Coloured by Race:
A study about the Making of Coloured Identities in South Africa

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Abstract

After the dissolution of apartheid, racial classification has lost its official and legal validity in South Africa. However, race is still a prominent model for social organisation and racial identities continue to influence the lives of most, if not all, South Africans. The endurance of the social and material reality of blackness and whiteness has been closely examined by anthropologists and other researchers but what about those who do not necessarily conform to either one of these social categories? This thesis focuses on the Coloured population in South Africa, which during the time of apartheid, were officially classified as a separate racial grouping. Today, large parts of the Coloured population are distant descendants of ‘interracial relations’ between the Black, White and indigenous population. They are an extremely diverse group of people with root in many different parts of the world but their collective experience of social and spatial separation from the White and Black population has nevertheless generated a sense of community that continues to operate in post-apartheid South Africa.

Based on four months of fieldwork in South Africa, this thesis explores the concept of Coloured identity in an attempt to explain how this former racial category has been and still is, made into a socially relevant category in the informants’ lives. I also try to illustrate the very multifaceted and unstable notion of colouredness by examining the relationship between the informants’ racial identities and their class identities. This intersectional approach has allowed me to examine Coloured identity as a complex lived experience that reaches far beyond its initial function.

Keywords: Coloured, South Africa, race, identity, racial identities.
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List of all cited informants

The names of all the informants have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity.

Agneta: Danish university teacher who lives in South Africa.
Ben: Agneta’s husband and Henry and Ethan’s stepfather.
David: 27-year-old software computer programmer with a three-year-old son.
Christopher: 55-year-old former journalist and author.
Adam: 43-year-old community politician and social activist.
Richard: 45-year-old English teacher at a high school.
Gillian: 55-year-old retired primary school teacher and mother.
Helen: 32-year old amateur actor and community worker.
Evan: 45-year-old unemployed former tourist guide.
Ash: 30-years-old currently unemployed photographer.
Grant: 40-year-old University Lector.
Paul: 27-year-old unemployed former gang member from the Cape Flats.
Hector: 30-year-old unemployed friend of David.
Wendy: 33-year-old unemployed originally from Hanover park on the Cape Flats.
Keenan: 26-year-old unemployed from Durban.
Warren: 20-year-old language student at UCT.
Carvin: Stand-up comedian from Durban.
Gloria: 45-year-old director of an NGO in Cape Town.
Norton: 50-year-old author and historian.
Ramabina: 22-year-old student and member of the Students’ Representative Council at UCT.
Joyce: 23-year-old language at UCT.
Damian: 25-year-old student and member of the Student’s Representative Council at the UCT.
Rashaad: 32-year-old accountant and program coordinator of youth empowerment program.
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1. Introduction

Agneta was busy preparing our supper. She paced back and forward in her kitchen and every now and then she dipped a spoon in one of the casseroles to make sure that she had used enough salt and pepper. The ten-year-old twins, Henry and Ethan, were setting the table. They were a delightful pair with an abundance of energy and wit. Ben, who is Agneta’s husband and the twins’ stepfather, had already sat down next to me at the table and he was browsing through yesterday’s newspaper. I had come to know the Brown family during one of my visits to South Africa in 2014. At that time, they were living in a small community in the province of KwaZulu-Natal a couple of hours drive away from Durban.

During supper that evening, Ben asked me about my research project. I explained that I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the Western Cape and that I was exploring the concept of ‘Coloured identity’. Ben, who obviously got intrigued, put down his fork and turned his attention towards the two boys at the end of the table. “That sounds very interesting,” he said, “maybe you should interview Henry and Ethan then? What do you think about that boys?” The twins did not answer Ben’s question but looked anxiously at their mother. “What do you mean by that?” Agneta said with a hint of irritation in her voice. “Well,” Ben continued, “the boys’ father was Black and you are White so that makes them Coloured, right?” I noticed that this conversation was making both Agneta and the twins uncomfortable and for a moment I wished that I had not told them about my research. “I don’t want my children to be classified in this way,” Agneta said, “it is like saying that they are not the same as me.” Ben let out a long sigh and smiled at his wife. “Don’t get cross with me Agneta, you just don’t understand because you grew up in Denmark and you are not used to the South African way of thinking about these kinds of things. Of course, they are Coloured. It is impossible to deny! They are half White and half Black and in South Africa, you are what you are whether you like it or not.”

