beaufort West<sup>261</sup> in the Great Karoo, if not for the black and yellow signs warning of kangaroos bounding across the highway.

I was invited out to a “girls’ evening” on my first night in Perth and was picked up by friends of Brigitte’s, also ex-Capetonians, who had offered to drive us. No sooner had I buckled up in the back seat than the husband, after a glance in the rear-view mirror, fired at me: “So, are you a Wynberg girl?” I immediately recognised his need to classify and assign an identity to me, and, judging by the reference to Wynberg, it was as a middle-class, English-speaking, ‘coloured’. I learned that they were from Bonteheuwel, a working-class, ‘coloured’ township on the Cape Flats.

We were met by the rest of the group, all former Capetonians, who had been classified ‘coloured’. They ranged in age from late twenties to early fifties and had been living in Perth for 10 to 25 years. I was warmly received and welcomed into the group. What intrigued me most was that they communicated with each other in *Kaaps* — I could have closed my eyes and imagined myself anywhere on the Cape Flats. Except for possibly one exception, I detected no hint of an Australian accent. I joked with my friend that she might

<sup>257</sup> *Fontein* = Afrikaans for a fountain or well; typically, part of the name of a small Afrikaans town in South Africa

<sup>258</sup> A restaurant chain originating in South Africa

<sup>259</sup> The first wine farm in South Africa dating back to 1685 on land granted to Governor Simon van der Stel

<sup>260</sup> Domestic help being expensive and not as freely available as in South Africa

want to consider writing a regular article for *The Daily Voice*<sup>262</sup>— the repartee at dinner would not have been out of place in the tabloid aimed mainly at blue-collar workers of the Cape Flats. Although they had emigrated, this group of women appeared to have held onto some perceived sense of ‘coloured identity’ in a process of othering. There were no outward signs of belonging to their host country, no sense of Australian identity, which I acknowledge was elusive to me. Further research is necessary, as I did not have the opportunity to interview any of them regarding how they had transitioned from South Africa to Australia, nor what their experience of social integration and assimilation might have been.

On another occasion I met a former South African and his Australian partner. The expatriate soon identified himself as “from ‘Vanguard’, a township similar to Bonteheuwel. He wanted to know where I was from and how the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was doing, presuming immediately, that I must have attended the university reserved for ‘coloureds’ during apartheid. He slipped into colloquial Afrikaans, and took pride in his partner showing off the phrases she had picked up, although those seemed to be laced with cursing and sexual innuendos. I felt obliged to adapt to the environment, at the risk of being accused of adopting a ‘white’ posture — “*jy hou jou wit*”<sup>263</sup>(you keep yourself ‘white’). Did this mean that I didn’t know how to be appropriately ‘coloured’?

Both these incidences had me questioning issues of “colouredness”. I wondered about this need for camaraderie, in this new country which I imagine many of them had sacrificed much to emigrate to. What was this elusive “coloured identity” that they appeared to cling to? Was it a sense of insecurity at the loss of institutionalisation conferred on them under apartheid? Bowler and Vincent (2011), in their paper examining issues of ‘colouredness’ say that, ‘colouredness’ may evoke

... a sense of self, community and belonging ... Lumped together as a category of person by apartheid’s ideologues, coloureds were housed in coloured communities, attended coloured schools and universities and were buried in coloured cemeteries. The result was that colouredness — one of apartheid’s most fantastical fabrications — became rooted in material experience and therefore the primary source of identity for some South Africans.

When I am asked where I am from, I am guarded in my reply, since I am only too aware that places like Walmer Estate (where I grew up), Lotus River (where we later moved to) and Elsie’s River (where I went to high school), have distinct socio-economic differences conferred by apartheid-era Group Areas restrictions. Not even within my immediate family were we homogenous and, like many of the people I interviewed, our family was not unique. Each family seems to be a microcosm, encapsulating in miniature different

<sup>262</sup> Published in English - with plenty of Afrikaans slang thrown in, its pay-off line is “*sex, scandal, skinder and sport*”. (*skinder* = gossip)

<sup>263</sup> Since ‘coloured’ people were known to approximate ‘whiteness’, this was a way of keeping them in check, a way of policing from within the community

characteristics of the larger heterogeneous ‘coloured’ community. The material experience that Bowler and Vincent (2011) speak of then, is not identical for everyone. But was it this material experience which was being replicated, or sustained by the expatriates who I had met?

The use of the stereotypical *Kaaps* to welcome me, had echoes of a private club with a “secret” language, neither used nor understood by those who did not belong. Fanon, in a chapter titled, *The Negro and Language*, in his seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, first published in 1952, speaks of the importance of language and asserts that “the black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man” and behaves differently in each dimension, as “a direct result of colonialist subjugation” (Fanon, 2008: 8). Every colonised people, in whom an inferiority complex has been created, he says, finds itself elevated to a civilised state through its success at adopting the culture, including language, of its mother country or coloniser — “He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness...” (Fanon, 2008: 9). It would therefore be expected that the expatriates I met, would behave similarly, with Australia as a substitute for their mother country, given its colonial relationship with the United Kingdom. It could be further expected that there would be a desire to assimilate with the ‘white’ majority, given the position of inbetweenness that ‘coloureds’ occupied in South Africa, and which had presumably led them to emigrate. Here though, they were still marked as other, still separate from the majority, and seemed to not have taken the opportunity to assimilate. Was I the one who had adopted the culture and language of the British coloniser? Or was I simply the result of the different parts of growing up in South Africa with an experience unique to my family and community? Erasmus (2017) proposes that ‘coloured’ refers to a group of people “*loosely bound* together for historical reasons such as slavery, creolisation and a combination of oppressive and selective preferential treatment under apartheid” (Erasmus, 2017: 112, my emphasis). While I had socio-political experiences in common with the people I met, there were as many differences separating us.

This habitual repetition of stereotypical behaviour reinforces the idea of being separate, and lends a permanence to a cultural identity, the existence of which is debated by academics and non-academics alike, characterised by the acceptance/rejection debate (Bowler & Vincent, 2011). Perhaps, as immigrants, there is a fear of losing too much, a severing of roots; or a fear of becoming too Australian, and in so doing, renouncing their ‘colouredness’, whatever that may be? Or perhaps the idea of assimilating an Australian identity and culture is so alien that it is easier to cling to what is familiar? Bowler and Vincent (2011) remark that stereotypes do more than marginalise and discriminate, they

... are also employed from within the group as it tries to shore up a sense of its identity through the construction of shared traits that determine who belongs in the group as well as articulating ways in which group members are different from those who are not members.

One of the things that I value about travel is that it confers on me a certain level of anonymity - away from Cape Town, South Africa, away from the racial baggage of apartheid, where I can be simply human. As the American travel writer, William Heat-Moon, a Native American who writes about the search for his ‘white’ roots, asserts

When you’re traveling, you are what you are, right there and then. People don’t have your past to hold against you. No yesterdays on the road (Heat-Moon, 1999).

