

Living and Feeling Apart

Difference and Identity in South Africa

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1. Introduction

Colonial rule and Apartheid left South Africa deeply traumatised. The country was in crisis. The self-identity of most citizens – white or black – was shattered. Conflicts between and within racial groups dominated the critical years of this area. Even after the end of Apartheid, despite the official abolition of racial segregation and discrimination, racial ways of thinking and white dominance left deep cuts in the nation's structure, which could not be wiped out in a matter of a few years. The way one defined one's own identity was deeply located in the soul of every citizen. Hence, Apartheid should be seen as the most crucial political and social system that affected the identity of all citizens and still defines the identity of most South Africans today. The importance of Apartheid for South Africa's history raises several questions: How is its social structure and apartness experienced? How does it feel to be South African? What events, situations, and social relationships might shape the identity of South Africans? And – most interestingly – is it plausible to talk about national identity? Several philosophers have discussed post-colonial conceptions of identity and otherness related to personal, cultural, and national identity, which seem worth exploring.

The aim of my paper is to relate and critically discuss those philosophical concepts and to contextualize them with South African history and social structure. In particular, the question how Apartheid and its ideology shaped the identity of black and white South Africans shall be answered. First, the term Apartness will be discussed and a concise historical overview of Apartheid shall be provided. Afterwards, identity concepts of post-colonialism, including those of Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Jacques Derrida will be discussed. The next section deals with spaces of identity, in particular with townships as the *Subject* (Julia Kristeva) and remote farms as heterotopic spaces (Michel Foucault). Finally, the importance of trauma and identity crisis will be discussed. Further, the national component of trauma will be stressed and linked to the concept of national identity. In order to provide a deeper impression of life under Apartheid, surveys, illustrations, and three South African novels will be used for purposes of illustration: J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, Bessie Heads *A Question of Power*, and André Brink's *A Dry White Season*. The reader shall be enabled to slip into the mind of South Africans, whereby a deeper understanding of Apartheid and its consequences shall be gained.

2. Apartheid: A short historical overview

The term Apartheid can be translated from Afrikaans to English as “apartness” and implies segregation, distance, and living apart¹. Thus, the very term of the concept already implies the feeling related to living in accordance to this ideology, which was introduced when the National Party (NP) won the elections in 1948. Their main aim was to further the separated development of South Africa’s racial groups and to limit the contact between those groups as much as possible (mainly to work relationships)². While other forms of segregation had existed before South African Apartheid, its outstanding characteristic lies in the fact that racial segregation was anchored in law, i.e. racial laws.

As these legal regulations defined the lives of all citizens, a short overview of the six most relevant racially segregating acts seems helpful to enhance understanding. Already one year after the National Party’s accession to power, in 1949, the first acts were passed. The *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* turned inter-racial marriages illegal, probably causing a shattering of a number of relationships. In 1950 three important changes were made. First, the *Immorality Amendment Act* built on the act passed in 1949, as now sexual contact between whites and non-whites too became illegal. Non-white races were defined in the *Population Registration Act* and categorized into black, coloured, and Indian. All citizens were registered and received ID-papers, on which personal data and physical characteristics, including skin colour were noted. Thus, the country was divided into four racial groups: white, black, coloured, and Indian (British colonial rule had caused high immigration quotes from India). While this registration was obligatory for all South Africans, it meant a considerable restriction of movement for coloured and black South Africans because at any time police officers could demand to be shown their ID-papers and, in addition, in combination with other acts, their personal freedom decreased considerably. The *Group Areas Act* of 1950 divided South Africa up into areas reserved for the four defined racial groups. As a consequence, the mobility of non-whites was clearly limited and apartness was now also manifested in space. This spatial segregation was further deepened by the *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act*, a law which restructured South African government by dividing the black population in almost random national units that were allocated specific areas, the so-called Homelands.

¹ Cf. Dictionary.com: “Apartheid”, online: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/apartheid?s=t&ld=1091> (02/02/2017).

² Cf. South African History Online: “Apartheid and Reactions to It”, online: www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-and-reactions-it (02/02/2017).

Originally there were eight National Units; later Ciskei and Transkei were added for Xhosa people³. Thereby, South Africa was legally structured according to race.

As a consequence, in South Africa racial segregation was not only located in people's minds but also manifest in its landscape, as can be illustrated by pictures of frequently encountered signs in times of Apartheid (see *images 1* and *2*). The aspect of spaces of identity will be further discussed in section 4.



Image 1: Johannesburg.1956 (online: www.cvltnation.com/institutionalized-hatred-signs-of-apartheid-1950-1990)



Image 2: Signs (English and Afrikaans) in Johannesburg.1957 (online: www.cvltnation.com/institutionalized-hatred-signs-of-apartheid-1950-1990)

³ Cf. South African History Online: „The History of Separate Development in South Africa. Apartheid Legislation 1850s-1970s“, online: www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s (02/02/2017).

Signs warning white people that they were about to enter black areas were positioned at the entrance to townships, while multi-lingual signs allocated areas and facilities to specific race-groups.

The inequality resulting from the acts explained above was soon criticised, both within South Africa and internationally. Apart from individual liberal efforts large protest movements included the African National Congress (ANC, with various sub-divisions), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). It is important to recognize that not all of these organizations were exclusively black or non-white; while some argued that only the blacks themselves could free their people, other organisations worked together across all races and several white liberals (as for instance the author André Brink) actively supported the national liberation of non-whites from white hegemony. Already in 1949 Apartheid inspired people to protests and strikes. In 1952 the Defiance Campaign was organised, a peaceful campaign leading to the numerous detentions. One of the most outstanding instances of police violence was the “Sharpeville Massacre” of 1960. As a consequence of the following resistance, the state decided to ban the ANC, as well as the PAC, whereby both organisations were forced to continue their activities underground, or in other countries. Acts of sabotage by members of the ANC and violent resistance (primarily by the PAC) followed. In 1963 several members of the resistance were detained, including South Africa’s most famous prisoner and symbol of the anti-apartheid effort, Nelson Mandela. At the end of the 1960s the situation calmed down for the resistance had to reorganize its structure⁴.

About fifteen years later the situation escalated again. In the “Soweto riots” of 1976 hundreds of people were killed, including children, causing further violent resistance by illegal sub-organisations, which continued into the 1980s. This is also the time when Nelson Mandela gained international fame as a symbol of South African national liberation. Mandela and the ANC could clearly use the general increasing international controversy around the system of Apartheid. After President Botha had ignored the arising demands for democracy, riots in South African townships ripped the police of their power in the respective areas, where after the government declared the State of Emergency. As a consequence, larger parts of the white population started to notice that the only solution would be a change of the political system. Thus, first negotiations with the ANC were initiated⁵. In the early 1990s, finally, the ban of the above mentioned organizations was lifted and Mandela and several

⁴ Cf. South African History Online: “Liberation Struggle in South Africa”, online: www.sahistory.org.za/article/liberation-struggle-south-africa (02/02/2017).