The disagreement between Agneta and Ben illustrates the theme of this thesis. Coloured identity is a dubious and challenging concept that has puzzled and fascinated researchers for years. In this thesis, I explore both past and present ways of
relating to colouredness and try to understand how this rather ambiguous racial identity has influenced the lives of the informants.

My motivation for choosing this research topic derives from my own uneasiness regarding the topic of race. During my upbringing in Sweden, I was taught that race is merely an artificial concept that should be regarded as nothing more than an obsolete remnant of discriminatory ideologies. I was brought up ‘not to see race’, or at least, pretend that I did not see it, and I have always associated the term with prejudices and even xenophobia. However, the fieldtrip to South Africa has drastically changed my perspective and I now realize that race and the concept of Coloured identity is far more tangible and complex than I could ever have imagine.

1.1 Research Objective

This study explores the concept of Coloured identity. The objective of this exploration is to understand how colouredness in South Africa is lived, experienced and utilised by the informants and how the notion of Coloured identity has been, and still is, made into a socially relevant category in people’s lives.

In order to understand this, I first examine the emergence of Coloured identity. I explain how changing social and political relationships historically have shaped and transformed the meaning and substance of colouredness and how the Coloured populations’ intermediate position in the social and racial hierarchy has influenced the meaning and substance of colouredness. Yet, I also explore contemporary expressions of Coloured identities and illustrate how the informants embodied and communicated their racial identities and how they actively and sometimes strategically negotiated the content and meaning of colouredness though daily social interactions. By giving voice to both those who rejected and those who embraced their alleged racial identity, I seek to provide a multifaceted conversation about Coloured identity that illustrates the very complex and sometimes even challenging notion of colouredness. In order to further demonstrate the unstable and fluctuating nature of this social category, I also look at the relationship between the informants’ racial identities and their class identities. To what extent did the informants’ class identities influence how they related to and
experienced their racial identities and how did the informants encountered potential ‘contradictions’ between their race- and class identities?

1.2 Definitions
Before I initiate my exploration of Coloured identity, I will briefly define and clarify how I have used some of the central concepts in this thesis.

**Race**
In everyday settings, race is usually referred to as an out-dated approach to human biological variation. Yet, race has never solely been built on the idea of biological and physical differences but it is also closely connected to social, political and economic relationships. Racial identities are a tremendous influence in peoples’ lives across the globe since we live in a world where institutionalised racism has allowed race to determine peoples’ abilities to access resources as well as positions of power (American Anthropology Association 2016). Although the constitution of South Africa is probably one of the most progressive on the planet, the actual implementation of peoples’ constitutional rights is less impressive (Robins 2005). The link between race and individuals’ prospects for upward social mobility remains critical in South Africa and race, therefore, continues to determine both social and economic inequalities.

In this thesis, I have therefore adopted a social constructivist position to the concept of Coloured identity. I recognise that there is no such thing as a biological or essential separate Coloured race but hold that Coloured identity is nevertheless real and tangible in the sense that it refers to a set of experiences that forms the basis for a collective and shared identification. This thesis thus focuses on the historical, political and social reality of Coloured identity and gives no credence to former apartheid race categorisations. This has allowed me to explore Coloured identity not as an abstract or natural category but rather as a multifaceted lived experience.

I have chosen to capitalise the terms White, Black and Coloured in this thesis. The purpose of this is to emphasise that these terms refer to an official terminology in South Africa that does not necessarily mirror the actual experiences of individuals.
At times, I also use the term ‘so-called Coloured’ but I only do so when I am referring to an informant who does not feel comfortable being labelled as Coloured. This is a way of not imposing racial classifications on informants who do not define themselves in terms of race.