This time however, I was keenly aware of being not only South African but ‘coloured’, placed into an even smaller box. And I resented this. I did not feel that I was part of this club, I didn’t tick the boxes they thought I did. I was not a “Wynberg girl” nor had I attended UWC, and the language they communicated in did not come naturally to me. Perhaps too, what was at issue was the gaze with which I was seeing and being seen. Hirsch (1999), in her book on family photography, refers to a “familial gaze” that fixes and defines us, shaped by our various experiences and conceptions, being recorded visually in the photograph. And, as these looks and gazes intersect, they are filtered by various screens that define what and how we might see.

I was acutely aware that my gaze had been influenced by fundamental changes since 1994, to which they had not been party to. But equally, the gaze with which I was being looked at, was unfamiliar with the changes that I had experienced. I felt uncomfortable, since this repetition of stereotypes served to reinforce feelings of “discrimination and inequality”, recalling “relations of domination and subordination” (Bowler & Vincent, 2011). The visit to Perth, Australia, was perplexing on a number of levels, not least because of the questions of identity that were raised. The “other” which I have sought out on previous travels, proved to be unexpectedly familiar, albeit a familiarity rooted in stereotypical behaviour.

It was on our skins that our inferiority was supposedly written, in the sleekness of our hair, the colour of our eyeballs and cuticles, the shape of our noses and the fullness of our lips - the epidermalisation of our inferiority — as Fanon (2008) so eloquently put it. But there is no ‘coloured’ race, no fixing of epidermalisation; only this uncertain space of neither ‘white’ nor Bantu, open to a myriad of different interpretations.

### **CASPER, VIETNAM AND ME**

When I think about my family I usually think about my two brothers, Zain and Enver, and me. My sister was born in 1971, the year that the three of us turned 7, 8 and 9, and another brother a year later. Soon after, we moved to the Cape Flats. It has always seemed to me that we were like two separate families, one from Walmer Estate and a different one from Lotus River. Two families living different ‘coloured’ lives.

In this photograph, taken in the late 1960s, Zain and Enver must be about 5 and 4 years old, respectively. They are standing on the *stoep* of my grandparents’ house in Walmer Estate, bordering District Six, and,

judging by the way they are dressed, it must be Eid and we are probably on our way to visit family. They would both be wearing brand new clothes and shoes (Eid and Christmas were occasions for new clothes) which would have had to “last”. The cardigans they are wearing look a size too big and I am sure that those trousers with the sharp creases down the front probably have generous hems, to be lengthened later as they grew. My mother dressed them in matching clothes and people would often ask if they were twins.



*Figure 40*

They’re both squinting into the sun, although Zain seems to be making more of an effort to look into the camera, as I can imagine my father telling them to do, his face half hidden behind the camera as he reminds them to “say cheese”. Although it was my father who was the designated photographer, it was my mother who would have put the photographs into an album or a frame. The tiny corner marks she made to line up the photograph are visible in the image. I must be standing off camera, either waiting to join them, or to have my own photograph. I am touched by this image of them clasping hands. I don’t recall if they were told to do that or if Zain, with his head cocked to the side so endearingly, is holding onto Enver, obediently taking responsibility for him to behave.

The second photograph, below, is of the three of us, taken at Steenbras Dam, one of the few holiday places we were allowed to go to as ‘coloureds’. It is the site of many happy family outings, often taken with extended family. I recognise that hedge. I recall us peeping through the foliage to see the pool on the other side. That one was much bigger and fancier compared to the shallow pool we were allowed to use, and it was reserved for ‘whites’.



*Figure 41*

Even though it is an informal outing, we, especially I as the oldest, seem to have imbibed the sense of ceremony usually required in our photographs. I'm in the middle, the big sister with my arms crossed in front, legs together and hair neatly done with a big bow. Zain is on the right in the red top, his shorts askew above his knobbly thin legs, his head angled to the side of his cowlick he would later try everything to keep flat. Zain looks quite forlorn — there's that tilt to his head, the shoulders hunched and no smile. Enver, however, looks much more at ease, chest open and arms behind his back, ready to be released and have fun as soon as the mandatory photograph has been captured. But perhaps these are meanings which my now maternal gaze brings to these photographs almost 50 years later.

Enver's hair was so straight that it would stick up like a bristle brush when it was cut short. With his eyes which had a slight slant, and his love for rice, we teased him about actually being Chinese, although my grandfather had nicknamed him, "Vietnam"<sup>264</sup>. We teased him, as children do, that he wasn't really part of our family but belonged to the Yaps who owned the corner shop — "K Yap & Sons", the sign painted in bold black letters on the outside read. The Yaps, as Chinese, would have been classified "Coloured" by the apartheid government's Population Registration Act. We would see them walk up from the house a few doors down from the shop to open up in the morning. On reflection now, I am shocked by the racism inherent in our childish teasing, an indication of the pervasiveness of apartheid language and categorisation. I remember that my father had a box camera and then later a Kodak *Retinette IA* which he bought in the 1960s. He recalls that he paid R22,50 for it. It cost R30 but my mother's cousin, Beryl, who worked for NU Pharmacy on the corner of Station and Main Road in Claremont, was able to get a 25% discount. The acquisition of the camera was obviously so important to my father that the memory of the purchase remains so clear 50 years later. These two photographs were taken around the time that District Six was declared an

<sup>264</sup> I am not sure why the reference to Vietnam – could it be that the war with the Americans was foremost in the news? South Africa did not have relations with Vietnam, but Taiwanese and Japanese people both had honorary 'white' status during apartheid.



area for ‘whites-only’ and a few years before we moved to the Cape Flats. Bulldozing and removals must have started although there is no evidence of this in the photographs, we had gone on holiday, life went on. Is it strange that I find myself squinting at the photographs to compare the differences in our skin colour? We seem to be the same colour. Zain was paler than Enver and I, prompting a friend of my grandmother to give him the nickname Casper, ‘white’ like the friendly ghost. Perhaps the photographs are over-exposed, faded by time, or bleached beyond the reach of critical eyes? None of these colour gradations are obvious from this photograph, yet there they are, unleashed every time I view these and other images: the image of my grandmother, meticulously made up, her fair skin and straight hair her source of pride, the street photographer’s shot of my “Cape Coloured” mother and “Cape Malay” father and the many images of special occasions which necessitated us looking our best so that people could see how decent and respectable we were. What people? For whose gaze were these photographs taken?