⁵ Cf. South African History Online: “Liberation Struggle in South Africa”.

other political prisoners freed. After several meetings and negotiations the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was founded. April 1994 marks the end of Apartheid; then, the first elections were held in which all races had the right to vote. Mandela, as the leader of the ANC, won the election and became first black president of South Africa⁶.

After this short historical overview, we may now turn to our socio-cultural analysis of relationships and identity prior to Mandela's victory.

3. Forming identities

The complex nature of South Africa's social structure but also of our general contemporary society with all its ambiguities and contradictions creates the need to understand identity not as singular but manifold, and sometimes contradictory. Stuart Hall argues that "[i]dentity is always in the process of formation. [...] [I]dentity means or connotes the process of identification, of saying that this here is the same as that, or we are the same together in this respect. [...] [S]tructure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence"⁷. This definition has two important implications. First, identity is not seen as a stable inert universal quality, as it is always in process; the subject always becomes someone new. Hence, Hall clearly argues for a non-essentialist concept of identity. Secondly, his definition implies that identity is constructed in relation to other objects or subjects. We compare ourselves to others and try to find differences or similarities. According to Hall, all our thoughts, images, and our perception of the world around us are constructs of discursive practices, especially language. Thus, Hall clearly belongs to the school of thought termed post-structuralism. Its perspective on identities is described as follows: "It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions"⁸. Such antagonist discourses and practices could frequently be encountered in South African society, with regard to both black and white citizens. Afrikaner liberals, for instance, identified as Afrikaners, while at the same time their political opinion was contradictory to the official policy of Afrikaner government, as well as main-stream opinion. Another example can be found in black and coloured women's struggle for emancipation; while women of the ANC women's league combined the national liberation struggle with the gender issue and demanded the right to vote for men and women of all races, male leaders of the ANC were

⁶ Cf. South African History Online: "Liberation Struggle in South Africa", online: www.sahistory.org.za/article/liberation-struggle-south-africa (02/02/2017).

⁷ Hall, Stuart: "The Question of Cultural Identity". In: Hall, Stuart; Held, David; McGrew, Anthony (Ed.): *Modernity and its Futures*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, 47.

⁸ Hall: "The Question of Cultural Identity", 4.

convinced that national liberation was prior to women's emancipation⁹. Although the objectives of the ANC and its sub-organisations were at times contradictory, women of the ANC women's league identified as both: females and members of the national liberation struggle. Each of them, each subject, is constituted of multiple, diverse identities, which might at times be contradictory.

Further, due to the uniqueness of all individuals, an analysis of South African identity necessarily involves generalization and many South Africans will not be able to identify with the personalities chosen for exemplification. It should be considered that there will always be exceptions to the following results of analysis.

An analysis of identities and their construction not only demands generalisation but also some kind of categorisation. For understanding group dynamics in South African society we should consider Antonio Gramsci's concept of the *subaltern*. In his article "Notes of Italian History", written between 1929 and 1935 and later published in his most famous book *Prison Notebooks*¹⁰, he uses the term *subaltern classes* to speak about lower-ranked people or groups of people in a particular society who suffer under hegemonic dominance of a ruling elite, which robs them of their right of participation with regard to the creation of local history as individuals of this nation. In particular, Gramsci is concerned with Italian farmers and workers, who were suppressed by the Italian Fascist Party but his concept can be applied to most hegemonic social power structures. Gramsci is of the opinion that subaltern classes are per definition no community and even though they do indeed have their own history, the history of the suppressing party clearly dominates social discourse and is officially accepted. In addition, subaltern classes are denied access to cultural and social institutions. Both points seem to be true for South African non-whites: the discriminating acts explained in section 2 clearly illustrate the limited room for action of blacks and coloureds under the rule of the NP. Moreover, the history of South African subaltern groups was probably hardly incorporated into teaching, as "Apartheid education in South Africa promoted race, class, gender and ethnic divisions and has emphasised separateness, rather than common citizenship and

⁹ Cf. Lichtenegger, Anna: "'Repeal the Pass Laws'. Texts of Protest by the ANC Women's League in the 1950s". Unpublished seminar paper at the University of Vienna. Vienna 2016.

¹⁰ Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia UP 1992.

nationhood¹¹. For Gramsci, dismantling this master-slave pattern represents the only way to resolve such asymmetric power structures¹².

Gramsci's concept has been discussed by numerous authors of various fields but the probably most important criticism was placed by the Indian-American, feminist, post-colonial critic Gayatri Spivak. In her work "Can the Subaltern Speak?"¹³ she explores subalternity in the context of new social developments, such as globalisation and capitalism. Building on an analysis of Hindu women's situation under colonial rule, Spivak strongly criticises the autonomy of subaltern groups. The contradictory position of Hindu women torn between Hindu traditions and newly introduced British-humanist principles deprives them of the possibility to speak for themselves. As both (primarily male) parties lend them their voices, their own voice is lost, or in Spivak's words: the subaltern cannot speak. El Habib Luoai offers two possible interpretations for Spivak's central sentence: First, it could express that the resistance of subaltern groups cannot be voiced due to hegemonic suppression by another group. Another possibility is to perceive the subaltern as a conscious subject whose only available language is the dominant language¹⁴.

The dominant language of Apartheid was Afrikaans. Nevertheless, the language of resistance, i.e. of the subaltern groups, was English, which can be simply explained by considering the variety of languages spoken by South Africa's various ethnic groups. Today eleven official languages and even more non-official (more local) languages and dialects are recorded¹⁵. *Table 1* illustrates that the respective mother tongue varies according to ethnic group.

	Black African	Coloureds	Asians	Whites
English	2.9	20.8	86.1	60.8
Afrikaans	1.5	75.8	4.6	35.9
Xhosa	20.1	0.6	0.4	0.3
Zulu	28.5	0.5	1.3	0.4

Table 1: Mother tongue according to population group (percentages), online: www.statssa.gov.za

¹¹ Naicker, Sigamoney Manicka: "From Apartheid Education to Inclusive Education. The Challenges of Transformation". In: *International Education Summit For a Democratic Society* (Wayne State University), Detroit 2000.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of Gramsci's concept see Luoai, El Habib: "Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications". In: *African Journal of History and Culture* 4(1), 4-8.

¹³ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty: "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In: Nelson, Cary; Grossberg, Lawrence (Hg.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1988, 271-313.

¹⁴ Cf. Luoai: "Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak".

¹⁵ Cf. Southafrica.net: "South Africa's Languages", online: www.southafrica.net/za/en/travel-tips/entry/travel-tip-south-africas-languages (02/02/2017).