Class
Another recurring concept in this thesis is ‘class’. Ever since capitalism started making headway in large parts of the world, class has remained an increasingly significant model for social organisation (Smith 1984:467). Yet, there has never been one general definition of class. On the contrary, philosophers, economists, sociologists and other intellectuals have proposed numerous different interpretations and approaches to the concept of class such as, for instance, Marx’s classic theory of ‘mode of production’ and Foucault’s ‘governmentality’. The fundamental objective of such theories is to expose and explain the development of social, political and economic inequalities with reference to the expansion of industrialisation, democracy and, of course, capitalism across the globe (Carrier and Kalb 2015). However, in this thesis, I pay little attention to the broad theoretical hypotheses regarding class and instead try to understand how class relationships influence the social life of the informants.

In this thesis, I occasionally use the concepts ‘working-class’, ‘middle-class’, and ‘upper-class’. However, I recognise that standardised concepts such as these are not entirely unproblematic in an empirical analysis since they tend to homogenise groups of people in ways that do not always reflect the actual lived experiences of the informants. They are a simplistic way of organising and categorising people into different socio-economic ‘rakings’ based on factors such as education, wealth, health, social status and power. However, class is not merely an indicator for an individual’s socio-economic standard. The concept reaches far beyond its economic characteristic, and in this thesis, I will illustrate that the concept class also influences my informants’ racial identities. The term upper-class, for instance, should thus not only be understood as an indicator for an individuals’ current economic situation but as a location of structural advantage which includes aspects of both economic and racial character.
1.3 Previous Research

There is a wide selection of writings about Coloured identity. However, a large proportion of these texts were written at the time of apartheid or during the adjacent years following the democratic transition (see for instance du Pré 1994, Goldin 1987, and James, Caliguire and Cullinan 1996). These writings provide valuable insight into the making of Coloured identities during the twentieth century but they are also, in my opinion, characterised by an out-dated and somewhat essentialist interpretation of racial identities. In this thesis, I therefore intend to provide a reflexive discussion about race in which Coloured identity is portrayed and interpreted as a lived experience.

There are some contemporary reflexive and complex analyses of Coloured identity. (See for instance Adhikari 2009, Adhikari 2005, and Besteman 2008). Yet, most of these writings focus primarily on the history of the Coloured population and only briefly touch upon contemporary ways of relating to colouredness. In Not White enough, not Black enough, Adhikari elegantly describes the development of various competing interpretations of colouredness throughout the twentieth century but it is only in the last concluding chapter that he briefly addresses Coloured identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Adhikari claims that “Coloured identity in the new South Africa is one of fragmentation” (2005:186), and I agree. The clash between official policies regarding racial segregation and the actual social and material consequences of racism is not only puzzling but contradictory and challenging for those who seek to build a sense of identity in post-apartheid society. Much has changed during the last twenty years and this study will therefore pick up where Adhikari left off and shed light over present-day interpretations of Coloured identities. This is important since Coloured identity has not yet lost its legitimacy in the eyes of most South Africans.

Elain Salo has also explored post-apartheid expressions of Coloured identities. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in South African townships and in her article Negotiating gender and personhood in the new South Africa (2003) she explores gender identities amongst the youth in the predominantly Coloured township Manenberg in the outskirts of Cape Town city centre. In this article, she demonstrates how the Coloured youth destabilise and renegotiate both gender and racial identities through means of popular culture that challenge local ideals of masculinity, femininity and race. Her research has been relevant in my own study since she reveals the very
changeable and unstable notion of Coloured identity by conducting an intersectional analysis of the relationship between race and gender. However, in this thesis, I investigate yet another important relationship which has not yet been explored; namely the relationship between Coloured identity and class.