As I scrutinise these images I realise that my life has been about not fitting in — growing up with two religions, two languages, two cultures; moving from middle class Walmer Estate to working class Lotus River, from an Anglican school in District Six to a Catholic school in Elsie’s River, choosing to study occupational therapy<sup>265</sup> at a ‘white’ university. I married into an Indian family, raised my children in a formerly ‘white’ suburb where they attended predominantly ‘white’ schools. I seem to have passed from one space to another. Where do I fit? Is my search for a wedding photograph of my parents a search for validation, for legitimacy, for some kind of proof of belonging – a metaphor for a search for an identity, for roots that are not there, what O’Connell refers to a “metaphorical homelessness” (O’Connell, 2012: 14)?

### **CROSSING THE COLOUR LINE**

In spite of attempts by the apartheid government to ‘fix’ ‘colouredness’, it remained an ambiguous and fluid identity, heterogeneous in skin colour, language, religion, and culture. It was against this background of “neither/nor” that people crossed the colour line, sometimes temporarily, often permanently. Crossing the colour line or passing, meant that ‘coloured’ people of fairer complexion could pass for ‘white’, and likewise, ‘black’ people could pass for ‘coloured’. According to Paulse (2002) the practice of crossing the colour line has its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape Town, when those who could, did so in order to access certain freedoms and privileges, limited to certain ‘race’ groups. Often this revolved around employment, access to residential areas or marriage. The very fact that people could pass, like chameleons from one classification to another, is indicative of the difficulty associated with attempting to fix people into boxes.

Many of the stories shared with me while I was conducting interviews, were about *colour*, not race. My

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<sup>265</sup> practising occupational therapy which was largely unknown in the community

brother, Enver, recalled playing on the sand with Zain on Camps Beach (reserved for ‘whites’) while my fair-skinned maternal grandmother sat on a bench nearby. A policeman who saw the two of them, and who obviously was unsure about whether or not they belonged on the beach, marched them over to my grandmother who he must have assumed was ‘white’, and asked if they belonged to her. When she said yes, he left them alone. “You know, Zain was so white but I was a little blush. The policeman probably wondered why I was playing with this white boy. I still remember feeling that I had done something wrong” (Kamies, 2018). It is this awareness of having done something wrong or foolish that is integral to the experience of shame. Almost 50 years later, my brother can still recall the sense of wrongdoing related to what should have been an innocent everyday incident of two young brothers playing on the beach, watched over by their grandmother.

Brigitte described how she had “made life easier” for her older, darker-skinned sisters who would pretend to be her nanny so that they could ride the ‘white’ bus in Port Elizabeth (Rhode, 2016). Hardisty’s aunt who could pass for ‘white’ would travel in a separate train carriage to them and reunite at their destination (Hardisty, 2018). Aunty Merle’s father had changed his classification from ‘white’ to ‘coloured’ after the Population Registration Act came into being, in order to remain legally married to her mother and to continue living in a ‘coloured’ area with his family. However, he continued his work as a confectioner at Baumann’s, a job reserved for ‘whites’. Aunty Merle recalls that when her father was ill it was her fairer-skinned oldest sister who had to collect his wages at work, to maintain the façade of ‘whiteness’. “What did that do to my other siblings,” she wondered, “to not be fair enough to go to my father’s workplace?” Were they aware that if they did, he risked going to jail or losing his job?

Wendy had a similar story to share with me when she showed me photographs of her parents she had recently been given by her mother on a visit to Mafikeng to celebrate her mother’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her mother had handed her a brown envelope with a few photographs that she had kept in a box and told her that it was best that she took them as she feared they would be thrown away by her in-laws after she died.

The first photograph is of Wendy’s mother, on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Her mother was ‘coloured’, her father ‘white’. All her siblings were fair with green eyes except for one who Wendy described as “olive-skinned”. Her mother worked as a quality controller in a small clothing factory in Johannesburg, which only employed ‘white’ girls. For five years she kept her courtship with her ‘coloured’ boyfriend a secret, fearing that she would lose her job if it was discovered. She left work on a Friday afternoon, got married over the weekend and never returned to the factory. None of her workmates were invited to the wedding and she never saw any of them again.



*Figure 42*

Wendy also shared a photograph of her parents, taken on their wedding day in 1960. In the black and white image, the happy couple gaze lovingly into each other's eyes, seemingly oblivious to the photographer and any onlookers who may have been there. When I asked why she had chosen that particular photograph, she replied that it was because of the secrecy surrounding the wedding. She couldn't tell me how her mother felt about the situation, saying that her mother had seemed matter-of-fact, she had done what she had to do. "She told me, 'that's the way things were. I had to make a choice between my friends and my husband.'" She couldn't have continued at the same job once it was discovered that she was 'coloured', and she was embarrassed to tell them that she was getting married and not able to invite them (Fisher, 2016). In the wedding photograph, the bride and groom gaze lovingly into each other's eyes, clearly happy. There is no evidence of the dilemma her mother must have struggled with regarding her 'secret' of being 'coloured', the fear of being discovered and arrested for working in a 'white' clothing factory, and the loss of her job because of who she had chosen to marry. Passing indicates a casualness, a quickness of movement from one space to another, but it also necessitates a death or end of something as one moves to the next space, leaving a part of oneself behind while one assumes another, which is what Wendy's mother was forced to do.



*Figure 43*

Trying to navigate these spaces often meant choosing between family, home and community, in order to enjoy privileges that were not open to you as a ‘coloured’ person. Gail Lukasik, a ‘white’ American author who discovered that her mother was ‘black’, wonders if gaining ‘white’ privilege was worth the price of her mother losing her ties with her family and with her true self, and what it was like to live in a racist society and have to keep quiet. She regrets that her mother was not able to share with her who she really was, even after she discovered that she was from a ‘black’ New Orleans family. Her mother made her promise that she would not tell anyone until after she had died, so fearful and ashamed was she of being exposed as ‘black’ (Lukasik, 2017).

Allyson Hobbs, assistant professor of history and author of *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (2016) examines the stories of the countless ‘black’ and ‘white’ people who chose to cross the colour line from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in America. While there were certain advantages to crossing the line, Hobbs (2016) points out that there was untold loss attached too — the loss of self, family and community and history. Passing also required that your family and community had to let you go, and they had to keep your secret. It was therefore not a solitary act, requiring collaboration from those around you. How did those who colluded with you by letting you go, feel about being left ‘behind’ and what about the new group you were entering. Did they resent your ‘luck’ at being ‘white’ enough or feel ashamed because of not being able to emulate your actions?