Due to the variety of languages spoken by members of the anti-apartheid movement a common language of resistance was of highest importance. The choice of English instead of Afrikaans as the language of national liberation becomes obvious if the unpopularity of Afrikaners among non-whites is considered. Hence, larger organisations such as the ANC had – and still have – to rely on English as a lingua franca, which serves as a tool for the unification of subaltern groups. The ANC website, for instance, is only available in English and also most posters designed for mobilization were written in English. Two examples are given as *images 3 and 4*.



Image 3: ANC poster announcing a meeting of women, online: archives.anc.org.za



Image 4: ANC poster demanding the release of political prisoners, online: archives.anc.org.za

English also represents the language chosen by most liberal authors who contributed to the national liberation effort by thematising the cruelty of South African Apartheid. This not only applies for white authors, whose mother tongues were primarily Afrikaans and English, but also for non-white authors, such as Bessie Head. Born in South Africa, Head migrated to

Botswana, where she continued writing about her experiences as coloured woman under Apartheid. Instead of writing in Afrikaans or any of South Africa's other languages, she chose English, whereby a wider international audience could be addressed.

The concept of subaltern classes raises the question of possible purposes their subordinate position might serve for the dominant class or group of the respective hegemonic society, and in particular, how subaltern classes contribute to define their rulers' identity. A helpful theory is provided in the form of Palestinian-American critic and author Edward Said's "Orientalism"¹⁶. As one of the world's most important scholar of postcolonial studies, Said explores how western colonial rulers presented North America and the Middle East in the 19th and 20th century. His analysis reveals that the Orient exists as a negative inversion of the Occident, i.e. the western world. According to Said, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience"¹⁷. Hence, the West uses the Orient to establish a positive self-definition in contrast to the backward Other. Thus, in this context the term Orientalism is used to denote "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'"¹⁸. Said further maintains that colonised people do not resist against colonial rule, for the belief in British superiority and their consequent inferiority has been anchored deeply into their consciousness. This binary division establishes absolute difference between Orient and Occident and creates hierarchies. Specific qualities are ascribed to the two opposing concepts; some examples thereof are provided in *Table 2*.

WEST / OCCIDENT	EAST / ORIENT
positive/ presence	negative/ absence
rational	irrational
democratic	despotic
progressive	timeless

Table 2 (Said 1977)

While positive values, such as rationality and progressiveness, are connotated with the West, the Orient evokes images of despotic, timeless society and irrational behaviour. Obviously, the attribution of such values is not based on reality. Said clearly reminds us that Orientalism is a construct produced by western powers.

Does the binary opposition of white rulers and non-white subaltern groups in South Africa imply a similar (non-realistic) ascription of values and characteristics? It can be argued

¹⁶ Said, Edward W.: *Orientalism*. London: Penguin 1977.

¹⁷ Said: *Orientalism*, 1-2.

¹⁸ Said: *Orientalism*, 3.

that not only the opposition of Occident and Orient but all hierarchical social structures based on racial theory do clearly involve the creation of mental concepts of the other group, which serve to define and legitimate the identity and power of the dominant group. South African Apartheid, for instance, is based on the assumption that Afrikaners (and maybe also British or other Europeans) are the class fit to rule, as they bring progress, democracy (which is highly questionable in a society of racial segregation), and rationality to the African peoples, who have up to then lived a deeply ‘primitive’ life. How else could have so many Afrikaners lived with a peaceful mind in a society of utmost inequality if the majority of them had not believed in the rightfulness of Apartheid and white superiority. In South Africa, this *Euroafricanism* – as we might call it – probably served a similar purpose as Orientalism: non-white cultures, cultures that existed in Africa long before Europeans arrived, were seen as the negative opposition to progressive European culture, thereby establishing a positive self-image among Afrikaners.

If we follow Jacques Derrida’s thoughts on binary categories, we find that in the case of South Africa white represents the unmarked norm, black the other (with coloured and Indian as something in-between). Kathryn Woodward links Derrida’s concept to power relations and establishes that “[d]ifference can be constructed negatively as the exclusion and marginalization of those who are defined as ‘Other’ or as outsiders [...]”¹⁹. Black South Africans are clearly marginalized and excluded from political participation, not only through the social structure but by law. This represents the very peculiarity of South African society and even today, long after the abolition of Apartheid, white often remains the norm. In their article “Südafrikas Kolonialphilosophie. Rassismus und die Marginalisierung der Afrikanischen Philosophie”²⁰ Terblanche Delpont and Ndumiso Dladla, for instance, point out that non-western philosophies are hardly valued by South African institutes of Philosophy. Further, they found that the western Eurocentric philosophical tradition has actively contributed to the construction of the white man as the world-wide norm²¹. With Apartheid ideology being even supported by academic and philosophical discourse it is hardly surprising that most Afrikaners uncritically accepted racist doctrines.

Nevertheless, this raises the question if most Afrikaners were indeed blind to these grave differences between their homely life in beautiful white suburbs and the black townships at the margins of their cities. André Brink’s novel *A Dry White Season* suggests

¹⁹ Woodward, Kathryn: *Identity and Difference. Culture, Media and Identities*. London: Sage 1997, 35.

²⁰ engl.: „South Africa’s Colonial Philosophy. Racism and the Marginalisation of African Philosophy“.

²¹ Delpont, Terblanche; Dladla, Ndumiso: “Südafrikas Kolonialphilosophie. Rassismus und die Marginalisierung der Afrikanischen Philosophie”. In: *Polylog* 33, 2015, 6.

that most of them indeed were ignorant, or at least not consciously aware of white hegemony. Brink's main character Ben DuToit, a white Afrikaner, starts to investigate into the sudden disappearance of his gardener after the latter tried to regain the corpse of his dead son from the police. As Ben dives deeper into South African society with all its dark passages, he learns how police power is abused on a daily basis to violently maintain the status of white superiority. His visits to townships, lying beyond his familiar environment of white suburbs, lead him to reflect on the differentiations made between whites and blacks:

“And so it is beside the point to ask: what will become of me? Or: how can I act against my own people?”

Perhaps that is part of the very choice involved: the fact that I've always taken 'my own people' so much for granted that I now have to start thinking from scratch. It has never been a problem before. 'My own people' have always been around me and with me.”

[...]

“My people”. And then there were the “others”. The Jewish shopkeeper, the English chemist; those who found a natural habitat in the city. And the blacks.”