There is a range of writings about the relationship between race and class in South Africa. However, as I reviewed the existing literature I noticed that little attention has been paid towards the intersection of class identities and Coloured identity. In the book *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*, Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass provide an innovating and comprehensive analysis of how race and class influence patterns of inequalities in South Africa. They argue that although racial inequalities have endured, class has surpassed race as the main indicator for social and economic inequalities (2005). In an article from 2008, Seekings furthermore argues that: “deracialisation of citizenship and public policy (with the minor exception of ‘affirmative action’ and ‘black economic empowerment’) has removed the impetus to racial identities” (2008:2). I do not oppose Seeking and Nattrass’s conclusions but hold that their sharp distinction between class and race might be a simplification of a considerably more complex relationship. Instead of asking whether class has surpassed race as the prevailing indicator for inequalities and social belonging, this thesis, therefore, explores what happens in the intersection of class identities and racial identities on an individual level. I also introduce the concept of Coloured identity to the discussion, which in my opinion, is an excellent example of the intimate relationship between race- and class identities.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

In the following chapter, I present the theoretical framework that has supported and facilitated my analysis of Coloured identity. My analysis is primarily founded in two theoretical approaches, namely Intersectionality and Performativity. I provide a brief outline of how I have employed these approaches and how they have influenced and even steered the direction of this study. Thereafter, I turn towards my methodological approach and fieldwork experience and explain how I gathered my empirical data. I also discuss some of the challenges I encountered during the fieldwork and reflect on my own perspective on the concept of race and how my racial identity might have
influenced the scope of this study.

In the first empirical chapter, I explore the emergence of Coloured identity. I explain the Coloured population’s historical connections to the indigenous Khoi and San population, the Black slave community, and the European settlers in order to demonstrate how different social and political processes have shaped and continuously transformed the substance and meaning of Coloured identity. I also describe how the Coloured populations’ intermediate position in the social and racial hierarchy has influenced present-day experiences and expressions of colouredness. The purpose of this exploration is to show that the Coloured populations’ diverse heritage has allowed some individuals to negotiate the content of their racial identity and thereby influence their position in their social hierarchy by emphasizing certain part of their biological heritage and rejecting others. This ‘flexibility’ demonstrates the complexity of colouredness and illustrates that Coloured identities are always historically situated and continuously transformed along with changing social, political and economic relationships.

The second empirical chapter addresses contemporary expressions of Coloured identities. The informants in this chapter lived or had grown up in the generally economically deprived residential area Cape Flats in the outskirts of Cape Town city center. I discuss some of the challenges facing these informants and explore the relationship between the informants’ racial identities and their class identities. I will show that although all Coloureds are potential carriers of negative racial prejudices, young underprivileged men are particularly vulnerable to such stereotypes because of the close association between Coloured identity, township life and even gangsterism. However, regardless of these negative stereotypes, the informants from the Cape Flats proudly embraced their colouredness and even tactically employed it in an attempt to counter social and political marginalisation.

In the third and last empirical chapter, I also explore contemporary expressions of Coloured identities. However, the informants presented in this chapter occupy a position of structural advantage and are primarily members of the Coloured upper-class and educated elite. As will be illustrated later on in this thesis, these informants rejected their alleged colouredness and did not consider themselves part of a separate Coloured community. Many of them were strong advocates of non-racialism and saw
little or no reason for identifying with a racial grouping that, in their opinion, does not match their lifestyle. I also illustrate that the upper-class informants were far more prone to define themselves in terms of individuality and chose to pronounce personal accomplishments before their racial background.

In the last concluding chapter, I summarise some of my findings and dig deeper into the correlation between Coloured identity and class. I discuss why the upper-class informants and the working-class informants had different approaches to the notion of Coloured identity and also deliberate on the informants’ ability to negotiate the meaning and content of their racial identities. Fhagen-Smith and Korgen have argued that middle and upper class environments, to a larger extent, stimulate independence and individuality and Korgen suggests that this is a plausible explanation for why multiracial individuals from the upper classes are more likely than those from the working class to recognize and express greater ‘freedom of choice’ in their own racial identities (2010). This however, as I will show, is not necessarily the case amongst my informants who regardless of their social status found ways of tactically negotiating the content of their racial belonging. The overall purpose of this discussion is to illustrate that race and class are not two separate processes but they continuously influence one another and even depend on one another for content and meaning. Class has become an increasingly important indicator for social belongings in South Africa but this does not necessarily mean that the importance of race has diminished.
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 An Intersectional Analysis of Coloured Identity