What mark did this legacy leave on our minds? What does it do to a teenager to have to pretend to be her youngest sister’s nanny so that she can ride on a bus, or to see your aunt get onto the better carriage because her skin is fairer than yours, or to hide your relationship from your work colleagues for fear that they would

report you and you would lose your job? With a flourish of a pen, you could make your name ‘whiter’ and play sport in a ‘white’ league or dance in a competition that would have been forbidden to you if you had been asked for your identity documents. Often family members would ‘disappear’ to assume a life in a different race category, cutting themselves off from family and community, choosing to be dead or passed. Merely associating with someone who was not ‘white’ meant that your classification could be questioned (Bowker & Star, 2000). Hence, families were split up and ignored. I knew that uncle Alfie lived in Woodstock on the other side of the bridge with his daughter who had been reclassified ‘white’; this meant he couldn’t risk being seen with my grandfather, his brother, for fear of being ‘caught out’. Similarly, Aunty Merle recalls being aware that her father’s ‘white’ family lived a couple of roads away from them in Walmer Estate and not having any contact with them. The South African Race Classification Board (SARCB) used appearance<sup>266</sup> and testimony to decide on a person’s classification rather than the one-drop rule as in America, presumably because many ‘white’ South Africans had traceable ‘black’ ancestry. If someone looked ‘white’, no further investigation was necessary, but the board could take testimony from family, work colleagues, clergy and anyone in the community. It was easier then to cut yourself off from family and friends, to “be dead” to them, since association could determine race classification.

There were those who were caught, like author, Rayda Jacobs (2008), who describes in her memoir, *Masquerade*, how she lived a double life, travelling to work in a bus full of ‘coloured’ passengers from the ‘coloured’ suburb where she lived and then got onto the first-class carriage of the train to Cape Town, to attend the college that was reserved for ‘whites’, to complete a course as an executive secretary. This meant having to obtain a ‘white’ identity card. She worries about being

... a play-white ... an imposter, someone who didn’t want to know they were coloured and pretended not to know their dark friends on the street; it wasn’t someone you wanted to be associated with (Jacobs, 2008: 56).

She is able to inhabit these dual spaces, the ‘coloured’ Athlone suburb and the ‘white’ college, passing from one to the other, leaving the ‘coloured’ suburb in a ‘coloured’ bus, then halfway through her journey boarding the ‘white’ carriage on the train with her ‘white’ classmates to arrive at the ‘white’ college. At the end of the day she reversed the process, gradually becoming ‘coloured’ again. After surviving the year, not without panic attacks, she gets a job as a legal secretary and then is summoned to the Caledon Square Police station where she is confronted about the illegal possession of a ‘white’ card and is forced to leave the country. Jacobs suspects that someone she knew must have reported her to the police, implying that the community sometimes resented or looked down upon those who chose to pass for opportunity. Palse (2002)

<sup>266</sup> Tests were conducted on hair, eye colour, features and bone structure.

comments in her study that the historical and widespread practice of passing did not prevent sanction. Jacobs' passing reminds me of the bus that we took to and from town on Saturday mornings, travelling from the city centre, up through Hanover Street, continuing to Coronation Road where we would get off, and the bus continued to University Estate. From the poorer more cosmopolitan District Six, the bus carried its passengers to the more respectable and higher class Walmer Estate, until only 'white' passengers who would get off in Melbourne Road, were left. We traversed this space regularly, from one grandmother to the other, moving between Christianity and Islam, between English and Afrikaans, between less and better off. Bizarrely, these pockets of greyness existed all over the segregated city. Some residents of Walmer Estate literally lived across the street from 'white' neighbours, or a road from family passing for 'white'. The heterogeneity of appearance, culture, religion and origin of 'coloureds' led to them being reclassified or seeking reclassification, according to Bowler and Vincent (2011). This is evident in the number of reclassifications or movements from one 'race' group to another. As recently as 1984, for example:

518 coloured people were defined as White; 2 whites were called Chinese; 1 white was reclassified Indian; 1 white became Coloured; 89 coloured people became African (BBC n.d.).

Not everyone who could pass, chose to. Brigitte related the following story:

When I was 16, one of the nuns called me to the parlour and asked me what I was going to do about my future. I told her that I had always wanted to be a doctor. That's not what she meant. She said, 'there isn't a future for you as a coloured person. What will you do?' she didn't say it outright but she raised the concern. I remember saying, my family is my family. I didn't want to ever be anything other than what they were. In those days people could reclassify themselves and that's what she was referring to - the fact that I could have a better future if I thought about it. I was horrified.

Brigitte would probably have easily fitted into a 'white' community and is more likely to have been able to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, but giving up her family required too much of a sacrifice from her. Ironically, she says that all she ever wanted to do was fit in,

I really resented that I was a fair, coloured person. I was proud to be coloured, I didn't want to be anything else. People would comment on my blue eyes and fair skin, but all I wanted to do was fit in to the community I felt I belonged to.

In 1985, the apartheid government, under increasing pressure to reform, repealed the Immorality Act and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and, in 1989, the Group Areas Act. In this climate of 'change' Denise Woodman was part of the 1989 intake of 'non-white' air hostesses for South African Airways, the national airline. "They were slowly taking us in. They only took a few of you," says Woodman, "like at Bishops," she said referring to one of the top private schools in Cape Town, which remains predominantly 'white'.

According to Woodman, this was amid resistance from the Afrikaner staff. In order to fit the image of the airline, and maintain its standards, the new recruits were subject to regular inspections, conducted by a ‘white’ senior – this included regular weigh-ins, makeup was expected to be flawless, and hair had to be sleek. “They literally did the pencil test<sup>267</sup> on us”.

This was 1989, a year before Mandela was released. The uniform inspections echo the way we were treated as children at school. When I enquired whether anyone had protested against the indignity of being lined up and examined to check whether he or she was ‘good enough’ to represent South Africa on international flights, Woodman said that “No one wanted to rock the boat; we were handpicked, a cut above the rest and proud” (being an air hostess was previously a job denied to ‘blacks’). “Besides, if we did not comply, we were threatened with being grounded. This was an opportunity to do something that no one else in the community had been able to do. A new job, a new you” (Woodman, 2018).

Did the colour of our skins, the curliness of our hair, mean that we were always trying to comply with a standard set by the apartheid government? And were we complicit in this, by constantly striving to attain this standard? Is this why our mothers cleaned? To make up for being ‘coloured’? To be good enough to be seen as South Africans, as human? As Petersen commented in her interview,

My hair may not be straight, my skin may not be white, *maar kom kyk ons huise!* (but come and have a look at our houses).

Is that why my mother’s formal lounge bothers me so much today? Does she still feel the need to prove that, in spite of being ‘coloured’, even after apartheid, she’s good enough beyond any classification other than South African, other than human? And when will she ever feel good enough? These are questions which linger in the back of my mind, 24 years into a democratic country, as I navigate formerly ‘white’ spaces – the suburbs I live in, the schools and universities my children attended, the restaurants I visit, the places I choose to holiday – all of which remain predominantly ‘white’.