“We lived in a house, they in mud huts with rocks on the roof. [...] They laid our table, brought up our children, emptied our chamber pots, called us Baas and Miesies. [...] It was a good and comfortable division. [...] That was the way it had always had been.”²²

Ben's perception of his belonging to his “own people”, i.e. to Afrikaners, may be understandable for all readers, as we all experience a feeling of national or cultural belonging to members of a specific group, with which we share certain characteristics, such as shared values and history, similar food preferences and hobbies, - or in Ben's case also skin colour. As long as he stayed in his familiar environment, the white suburbs, he was often confronted with other groups, such as Jews or, of course, black servants, but he was never forced to doubt his own cultural identity. Now that he turns into a white liberal befriending blacks he is increasingly excluded from his peers; he loses the acceptance as a member of Afrikaner society, as becomes obvious by the rejecting behaviour of his friends and family. At the same time trying to enter black community Ben soon discovers that he is also perceived as an outsider by black South Africans, here, on basis of his skin colour: acting liberal does not turn him black. Consequently, Ben is led to doubt his concept of self-identity; he does neither belong to Afrikaners, nor to his black friends. He is marginalized, turned into a dissident, and, finally, an outsider.

This example serves to illustrate how Otherness, i.e. the definition of the self by differentiation from other social, national, or racial groups, contributes to our understanding of collective identities. It may be argued that such identities are based on classificatory systems, resulting from perceptions of similarities and differences. A person might be

²² Brink, André: *A Dry White Season*. New York: Harper Collins 2006 [1979], 162.

classified according to race, nation, gender, family, religion, class, profession, or any other category, with outward, perceptible symbolic characteristics, such as skin colour, age, language, or fashion, serving to identify the person as a member of a specific group. Notably, these cultural categories are contingent; they may change over time and space. In the Habsburg Empire, for instance, loyalty to the Kaiser and the Empire was for a long time prior to nationality but over the course of the 19th century this changed drastically – with quite drastic consequences for the Empire. While nationality, however, is not perceptible on the first glance (only by conversation or obtaining the person’s papers, for instance), race, or rather skin colour is. This represents the very peculiarity of South African collective identities. Race defines the most important category according to which collective identities are established; its most obvious characteristic in this context, i.e. skin colour, cannot be hidden. Before we explore this aspect in more depth (see section 5), it is worth to consider another literary example, which perfectly illustrates marginalization based on Otherness.

Author Bessie Head was born in South Africa as daughter of a white mother and a black servant. This parental constellation is indeed remarkable and highly uncommon. With her mother being considered mentally ill based on her conception of a child by a black man, Bessie Head was born in a psychiatric clinic and thereby lost her mother as a baby. All her life she would suffer under this early loss and her resulting crisis of identity. First she was given to a white family but soon it was decided that she would better fit into a coloured family. Finally, she grew up in an orphanage, for even at this early age she would not fit into one of South Africa’s tight racial categories. As an adult Head decided to migrate to Botswana, where – following in the footsteps of her mother – she too became mentally ill, suffering under schizophrenia. In her autobiographical novel *A Question of Power*²³ the main character Elizabeth shares Head’s history. Her thoughts deeply distorted by madness and at times difficult to follow illustrate how marginalization based on the inability to identify with a collective ultimately leads to identity crisis. In South Africa, Elizabeth was excluded from the dominant group of whites because her skin is too dark; in Botswana she is excluded because she her skin is not dark enough. Similar to Ben, Elizabeth is denied a group to identify with but while Ben could change his actions and thereby regain his identity as Afrikaner, Elizabeth’s skin colour serves as outward marker that determines her fate.

These two rather pessimistic and certainly tragic examples may lead us to believe that difference necessarily leads to crisis. Catherine Woodward, however, is certainly correct in stating that “it can [also] be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity,

²³ Head, Bessie: *A Question of Power*. London: Penguin 2002.

where the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching”²⁴. Hence, it can be concluded that identity is certainly based on construction of oppositions but it lies in the hands of the people to decide if differences lead to oppositions or celebrated variety.

4. Spaces of identity

These processes of identification and representation do not take place in a vacuum. They are located in time and space. As Foucault maintains, “[o]ur epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites”²⁵. He suggests to “attempt to describe these different sites by looking for the set of relations by which a given site can be defined”²⁶. Hence, after having considered how categorisation and otherness contribute to identity formation, this section aims to illustrate how identities form, transform, and clash in spaces which are typical of colonial times and Apartheid. In particular, we shall examine townships as the Abject and the farm as heterotopic space.

South African Apartheid was clearly not only manifest in people’s thoughts and feelings but also in space. The *Group Areas Act* of 1950 (see section 2) established living areas according to race. Thereby, historically developed cities and social landscapes were in many cases disrupted and destroyed. *Image 5* shows the example of Port Elizabeth. White circles represent groups of black citizens, black circles stand for white citizens, striped ones for coloureds, and dotted circles show where Asians (including Indians) used to live. The size of the circles indicates the number of habitants per area.

²⁴ Woodward, Kathryn: *Identity and Difference. Culture, Media and Identities*. London: Sage 1997, 35.

²⁵ Foucault, Michel: “Of Other Spaces. Utopias and Heterotopias”. In: *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* Oct 1984, 2.

²⁶ Foucault: “Of Other Spaces”, 3.

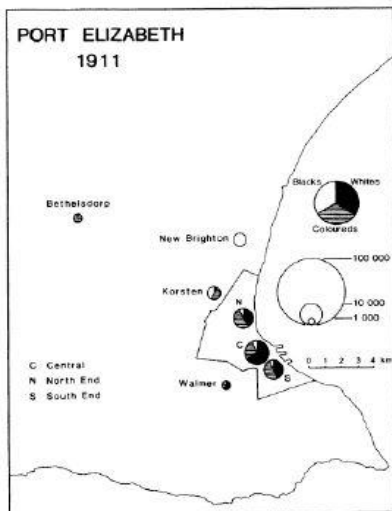


Fig. 1. Distribution and racial pattern of population in Port Elizabeth, 1911

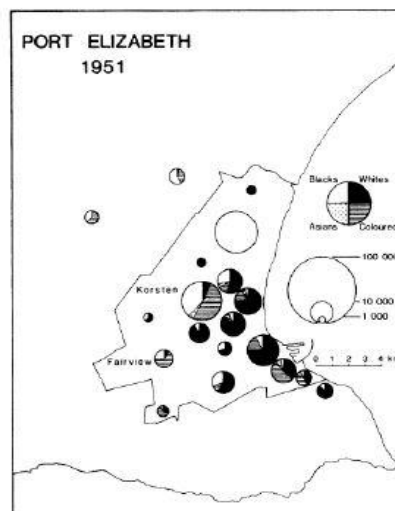


Fig. 2. Distribution and racial pattern of population in Port Elizabeth, 1951

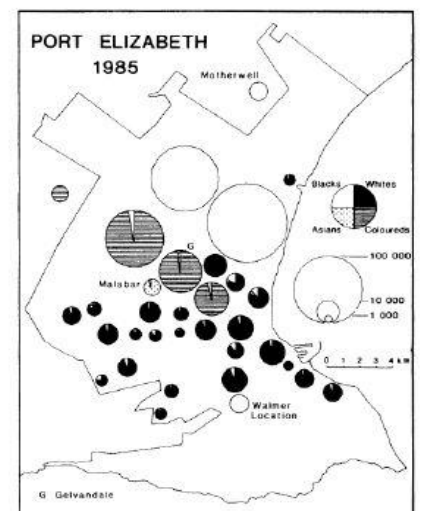


Fig. 3. Distribution and racial pattern of population in Port Elizabeth, 1985

Image 5: Distribution and racial pattern of population in Port Elizabeth 1911, 1951, 1985
(Christopher 1987: 198)