The initial objective of this study was to focus on issues of race. Yet, as I asked the informants questions about their racial identities, I noticed that they very often included other indicators for social belongings in our conversations. They experienced and communicated, not only one but several different ‘layer of identity’, which comprised, for instance, gender, age, class and much more. This made me realise that it would be close to impossible to fully understand the informants’ expressions of Coloured identities without also including other indicators for social belongings in the analysis. In order to do this, I have employed an intersectional approach in my analysis of Coloured identity.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for reviewing and analysing the relationship between different social categories. It has its roots in multiracial feminism that started to emerge in the late 1960s. At that time, feminist women of colour criticised what they considered being ‘privileged White middle-class feminism’ for its unwillingness to incorporate multiple social indicators of oppression in the analysis. Contemporary feminist studies, they argued, mainly focused on gender and thus failed to recognise the influence of other social indicators such as race and class. According to the feminist women of colour, women cannot be considered a homogenous group since White and Black women experience different types of oppressions. Black women, they argued, are exposed to multiple oppressions. They are marginalised because of their gender but also because of their race. The experiences of White and Black women can therefore not be equated and social indicators such as gender, race or class should not be analysed as isolated experiences (Guidroz and Berger 2009, and Thornton Dill 2009). This is where intersectionality makes an entrance.

The main objective of an intersectional analysis is to examine how different social indicators relate to each other and depends on one another for content and meaning (Cole and Sabik 2009:177). This is, in my opinion, crucial when exploring racial identities since the intersectional approach allows the researcher to review identities.
without necessarily placing individuals in fixed positions in the social structure. Class belongings can, for instance, cut across and even exceed racial belongings and different social indicators can thus influence how the informants of this study perceived themselves and their place in society.

In this study, I have chosen to focus primarily on race and class. I explore the correlation between the informants’ racial identities and their class identities and try to understand how these two social indicators influence one another. In other words, I do not compare the informants’ racial identities with their class identities but try to illustrate the very intimate relationship between these two. I examine if and how the informants’ class identities have influenced how they relate to their racial identities and if and how their racial identities have influenced how others relate to their class identities. I also explore how the Coloured populations’ intermediate position in the social and racial hierarchy historically has influenced the making of Coloured identities and if the informants’ aspirations for upward social mobility affected their attitude towards their alleged racial identities.

Another reason for why I find it appropriate, or even necessary, to conduct an intersectional analysis of the relationship between Coloured identity and class is because racial identities still have a considerable effect on peoples’ abilities to access resources. Identities are not merely indicators of ‘who we are’ or ‘want to be’ but they are also closely connected to economic as well as political relationships. Since all social belongings are not valued equally, identities influence people’s abilities to access resources and they generate palpable economic and political inequalities. The apartheid system was an obvious example. The idea of White supremacy was at the heart of the apartheid system and its advocates justified the oppressions of all non-Whites by referring to assumed inherent differences between people of different races. The objective of this discriminating system was partially ideological but also, to a large extent, political since the White oppressors used their racial identity to make collective claims over territories and assets (Christopher 2001). Identity claims are thus often closely related to political and economic processes and they can be used to dominate and subjugate groups of people.
However, identity claims can also be tactically employed in an attempt to challenge a dominant and oppressive force. The emergence of the Black consciousness movement in the 1960s and 70s was an influential contributor in the anti-apartheid struggle because of its ability to unite and build solidarity amongst the many different African people in South Africa. Few Coloureds, however, were able to identify with this movement partially because of their mixed ancestry and biological and social closeness to the White population (Adhikari 2005). Yet, throughout history, the Coloured population has employed other types of identification in order to retain and sometimes even enhance their position in the social hierarchy. In the first empirical chapter, I, therefore, explore how the Coloured population has tactically embraced and suppressed certain parts of their biological and ‘cultural’ heritage in the pursuit of economic, political and social rewards.