### **THE ELUSIVE ‘COLOURED’ IDENTITY**

In the past three years I have found myself immersed in stories about growing up ‘coloured’ — a curious space to be in since I reject the label. So, in a sense I have been living in an ambiguous space, identifying with lived experiences and listening to common stories of what it was like for a certain section of the population to live under apartheid. Simultaneously though, I have listened to different voices, Christian and Muslim, speaking English and Afrikaans, from different social, economic and educational backgrounds. Fisher, in his column, *Thought Leader*, for the *Mail & Guardian*, says that he does not identify as ‘coloured’

<sup>267</sup> An apartheid-era test to determine the sleekness of your hair and therefore your classification

but as ‘black’, in accordance with Biko’s BC<sup>268</sup> movement.

I have never considered myself to be a coloured and prefer to describe myself as black, in line with the definitions explained by Steve Biko in the 1970s. At the time, the apartheid regime called us non-whites and Biko questioned why “white” had to be the standard against which everything was judged. He asked why “black” could not be this standard. He argued that we should all call ourselves black (Africans, coloureds and Indians), and whites should be called non-blacks. These definitions have, of course, been entrenched in our law and our Constitution, so I can legally call myself black. The issue of whether there is a coloured identity is not new, but it surfaces every now and then. It seems to surface more every time we are heading for another election (Fisher, 2008).

Biko’s effect on the psyche of especially young South Africans is echoed in Nelson Mandela’s 2002 tribute to him:

His message to youth and students was simple and clear: Black is Beautiful! Be proud of your Blackness! And with that he inspired our youth to shed themselves of the sense of inferiority they were born into as a result of more than three centuries of white rule (quoted in Mangcu, 2012: 7).

In the interview with Fisher, he pointed out that ‘coloured’ people in Durban don’t speak Afrikaans but are likely to speak isiZulu, ‘coloured’ people in the southern suburbs of Cape Town speak a different Afrikaans to those who live in the northern suburbs, those in the suburbs of Eldorado Park and Eersterus may speak Sotho, and urban ‘coloured’ people speak a different language to those in Kimberly or Malmesbury (Fisher, 2018). Van der Ross (2015) similarly says that ‘coloureds’ differ from province to province and distinctions can be made “between a Capey, a Bolander, a Kimberleyite, a Transvaler, a Natalian or someone from the Eastern Cape” (Van der Ross, 2015: 8). This is supported by Erasmus (2017) who argues against ‘coloured’ being a biological or ethnic identity, but rather a loose category of South Africans bound together through a process of creolisation as a result of slavery and colonisation. This means that ‘coloured’ always overlaps with ‘black’ and African (Erasmus, 2017). Perhaps, says Fisher (2018), the so-called ‘coloured’ identity is closest to what we can call a South African identity since it impacts all people. The intermingling of diverse backgrounds and cultures of slaves, Dutch, Khoisan and Nguni people, means that their histories are intimately linked to Africa and South Africa. The language, culture, identity, and traditions shared by ‘coloured’ people evolved along with South Africa placing upon them a responsibility to resist attempts to be segregated or alienated from the struggles of others, and to refuse to be used again as a buffer or to be co-opted to serve the interests of a racist and divisive society, says Adendorf (2013). In his column Fisher

<sup>268</sup> The primary necessity, Biko believed, was for ‘blacks’ to emancipate themselves and reach a point where they could deal with ‘whites’ on equal terms in their own minds. In other words, to unshackle themselves from the structural colonial legacy that attempted to reform their way of thinking.



asserts,

I still believe that the only definition of “coloureds” is people who could not be fitted into any of the other apartheid-era definitions (Fisher, 2008).

This recalls the words of Brian Barrow (2003) in his book, *The Spirit of District Six*, as quoted by journalist John Pilger (2006) in his book, *Freedom Next Time*,

While so many other South Africans found pride and esteem in their cultural bonds with Europe and other parts of the world, the people of District Six were quite happy to be uniquely themselves and, in doing so, they fitted the definition of ‘South Africans’ more genuinely than anyone else (Pilger, 2006: 185-186).

Erasmus (2001: 21) suggests a re-imagining of ‘coloured’ identities, to move beyond the notion of ‘mixed race’ towards cultural identities which embody “specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being”. This diversity was articulated in “language, cuisine, music, civic and political responsibility, religion and even sporting prowess” in District Six (Soudien, 2001:128). Soudien (2001) offers for consideration District Six, with its heterogeneous population, and a place of tolerance and respect for difference, as a model for non-racialism in SA. Using the site of forced removals during apartheid as a concept for the production of a South African identity, the main features of his discourse are the ethos of community sharing, social harmony and the concept of hybridity. He proposes District Six as an authentic counter-apartheid identity, one which is united and integrated, while cautioning that the hybridity was enunciated in largely European terms and had lost its connection to pre-colonial Africa (Soudien, 2001).

District Six has become symbolic not only of the site of forced removals but as a space of integration. It was by no means the only such space – spaces of integration, of greyness, neither black nor white, existed throughout the city, spaces where people could be together, if only briefly. In so doing, the possibility of freedom could be nurtured. I propose that more spaces such as these are created, spaces where people can come and explore how we may live together.

## **ROAD TRIPS**

As part of my research I undertook a number of trips to small towns surrounding Cape Town, starting with Malmesbury and Caledon where my paternal grandparents were born and extending my trips to Genadendal, Mamre, Pniël (all former mission stations). I recognised a common theme, a shared identity, running through these little towns – more affluent ‘white’ centres, with poor ‘black’ settlements, far enough from the centre but close enough so that the labour source can walk there. Many towns have their history of indigenous inhabitants, slavery and forced removals, under the wing of the DRC in its centre and the mission churches

on the fringes, and often a slave bell. Afrikaans is mainly spoken especially by the local ‘coloured’ people who roll their ‘r’s’; church bazaars and Saturday morning markets are a main attraction, as is the bottle store. Little has changed for the ‘coloured’ people who have lived in these towns, many since the emancipation of slavery, when a town like Genadendal was set up. Here, the site of the oldest mission station in the country, local inhabitants live in poverty doing seasonal farm work or domestic work, as their parents and grandparents did before them. Five kilometres away, the town of Greyton, gentrified and ‘white’, is a tourist attraction “for body and soul”, according to its official website, with top restaurants and accommodation underlining the economic differences which have seen little change post-apartheid.

The photographs below show the poverty in which people continue to live, in ramshackle homes, whiling away time on street corners or outside liquor stores, trying to eke out a living, and seeing no better future than the yesterdays their parents and grandparents lived in. Democracy and the new South Africa seem to have passed these towns by. When I questioned one of the horseback riders about what he was going to do when he finished school, he replied, “*ek wietie, antie*” (I don’t know, aunty). The legacy of slavery, the church, and the shadow of the *dop* system, has left a mantle of dependency hanging over many of the towns and there seems to be little awareness of how to shake it off.