Two observations can be made: First, Port Elizabeth's population grew considerably between 1911 and 1985. This, however, is not surprising and typical of most cities in the world. Second, the distribution of racial groups changed insofar that in 1911 black, white, and coloured citizens lived in the same areas, while in 1985 they are clearly separated. Areas for each group had been created, people were now living apart.

An even more drastic apartness was established by the creation of townships. These areas, such as Soweto, lie at the margins of South African society. To use Julia Kristeva's term, they represent the *Abject* of South African society, which is described as follows: "It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects"²⁷. The *Abject* is no definable object. It is opposed to I and at the same time closely connected to the self. We would like to rid ourselves of it but the *Abject* is no Other and by losing it we would simultaneously lose ourselves. Thus, it is always there, worryingly close and different. According to Kristeva, it can be compared to the dark side of the moon: We know it is there but it is a place suppressed from our consciousness, an unfamiliar place, far away from our reality. The other part of the city – the ugly townships – represent the *Abject* of South African society. They are an essential part of it and although most white people feverishly try to banish these unfavourable parts of the country from their minds, they cannot live without them and not lose their identity. They remain the "in-between, the ambiguous",

²⁷ Kristeva, Julia: "Approaching Abjection". In: Kristeva, Julia (Ed.): *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia UP 1982, 1.

representing “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object”²⁸. Although the thought of these ugly parts of the country are suppressed in the minds of most Afrikaners, townships form an essential part of Apartheid society and contribute to people’s identities. They constitute “a burden both repellent and repelled”²⁹, a space like the dark side of the moon, always near without any chance to part oneself from it.

Nevertheless, even in times of Apartheid there existed places where whites and blacks lived in extreme proximity, namely farms. From colonial times onwards life on remote farms required that black servants or workers and their white masters lived together in the middle of nowhere, sharing a relatively limited space of living. Hence, farms can be perceived as heteropia or heterotopic space in the sense that “[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”³⁰. The farm unites the peaceful world of white masters with the downsides of Apartheid, here expressed by black poverty and bondage, leading to a clash of life histories, values, and collective identities. Foucault defines heterotopia as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”³¹.

One of the most defining characteristics of heterotopic spaces is given in the way time is experienced: “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time [...] The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time”³². On remote farms time seems to have stopped. In order to better understand this confusion of time we may again slip into the mind of another fictional protagonist, in this case, of Magda, the Afrikaner main character in J.M. Coetzee’s extraordinary novel *In the Heart of the Country*³³. Set on a remote farm in the Karoo semi-desert of the Western Cape, it follows the thoughts of Magda, a maiden living with her father and their black servants. Throughout large parts of the novel the reader cannot ascertain if the story as narrated by Martha constitutes reality or is only occurring within Martha’s imagination. The woman is confined in the claustrophobic surroundings of her bedroom, the house, and, in general, the farm. Therefore, time represents a central concept in her life; the clock is all that gives her life structure:

²⁸ Kristeva: “Approaching Abjection”, 3.

²⁹ Kristeva: “Approaching Abjection”, 4.

³⁰ Foucault: “Of Other Spaces”, 6.

³¹ Foucault: “Of Other Spaces”, 3.

³² Foucault: “Of Other Spaces”, 6.

³³ Coetzee, J.M.: *In the Heart of the Country*. London: Vintage 2014.

“In the shadowy hallway the clock ticks away day and night. I am the one who keeps it wound and who weekly, from sun and almanac, corrects it. Time on the farm is the time of the wide world, neither a jot nor a tittle more or less. Resolutely I beat down the blind, subjective time of the heart, with its spurts of excitement and drags of tedium: my pulse will throb with the steady one-second beat of civilization. One day some as yet unborn scholar will recognize in the clock the machine that has tamed the wilds. But will he ever know the desolation of the hour of the siesta chiming in cool green high-ceilinged houses where the daughters of the colonies lie counting with their eyes shut? The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes, keeping a high shine on the copperware and laying in jam. Wooed when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals, spoiled for life.”³⁴

Although objectively on the farm the same time passes as everywhere on the world, time feels different for Martha; the space of the farm is time-less, it is eternal. Time never passes and every day feels the same to her. For this reason Martha has to fantasize, to invent, to provide herself with more variety. She becomes obsessed with observing other people in her house, especially with the sex life of her father, and their servants Hendrik and Klein-Anna. Martha develops a neurosis as a consequence of her isolation and her forced muteness. The woman is voiceless, for while the South African liberation movement had to rely on English, Martha’s mother tongue – or in her words “father-tongue” – naturally would have been Afrikaans, but it is a language deeply imprinted with the image of hierarchy:

“I cannot carry on with these idiot dialogues. The language that should pass between myself and these people was subverted by my father and cannot be recovered. What passes between us now is a parody. I was born into a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective. It was my father-tongue. I do not say it is the language my heart wants to speak, I feel too much the pathos of its distances, but it is all we have. I can believe there is a language lovers speak but I cannot imagine how it goes. I have no words left to exchange whose value I trust.”³⁵

Afrikaans is the only means of communication that Martha possesses for communicating with their servants. However, it is her language, her father’s language, but not theirs. Despite her higher proficiency she feels voiceless, unable to share her real thoughts with her fellow beings; she remains isolated, isolated and lonely. Afrikaans does not provide her with the words she needs to express her true feelings. It is a language of power, of Otherness, not one of love and compassion. Consequently, not only the marginalized black servants but also the old maiden remains mute. Their voice is lost in history and can only be recovered by placing them in the centre of art and history. Hence, it is of vital importance to incorporate fictional, as well as autobiographic literature into philosophical considerations on identity, as only through the minds of characters, such as Martha, we can truly understand how it *feels* to live in a system of apartheid.

³⁴ Coetzee: *In the Heart of the Country*, 3-4.

³⁵ Coetzee: *In the Heart of the Country*, 120-121.