Before I initiate my exploration of Coloured identities there also exists a need to say a few words about some of the predicaments of conducting an intersectional analysis. I recognise that it is not entirely unproblematic to use already standardised categories such as race and class in an empirical analysis. Critics of the intersectional approach have questioned the normativity and seeming stability of these social categories and some have even argued for a complete abandonment of such concepts (McCall 2005). All social division are historically specific and they do not necessarily carry the same significance in all contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006). However, advocates of the intersectional approach hold that these concepts are indeed useful as long as they are treated as material and discursive realities and not essential actualities (McCall 2005).

Another challenge when employing an intersectional approach is how to determine which, and how many, social indicators to incorporate in the analysis. An individual’s identity and the conditions under which he or she operates are influenced by numerous of different social indicators and when a researcher decides which categories to focus on, he or she run the risk of diminishing certain properties and exalting other. Nira Yuval-Davis has written extensively on both the theoretical and empirical character of intersectionality and she proposes an answer to this dilemma.

She suggests that: “there are some social divisions, such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity and class, that tend to shape most people’s lives in most social
locations, while other social divisions such as those relating to membership in particular castes or status as indigenous or refugee people tend to affect fewer people globally” (Yuval-Davis 2006:203). The researcher can thus assume that some social indicators, such as gender and class, influence practically all people in most contexts. However, as mentioned above, some social indicators carry more significance in certain situations and the researcher thus, always have to take the specific social context into consideration and allow the field to determine which categories to include in the analysis. Yuval-Davis also argues that an empirical analysis is always primarily a product of the researcher’s own vision and creativity. Researchers do not simply examine human conditions and relations, she explains, but they are active participants in the construction of social realities. “Rainbows include the whole spectrum of different colours, but how many colours we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu” (ibid).

I have followed Yuval-Davis’ recommendations and allowed the informants to steer the direction of this study. I did not enter the field with already predetermined categories of significance but my attentiveness towards issues of class developed as I met with, interviewed and observed the informants. I am well aware that an intersectional analysis of, for instance, Coloured identity and gender, or Coloured identity and age, would have unfolded itself differently. Yet, I do not consider this a disadvantage but gladly encourage other researchers to further explore the very complex and multifaceted notion of Coloured identity.

2.2 ‘Performing’ Coloured Identities

In order to understand the ways in which race and class have influenced the lives of the informants, I find it crucial to consider the actual daily manifestations of colouredness. How did the informants communicate and express Coloured identities during daily social interactions and to what extent were they able to negotiate the content of their racial identities? In order to examine these processes, I have adopted Judith Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’.

The term performativity originates from the field of linguistics but it became prominent and prevailing within gender and feminist studies through the writings of
Judith Butler (Bell 1999:1). Butler argues that there are no genders beyond our expressions of gender, just as there are no races beyond our expressions of race, and an identity is thus always a product of our actions and not the other way around (2002:33). The ‘self’ is not an essential or organic object that instinctively acts and responds to the conditions presented by the environment but identities are formalised repetition of performances that imitates and congregates dominant discussions of, for instance, gender, race and class (Butler 2002). The informants’ racial identities are thus not expressions of who they are but rather a product of what they do and their identity can therefore never be separated from their actions.

Yet, individuals are never fully in control over their identities since they are constantly measured and evaluated by those around them. All social belongings carry with them guidelines and rules for what is generally accepted as ‘proper behavior’. Racial identities and class identities are infused with such norms and it is only by conforming to these patterns that and individual can be fully accepted as a member of a particular race or class. Goffman calls this practice ‘impression management’ and describes it as a dramaturgical performance that communicates the desired self-representation (Goffman 2011). The purpose of these ‘enactments’ is to regulate other’s expectations of oneself. Everyone does this, Goffman explains, since other’s perception of ‘who we are’ will directly influence our social status and position in society.

This, however, does not mean that identities are necessarily conscious enactments. On the contrary, performances are often unconscious expressions of our propensity to ‘fit in’ and they usually take place without the awareness of either the spectators or the performer (Goffman 2011). This is important since I am not suggesting that any of the informants in this study deliberately and deceitfully acted or played a role when they communicated their racial identities. They did, however, have to conform to prewritten ‘scripts’ that determine how it is appropriate to act and who it is acceptable to be. In other words, they had to ‘pass as’ Coloureds by embodying the ideals colouredness.