Figure 44



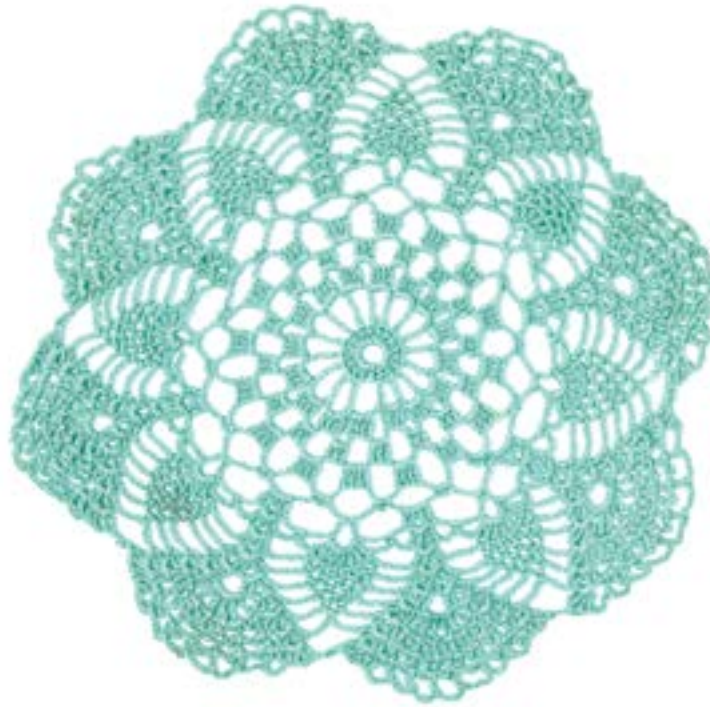
Figure 45



Figure 46



Figure 47



In the Genadendal museum I saw evidence of a rich history of industry — a mill, printing press, the tools of the cooper and the blacksmith, and *riempie*<sup>269</sup> chairs lined up against the wall, proof of a thriving furniture workshop. I could imagine the mill turning again, the printing press clacking away in the background while the cooper made his barrels and the carpenter drilled holes for the *riempie* to be strung through. I imagined youth showing visitors around their town, past the memorial to the soldiers who had died in WWI, leading them on hikes into the surrounding mountains, returning to eat freshly baked cakes at tables and chairs set out under oak trees on Die Werf<sup>270</sup>, in front of the 19<sup>th</sup> century church building. Most of all, I imagined the pride and dignity of human beings who are truly free.

Chief Albert Luthuli, Nobel Peace Prize winner and president of the ANC, in his autobiography, penned words which still ring true:

The task is not finished. South Africa is not yet a home for all her sons and daughters ... The past cannot hope to have a life sustained by itself, wrenched from the whole. There remains before us the building of a new land, a home for men who are black, white, brown, from the ruins of the old narrow groups, a synthesis of the rich cultural strains which we have inherited. There remains to be achieved our integration with the rest of our continent. Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilisation, a culture, which will take its place ... beside other great human syntheses ... It will not necessarily be all black; but it will be African (Luthuli, 1982: 260).

South Africa is not yet a home for all her sons and daughters.

<sup>269</sup> A thin strip of softened leather used for the seats of chairs, laces and string; traditional Cape chairs have such seats and sometimes backs

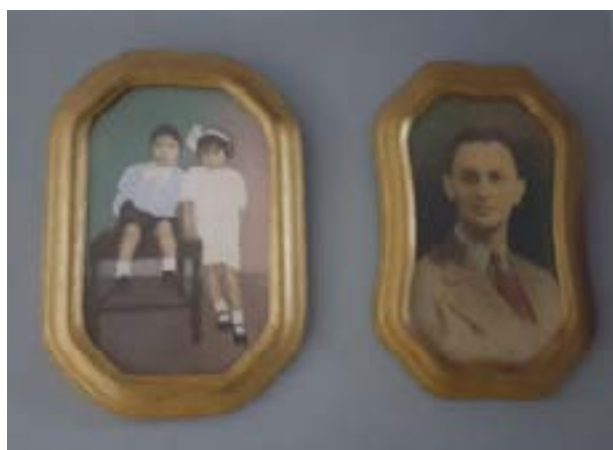
<sup>270</sup> The town square

## CONCLUSION

### A SEARCH FOR ROOTS

In many ways, embarking on this PhD journey, although motivated by exploring issues of shame and respectability, may be seen as a search for roots — a sense of validation and a sense of pride in a history and culture that has existed for generations, but denied by slave masters, colonisers and apartheidists. My search has been driven by a sincere attempt to understand where I come from, and what has made me who I am. I hope that by gaining insight into the past, I can imagine a future where my grandchildren will be not only free, but equal too.

A number of years ago I discovered the two portraits below, in my parents' garage. The frames were chipped, the pictures watermarked and the glass cracked. I had the pictures touched up, sanded and painted the frames and replaced the glass, each step restoring (in my mind at least) the dignity of the people in the portraits.



*Figure 48*

On the left is a portrait of my father and his sister taken probably around 1937-8 and on the right of my maternal grandfather, which I believe must have been taken around the same time. Three years ago, I visited an exhibition by curators Ruth Sack and Lisa Espi, entitled, *Picture Perfect: A Social History of Hand-Coloured Photographic Portraiture in 20<sup>th</sup> Century South Africa*, at UCT's Hiddingh Campus. Sack and Espi researched the practice of air-brushed photographic portraiture which was brought to South Africa from Chicago in the 1930s. My maternal grandmother who commissioned the portrait of her two oldest children, and my paternal grandfather, must have been among their early clients. According to the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA)<sup>271</sup> website, travelling salesmen would visit communities all over the country, finding clients who were prepared to surrender their precious personal photographs to be taken to the artists' studio to be enlarged, printed and coloured in. The two portraits that now hang on a wall in my home, were part of a larger phenomenon — of a highly popular business that criss-crossed the country,

<sup>271</sup> The exhibition was hosted by the University of Cape Town's Humanities Faculty.

with clients in urban townships and rural villages. According to the curators, they cut across class, race and religion. From Moravian mission towns to villages in Limpopo to big cities, Jewish, Indian, ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ families had given up the few photographs that they had of themselves – even photos from identity and pass books, – and waited for months to receive the framed portraits.

As I walked around the exhibition hall, examining portraits from studios in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, I wondered what made them so popular. Why had they been in such demand, why did people want them? What did it mean to have such a portrait? How much did it cost? When was it done? What about the social and political climate in South Africa had made this necessary? Of significance, is that in many cases, the time, circumstances and conditions have been manipulated, leading to the curators dubbing this “The Portrait Racket”. Some of them were of weddings that had either not taken place, or had been depicted with “western trappings”, some appeared to have been taken under duress, or were unflattering. In other cases, they had been created posthumously, as in the case of soldiers who had never returned from war. They all have a similar blue-green background which adds a certain democratisation to the portraits — the background obliterates the context, making where you came from irrelevant. The subjects in the portraits have been bestowed with dignity and stature.