5. Identity and trauma

As the previous sections have shown, literary portraits of life in South African society already indicate the deeply traumatizing nature of a society where identity is primarily established via difference, which in this case is even visible on the first glance and anchored in law. This section aims to explore this phenomenon more closely, whereby it shall be investigated who those traumatized subjects are and how their traumatisation may be explained.

For the marginalization of non-whites it might be assumed that primarily black, coloured, and Indian citizens might have been affected. This thesis is supported by Franz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks*³⁶, where he outlines his concept of trauma of race. Fanon argues that black people develop an inferiority complex as a consequence of their role in society, for living in a white world, which was exclusively constructed for white people, would represent a challenge for black people, as they are constantly confronted with the white gaze. According to Fanon, the gaze constructs white as the norm and black as the deviation, thereby leading to an estrangement of the black man in his own body, or in his words: "The white world [...] demanded of me that I behave like a black man – or at least like a Negro"³⁷. The white man expects blacks to behave in a certain way and the latter may either confirm to those expectations or not. Either way, it is the white man who constructs the black man. He represents the norm, according to which all others are measured, for "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man"³⁸. Thus, it is primarily one's skin colour that defines a subject's status in society. The marker of difference is always visible: "I am a slave not to the 'idea' others have of me, but of my appearance", i.e. my skin colour³⁹.

Although it must be considered that Fanon wrote about French territories and French society, which differed considerably from former British colonies, it might be argued that also South African blacks suffered under the white gaze. As *images 6* and *7* illustrate, white always set the standard, while all other ethnic groups were simply subsumed under the terms "Non-European" or "Non-Whites". Wearing a black skin determined one's limits within society, with regard to public, as well as private affairs, such as friendship and relationships. It can be assumed that being regarded as a minor human being and finding these racist assumptions in each and every aspect of society, including law and every-day facilities, must surely have been a deeply disturbing, if not traumatising experience.

³⁶ Fanon, Frantz: *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove 2008.

³⁷ Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, 94.

³⁸ Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

³⁹ Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.



Image 6: Train station (rfklegacycurriculum.wordpress.com/day-of-affirmation-speech/)



Image 7: sign indicating the separation of public space according to skin colour (www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_apart1.htm)

Franz Fanon primarily investigates French society but he uses the example of South Africa for highlighting the importance of racism for the development of the inferiority complex in black people:

“Although the colonizer is in the ‘minority’, he does not feel he is made inferior. [...] In South Africa, there are 2 million Whites to almost 13 million Blacks and it has never occurred to a single Black to consider himself superior to a member of the white minority. [...] Inferiorization is the native correlation to the European’s feeling of superiority. [...] It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.”⁴⁰

As Fanon holds, the number of members of one ethnic group is irrelevant; it is the legacy of racist European ideology which leads to the inferiorisation of those who represent the Other, i.e. the colonised. In French society, Fanon locates a way for black people to rise up to the white norm, namely to wear white masks: “I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject [...] So I will try quite simply to make myself white; in other words, I will force the white man to acknowledge my humanity”⁴¹. Adopting the white man’s behaviour and, most importantly, language enables the black man to be perceived as almost white; it forces the white man to acknowledge the Other’s humanity.

⁴⁰ Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, 73.

⁴¹ Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, 78.

While this may be true for French colonial societies, black South Africans were denied this opportunity. Regardless of a black man's or woman's perfection of their language skills in Afrikaans or English, regardless of their behaviour, regardless of their efforts to act European: black could never become white. Probably such 'skills' would have granted them better jobs, or even more respect by their employers but clearly they did not suffice to increase their official position in society, nor did they enable them to perform tasks only reserved for whites, such as to occupy political posts.

Non-whites were indeed highly disadvantaged. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to argue for a 'non-whites-only traumatised'. As the example of Ben DuToit in André Brink's *A Dry White Season* has shown, Apartheid affected all groups, including privileged Afrikaners. Not only liberals, however, experienced the downsides of an apartheid system. Specific events, such as inter-racial violence, detentions, and abuse of police power, in combination with constant othering definitely lead to traumatised, not only of individuals but of a whole nation. This phenomenon is commonly known as cultural trauma.

According to Alexander et al., "Cultural Trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental ways"⁴². Apartheid has indeed shaped a whole nation and still influences people's thoughts today. The psychological study "Trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in South Africa. Analysis from the South African Stress and Health Study" by Atwoli et al.⁴³ examined the epidemiology of trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the South African population between January 2002 and June 2004 (n= 4,315). It was found that the lifetime prevalence rate of PTSD after trauma exposure was 3.5%. Interestingly, factors, such as sex, age and education were unrelated to the occurrence of trauma and PTSD. Unfortunately, race or skin colour were not taken into account in the interpretation of results but it should be noted that black South Africans represented the majority of those surveyed (58.6% of women, 79.7% of men).

The study shows that the vast majority (73.8%) of those surveyed was exposed to at least one traumatic event in their whole lifetime: "The PTE class reported by the highest proportion of respondents was unexpected death of a loved one (39.2%) followed by physical

⁴² Alexander, Jeffrey et al.: *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Oakland: University of California Press 2004, 1.

⁴³ Atwoli, Lukoye et al.: "Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in South Africa. Analysis from the South African Stress and Health Study". In: *BMC Psychiatry* 2013/13, 2013.

violence (37.6%), accidents (31.9%), and witnessing (29.5%)”⁴⁴. Many of those events may have been caused by the consequences of Apartheid. The majority of cases of PTSD, however, can be explained by witnessing trauma or traumatic events, as is shown in *figure 1*. Of those who had witnessed a traumatic event, 3.5% experienced episodes of PTSD. Although this number does not seem very high, it should be noted that, on the one hand, PTSD is not always diagnosed correctly and, on the other hand, that traumatic events may have other – if maybe less serious – consequences, such as depression, or – more generally – loss of trust in fellow citizens.

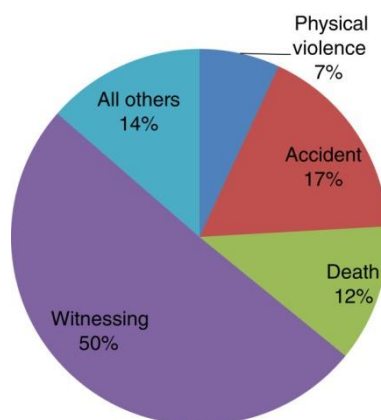


Figure 1 (Atwoli et al. 2013)

We may conclude from this study that the majority of South Africans was indeed confronted with traumatic events. Not only black citizens but all South Africans were affected by the atrocities and feudalities of Apartheid, which is commonly expressed in the term Cultural Trauma. It should be considered that trauma influences the way we perceive the world and our fellow citizens and, hence, our identity. Thus, it is vital to uncover such cultural traumata and to re-establish good relations within a former split society. After 1994 South Africans found a unique way to cope with their cultural trauma: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The TRC was set up in 1996 to avoid punishment of those state officials and private subjects who committed crimes based on racism under the Apartheid government. The aim was to bring the truth about such events to the surface and to foster reconciliation between victims and those to blame. Author Gillian Slovo generally praises the success of the TRC:

“The TRC process, especially its victims' hearings, did undoubtedly bring a sense of relief, at least, to some of its participants: a kind of closure. People were given the chance to be heard in public. They spoke of the years they had borne their pain and their grief in isolation and silence, and of the need to let their country know what it was they and their loved ones had endured.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Atwoli, Lukoye et al.: “Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in South Africa”.

⁴⁵ Slovo, Gillian: “Revealing is Healing”. In: *New Humanist* 2007, online: newhumanist.org.uk/585 (01/02/2017).

Telling and listening to such traumatic experiences was indeed valuable for coping with trauma and may have contributed to the improvement of inter-racial relationships in post-Apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, Slovo remains critical with regard to the question of truth:

“Behind this phrase, it seems to me, lies the dubious assumption that murderers and torturers can know the truth. [...] I am reminded of one particular exchange between a torturer and his victim. ‘What kind of human being,’ the victim asked, ‘can you be, to have knowingly caused another human being so much pain?’ The torturer's reply [...] was that he had asked himself that same question, that he'd gone to a psychologist to ask it too, because he didn't know the answer. There, it seems, lies the whole truth: that the whole truth cannot be faced. And therefore it cannot be told.”⁴⁶

Slovo's anecdote not only addresses the interesting question if one objective truth about an event really exists, but also if a subjective knowledge or understanding of reasons for police violence etc. can be gained. Apartheid represents an ideology; an ideology which captured the minds of thousands of people, shaped their identity, and led them to commit atrocities for reasons which cannot be understood by outsiders.

6. The question of national identity

After having considered the impact of traumatic events, this section will examine if in South Africa something similar to a sense of national identity can be experienced. With one group being constantly suppressed by another and suffering unimaginable pain, is it indeed possible that some sort of unity is felt?

A superficial glimpse on the issue provides a rather negative impression. A poll conducted by The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in 2015 – 11 years after the end of Apartheid – revealed that 61.4% of all respondents (n=2.219) felt that race relations have worsened or stayed the same since 1994⁴⁷. As *figure 1* shows, this is true for all ethnic groups.

⁴⁶ Slovo: “Revealing is Healing”.

⁴⁷ BusinessTech: “Racism is Alive and Well in South Africa”. Dec 2015. online: businesstech.co.za/news/general/106627/racism-is-alive-and-well-in-south-africa/ (31/01/2017).

South Africans who feel that race relations have worsened or stayed the same since 1994

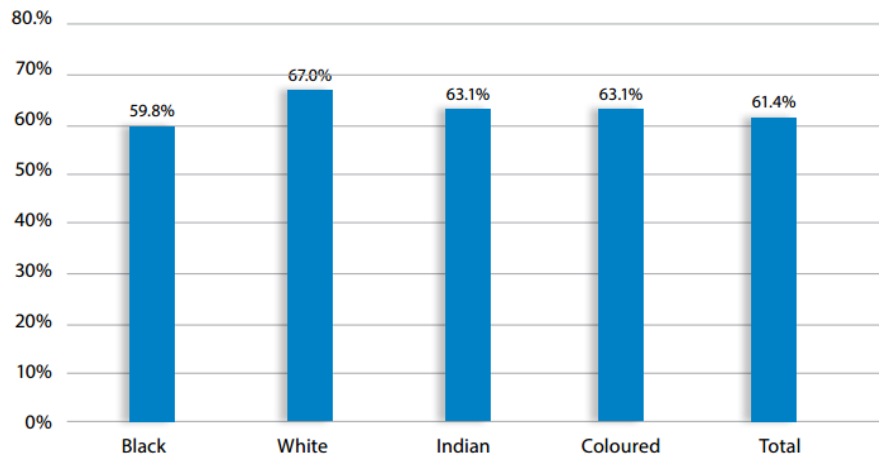


Figure 2 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2015)

In addition, 60.2% of all respondents reported experiences of racism (some only occasionally), whereby black South Africans were most frequently affected (62.4%) (see *figure 2*). Consequently, we would be led to believe in a total failure of the South African reconciliation process, including the hearings of the TRC. However, the majority of South Africans (61.3%) felt that the country has made progress in reconciliation since 1994⁴⁸.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that South Africans still primarily establish relationships within their racial group. The survey revealed with which group the respondents associated most strongly in their daily interactions, whereby language seems to be of utmost importance: 31.6% of those surveyed chose people who spoke the same language, closely followed by “same racial group” (23.7%). National identity, i.e. the option “primarily South African”, was of less importance (12.7%). The results of this question are given in *figure 3*. During Apartheid people might have felt similarly, or even more closely attached to their racial group. Ben DuToit’s thoughts in *A Dry White Season*, for instance, clearly reveal that he as an Afrikaner obviously primarily thinks of Afrikaners, not all South Africans when he writes about belonging to his “own people”.

⁴⁸ BusinessTech: “Racism is Alive and Well in South Africa”.

How often do you experience racism in your life?

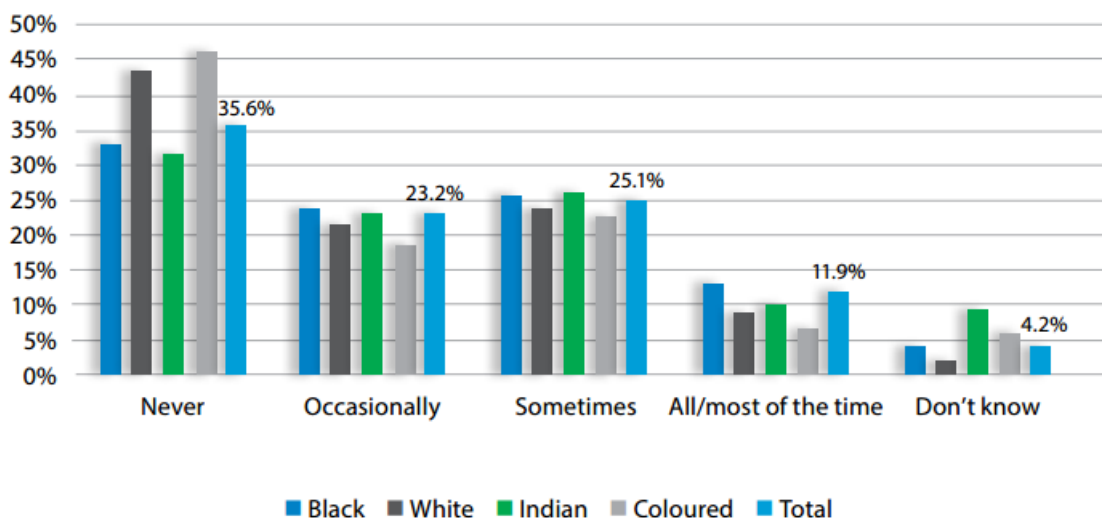


Figure 3 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2015)

Which group do you associate with most strongly in your daily interactions?