Amongst the family photographs in my possession, I found one of my mother taken in the sitting room of her parents’ house. She is smartly dressed, from the hat on her head down to the court shoes, the gloves and little bag. Her fashionable dress puffs out over starched petticoats. She reminds me of a debutante, a young woman of an upper-class family about to make her first appearance in society. On closer examination, I



*Figure 49*

realise that she is posing in front of the portrait of my grandfather. I wonder if her position was purposefully chosen, the well-dressed daughter posed in front of an equally well-dressed and dignified father, or is it accidental that she is standing right there? Either way, I am gratified to see the portrait on the wall, proof that it was once proudly displayed.

I also come across the original photograph of my father and his sister, which obviously provided the model for their portrait. It appears to have been taken in a studio. On the back of the photograph are neat notes and instructions concerning the colour of the hair, clothes and shoes they are wearing. In the upper right-hand corner is my grandmother's name and address: Combrinck Street, Cape Town — not an address where you would imagine to find a portrait of two children. I am intrigued that my working-class grandmother went to the trouble to not only have the photograph taken, but also to have spent money on the portrait of her two oldest. I am further intrigued by the fact that these two young children have been 'tidied' up in the portrait — my aunt has had her fringe straightened and my father has lost that wayward curl on his forehead. They look perfectly respectable and, since the background has been erased, it could have been taken anywhere. These small manipulations and the blurring of the background, serve to present an image that was important to my grandmother, for exact reasons that will remain hidden from me. The original photograph on which the portrait is based, is 80 years old, fragile, bent and torn and I am grateful of the more enduring framed version I have hanging on the passage wall.



*Figure 50*



*Figure 51*



*Figure 52*

Both the portraits give me a sense of a deliberate attempt to signal respectability. Portraiture has always had a link with wealth, power and stature, extending back to Pharaonic times when humans who were venerated as gods, were portrayed in paintings. During mediaeval times when the church was particularly powerful, the subject of portraits tended to be religious in nature, but later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, more secular subjects who were wealthy and powerful, commissioned portraits (O'Neill, 2009). I suggest that one of the reasons these hand-coloured photographs were so popular in South Africa, especially in the communities where they were to be found, is no different to that of ancient Egyptians and wealthy and powerful clergy and noblemen.

### **IMAGINING THE FUTURE**

If slavery, colonialism and apartheid were about dehumanising the body, then how do we look at transformation as re-humanising the body? More than simply the dismantling of apartheid legislation needs to be done in order that we may construct ways of life in which we acknowledge our human-ness rather than other-ness. Netshitenzhe (2015) believes that movement towards a truly integrated society requires us to think about who we are and what we want to be, as well as about the responsibility of leadership. Netshitenzhe (2015) agrees with Bagues (2010) that self-examination is required in order to find our humanity. Bagues (2010) invites us to think about “what we are, what we have become, and how we might rupture the frames of our present selves” (Bagues, 2010: 119-120). Similarly, architect Liz Ogbu, who focuses on spatial justice, contends that we cannot create cities for everyone without listening to everyone about what has been lost and unfulfilled. Healing, she says, is about acknowledging pain and making peace with it. Healing is about renewing our faith in the process of becoming. She urges us to consider that we cannot expect the foundations to hold if we build on brokenness (Ogbu, 2017).

As a creative writer and a story-teller, I believe strongly that it is through telling our stories in a multiplicity of voices that we can hope to transcend the racist boxes that we were forced into and learn how to be human. I am aware that by telling these stories some will presume that I am telling them because I am ‘coloured’. However, these are my stories, and the stories of people I know, went to school with and lived next door to. I don’t represent any ‘race’. The apartheid walls tried to force us into being the same — we lived in the same areas, went to the same schools, married the same people. We carried our sameness around like a security blanket and retreated within it, afraid of the other; we developed our own stereotypes based on our ignorance of what was beyond those walls.

Racism maintains that there is a natural connection between the way people look, the colour of their skin or texture of their hair, and the way they behave. It attributes characteristics such as intelligence, athletic ability

or creativity, to genetic makeup and not to environmental or historical circumstances. When I travelled with my family throughout the 1990s, we didn't fit into the stereotypes foreigners had of us. They asked us where we came from; why we were 'brown', not 'black', how come we spoke English; had straight hair? They thought we were every other nationality – Brazilian, Asian, Spanish – except South African. I believe that, when we travel, physically or metaphorically through books or documentaries, when we leave our communities, we open ourselves up to something different. Only by engaging with each other can we move beyond stereotypes and prejudices, to acknowledge and embrace our multiple stories.

Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Adichie (2009), warns us of the danger of a single story — single stories create stereotypes, they are not untrue but they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story, she postulates. I agree with Adichie when she says that when we reject the single story, when we realise that there is never a single story about a place (I'd like to add or a person, here), we regain a kind of paradise. By connecting the lines between all of our stories, we recognise our common humanity; we move beyond only seeing the other, and towards freedom and equality so that we may think about how we may live. It is up to us to reach out to each other, and to break down the walls that were constructed around us, to separate us from the other. Only then may we learn how to human.

Through my research, I hope to have substantiated the possibility of a re-imagined post-apartheid South Africa and as such, contribute to the healing of generational trauma which “did not begin and end with our parents and grandparents, but which continues, revealing itself as consequences which we live out within the current space of post-apartheid SA” (O'Connell, 2012:128).

### **HOW MAY WE BE FREE?**

In a paper titled, *And What About the Human?* Bogues (2012) explores practices of freedom from the perspective of the oppressed and within the framework of new archives. He questions the use of alternative archives in the landscape where record keeping is oral and the work of memory, and suggests the possibility of a different set of archives which includes music, art and religious practices. Practices of freedom are intended to construct new ways of human association, new ways for us to live as humans, and, in order to achieve that, we “need to write an alternative history of thought” (Bogues, 2012: 46).

Our thinking about what is human has been shaped by colonial thought, according to which bodies were objectified and subjected to violence “as if they had never been alive, or human”, argues Bogues (2012: 34). The voices of those on whom this violence and objectification were practiced, have been ignored, but their experiences provide lessons on how we may live as humans. Bogues (2012) argues that colonial power, slavery and apartheid were prolonged forms of specific domination that resulted in habitual trauma which



repeated itself to the extent that it became experienced as routine and commonplace. From this context then it is necessary to question practices of freedom. Emancipation did not equate with freedom — simply being emancipated or released from dependency was not enough; the oppressed needed to learn what it meant to be free in order to recreate themselves. Since the coloniser was placed in the role of ruler/enforcer and the indigenous man as an instrument of production, it becomes important to reconsider what it means to be human through a different lens, a different archive, in order to tell the stories of the oppressed, using an archive of the ordinary (Bogues, 2012).