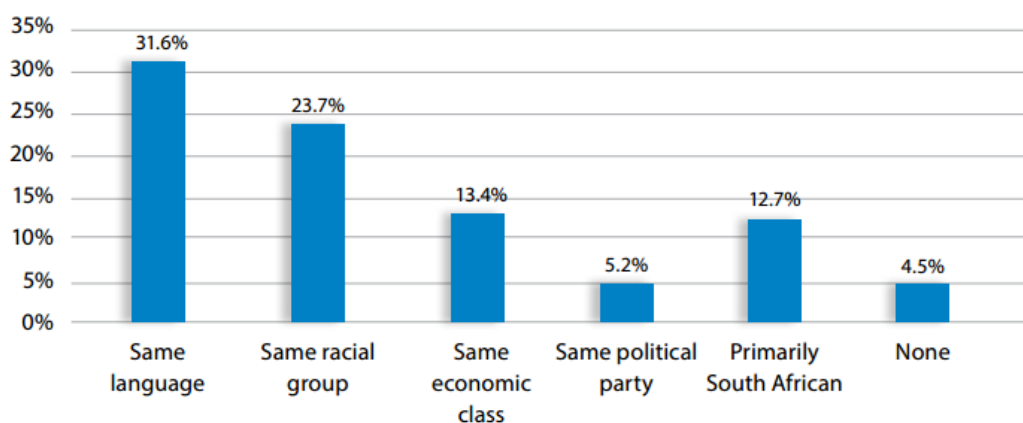


Figure 4 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2015)

The term *national identity*, however, may be interpreted in two ways: First, it may be understood as a kind of abstract affection to one’s fellow citizens, or, secondly, as a very subjective feeling of *being South African*, or, in other words, as a feeling of nationalist belonging. In both cases, similar to personal identity, national identity is constructed via difference or otherness in comparison to other human beings, or nations. As Benedict Anderson has stated in his work “Imagined Communities” on the development of nationalism, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their

communion⁴⁹. It should be noted, however, that not all communities are nations in our modern understanding. Also relatively small groups certainly base their identity on a feeling of community. Several historical developments were necessary for nations to emerge, including the end of the belief that society was naturally organized among certain rulers (e.g. kings)⁵⁰, or the convergence of print technology and capitalism⁵¹. In the context of South Africa it is highly unlikely that a feeling of affection to all fellow citizens is experienced, as the otherness within the country seems to dominate over the otherness in comparison to other nations. As the surveys discussed above have shown, many South Africans still experience hostility towards members of other ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that some feeling of national belonging and even national pride might exist among South Africans. Even members of a split nation may feel that this is the country of their origin, their home, and the place where their friends and family live. For such a feeling no friendship among all sub-groups is needed (and this would hardly be the case in any country, including Austria). In addition, national pride might motivate South Africans to experience a feeling of unity and increase the importance of national identity. This is supported by the findings of Houston et al., who examined trends in national pride in South Africa 2003-2013. They found that most people surveyed would agree with the statement “I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world” (83%-91%) and the majority stated that “South Africa is a better country than most other countries” (73%-84% since 2005). An important national event, the FIFA World Cup of 2010, significantly increased national pride⁵².

Such results represent a beacon of hope for South Africa’s future. Even though a feeling of national unity and mutual inter-racial devotion might still be relatively weak, in the course of the last century the importance of nationality and national identity rose considerably, and it is hard to imagine that South Africa might form an exception in an increasingly globalised world.

⁴⁹ Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso 2006, 1983.

⁵⁰ Anderson: *Imagined communities*, 36.

⁵¹ Anderson: *Imagined communities*, 46.

⁵² Houston, Gregory et al.: “Pride and Prejudice. Trends in South African National Pride”. In: Research Gate 2014, online: www.researchgate.net/publication/273489666_Pride_and_prejudice_trends_in_South_African_national_pride (02/02/2017).

7. Conclusion

As has been shown, the definition of the self via difference to an *Other* constitutes a central concept for understanding identity in the context of South Africa, with regard to both personal and collective identities. Such differences may be hidden or manifested in outward characteristics, such as skin colour. The very peculiarity of racism in South African society lies in the fact that outward difference not only defines one's self-identity but also the identity ascribed by others, or more specifically, by South African law, as race determined professional as well as private possibilities and limitations. Race was the category according to which spaces were formed and disrupted. Townships formed the abject, the space that should not exist but was nevertheless crucial for South African identities. Farms constituted another anti-space, a heterotopic space in which worlds clashed, where people got lost in time and space. Apartheid produced neuroses, it created crisis of identity and rendered its subjects mute. Its hierarchic power structure combined with specific triggering traumatic events have clearly shaped the identities of all South Africans and invoked a cultural trauma, which may be only understood by outsiders by losing one's own frame of thought in the literary works of South African novelists. Only by uncovering, resolving, and, finally, understanding the atrocities and feudalities created by Apartheid, not only national identity but also national unity may be achieved, and only then, a brighter future lies ahead.

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- Figure 6: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2015, published by: BusinessTech: "Racism is Alive and Well in South Africa". Dec 2015. online: businesstech.co.za/news/general/106627/racism-is-alive-and-well-in-south-africa/ (31/01/2017).
- Figure 7: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2015, published by: BusinessTech: "Racism is Alive and Well in South Africa". Dec 2015. online: businesstech.co.za/news/general/106627/racism-is-alive-and-well-in-south-africa/ (31/01/2017).
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Images

- Image 8: CVLT Nation: "Institutionalized Hatred! Signs of Apartheid 1950-1990", online: www.cvltnation.com/institutionalized-hatred-signs-of-apartheid-1950-1990 (02/02/2017).
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- Image 11: Christopher, A.J.: "Apartheid Planning in South Africa. The Case of Port Elizabeth". In: *The Geographical Journal* 153(2), July 1987, 198.
- Image 12: RFC Legacy Education Project: "Challenge Injustice Wherever You Encounter It", online: rfklegacycurriculum.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/ernest-cole_signs.jpg/ (02/02/2017).

Image 13: SouthAfrica-Travel.net: “The Apartheid Era”, online: www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_apart1.htm (02/02/2017).

Tables

Table 3: Statistics South Africa, online: www.statssa.gov.za (02/02/2017).

Table 4: adopted from Said, Edward W.: *Orientalism*. London: Penguin 1977.