O’Connell (2012) concurs that it is crucial, in a post-apartheid space, to consider alternative sources of remembering. Colonial expansion and anthropological inquiry went hand in hand, she contends. Later, apartheid sought to erase the history of the oppressed and the colonial and apartheid photographic archives were used to fix difference in terms of race, gender and culture. O’Connell emphasises the power of the family photograph to destabilise the dominant narrative, in spite of it often showing little skill, and being kept in boxes, envelopes or albums. We cannot discount these photographs as legitimate archives of knowledge which are able to “articulate suppressed, submerged, contested or fractured histories” as Edwards (2005: 28) contends in her study of family photographs in Australia. In this way perhaps, my father’s photograph of us in the front garden in Lotus River, disrupts the image of what people who lived in Lotus River were supposed to look like, dress like and be like. This provides a valuable lens, in spite of the fact that the top of my mother’s head has been cut off in the image. Many of my own photographs and those which were shared with me, likewise substantiate the use of the photograph to disrupt the narrative that would paint ‘coloured’ people as gangsters, drunks and happy-go-luck clowns.

The album of the oppressed, says O’Connell, urges us to reconsider how those who were oppressed, survived and constructed lives for themselves in which they were human.

Photographs found, and ‘spoken’ in the home, ask us to work outside of conventional archives and to think about what is missing from the narrative. They are the traces of moments that refuse to dissipate, and they invite us to think through questions of oppression as well as the after-lives of oppression (O’Connell, 2012: 105).

The incredulity of the apartheid laws and repercussions stand in stark contrast to the normalcy of our lives. The subjugation that was marked on our bodies, on our skin, hair, bone and facial features, was a visual representation of difference. I propose therefore, that a visual counter is required to resist and subvert this oppression, and this subversion is to be found in the album of the oppressed. In order for the photograph to mean something it needs to be spoken; photographs are social objects, as Edwards (2005) suggests, and I witnessed this in two of the interviews I conducted. Both interviews, with my mother’s cousins lasted for

about three hours. I had not seen either one for years and there was a ritual common to both, of making tea, setting the tray and first catching up. Only then could we talk about the purpose of my visit. The photos were examined, held, quietly giggled at, as the memories they evoked were released and then it was as if I was no longer there. I became a witness to the interaction between the photograph and the story-teller, which validates O’Connell’s claim that photographs and memory are intrinsically connected.

Through photographs of the oppressed and the sharing of memories, we may confront and challenge the legacy of slavery, colonialism and apartheid power which sought to brand us inferior, shameful and other. Family photographs contain extended family and friends, they belong to a community, and therefore hold the stories of a community. As such they have an important role to play in the healing of communities, allowing us to “touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other” (Fanon, 2008: 181).

As we witness the rise of ‘coloured’ nationalism and blatant acts of racism and isolationism, the urgency to learn how we may live together in a post-apartheid South Africa, assumes added gravitas. Instead of assuming an identity of otherness should we not be searching instead for connections to each other? The past has to be accounted for if we have any vision of a free country. The earnestness of this endeavour is mirrored in the fragility of the photographs I have examined, the representation of humanity lasting only on photographic paper – off-centre and out of focus – threatening to disintegrate in my hands and to become mere memories, ethereal like the ghosts of the enslaved, the ghosts of those who passed. We have to do this while the memories are still alive, while there are still people who hold the keys to the memories the photographs hold.

## **FOOTNOTE**

Years ago, I attended a women’s workshop where, as an icebreaker, we were asked to say out loud the names of strong women in our genealogies. An American woman in the group could trace her maternal line back to a woman who had crossed on the Mayflower<sup>272</sup>. That was more than 300 years of history right there. It was with a vague sense of shame that I could only name my mother and grandmothers. I seemed lightweight, of little consequence, without any history.

I pressed my mother for more details afterwards, unable to comprehend that she hadn’t done the same to her mother. There were things you didn’t talk about she replied to me, whispers of mixtures that were shameful or illegal. Her mother, she said, had hardly ever spoken about her parents, and she could not recall her ever going back to Malmesbury. I had looked in vain at the archives in Roeland Street for any information, but a surname like Adams was far too common and I had little other information to go on. As I

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<sup>272</sup> the ship which had transported the Pilgrims from England to the New World in 1620

walked through the Malmesbury Museum and the still obviously divided town, recently, I searched for signs of my grandmother's life there. Seeing the prominent position that Jan Smuts<sup>273</sup> and DF Malan<sup>274</sup> occupied in the museum as "sons of the Swartland", I wondered if that had anything to do with her obsession with 'whiteness'. As I stood outside the 'white' NGK, which stands proudly in the centre of town, I recalled my mother telling me that my grandmother had been baptised in the NGK, and had joined the Anglican church only after she and my grandfather had married.

While doing research for the Slave Church exhibition, I visited the NGK archives in Stellenbosch. I was amazed at the meticulous record-keeping, the kilometres of shelves of documents, dating back 300 years, that were temperature- and light-protected. Little did I think that my grandmother's baptism entry would be preserved on those shelves. Without expecting much, I asked the archivist, Karen Minnaar, if she could find any record of my grandmother in the archives. Later that same day, I received an email containing photographs of my grandmother's baptismal entry with the names of her parents and those of her godparents, along with confirmation of the entry on an NGK letterhead.

I am Nadia, daughter of Hope Lorraine, daughter of Ethel Jeanet Silvia, daughter of Annie.

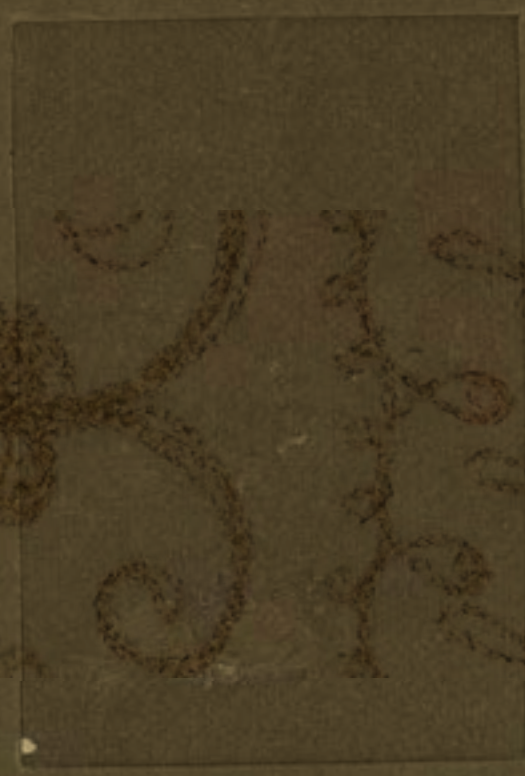


Figure 53

80 880 words

<sup>273</sup> Jan Smuts - Prime Minister of SA twice: 1919–24, 1939–48

<sup>274</sup> DF Malan – was the first Prime Minister of apartheid South Africa





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