Sara Ahmed has argued that all identities involve the process of ‘passing’ partially because it is impossible to fully embody the ideal image of a specific sociality
White subjects also have to pass as White, just as Coloured subjects have to pass as Coloured. However, some individuals, she argues, find it easier to embody certain socialites and can hence be confident that no one will question the authenticity of their identity claim. Others find it more difficult to embody certain socialites since they do not fully conform to the norms of that particular social category. It is, for instance, very difficult to claim to be a member of the upper class if you do not have the economic capital to support your claim just as it is very difficult to claim membership of a race if you do not share a history or biological ties with that particular group of people.

Yet, all social belongings are not governed by such strict rules of membership. The category Coloured is an interesting example. It is generally accepted as a separate racial grouping but since its biological and socially inclusive and exclusive boundaries are somewhat unclear, some individuals are able to ‘move across the borderlines of colouredness’. In South Africa, where race is still a prominent and defining factor, this is rather extraordinary. A White person would, for instance, find it very difficult to be accepted as Black; just as a Black person would find it difficult to be accepted as White. Some Coloureds, on the other hand, are able to pass as White or Black because of their intermediate position between these two racial categories. This is yet another reason for why I consider Coloured identity an exceptionally interesting research subject when trying to understand the complexity of racial identities.

Butler’s performative approach to social identification has thus not only allowed me to examine how the informants in this study embodied and communicated Coloured identities through daily social interactions but it has also help me explain how the informants actively transform and renegotiate the content of their racial identities through performances that either asserted or renounced their alleged Coloured identity. Both the performative and the intersectional approach share a constructivist outlook on identities and they have both facilitated my exploration of colouredness. The intersectional approach has allowed me to examine why Coloured identity should not solely be interpreted as an expression of race and the performative approach has helped me explain how different notions of Coloured identity are lived and communicated.
3. Ethnographic Research Methods

The objective of ethnographic research is to create awareness about the human condition by drawing from particular cases. However, the processes that anthropological scholars study are often extremely complex and therefore impossible to comprehend in their totality. The pursuit for complete ethnographic descriptions is, thus, a mission bound to fail. Anthropological researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that a question can generate many different explanations and transparency about the researcher’s methods is, therefore, crucial for the validity of his or her findings. In this chapter, I, therefore, present my research methods and try to be as explicit as possible about how I collected the ethnographic data.

3.1 Preparing for Fieldwork

The preparation for my ethnographic fieldwork started in 2013 when the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) awarded me a Minor Field Study scholarship. I started searching for informants a couple of months before my departure and came across a Facebook page called ‘Coloured voice’. The page encourages discussions about Coloured identity in South Africa and it had approximately 1300 members. I started following the discussions online and eventually I posted a message of my own in which I described the objectives of my research project. I also asked if anyone would be willing to meet with me during my fieldwork in South Africa.

After only a couple of hours, I had received lots of replies. Most responses were positive and several individuals even thanked me for taking an interest in the Coloured community, which they felt had been neglected in much contemporary research on South Africa. However, there were also those who became suspicion and wrote aggressive emails in which they accused me of being racist. These posts started heated debates, and before I knew it, individuals from all over South Africa were arguing amongst one another about whether or not there actually is such a thing as a separate Coloured identity. I found this fascinating and realised that I was on to something significant. Some of the individuals I spoke with through Coloured voice strongly identified as Coloured and stress that they were proud to be part of what they
considered being a separate Coloured community. Yet, others rejected the very idea of a separate Coloured identity and strongly opposed to being labelled as Coloured. I realised that I would have to make both voices heard in my study and before I left for South Africa, I made plans to meet with six individuals who rejected the idea of a separate Coloured identity and four individuals who were proud to call themselves Coloured.

### 3.2 In the Field

A large proportion of my fieldwork took place in the Western Cape and particularly in the surrounding suburbs of Cape Town. I chose to spend the better part of my fieldwork in this area since the Western Cape is the province that is most densely populated by Coloureds. The Coloured population represents approximately 8.8 per cent of the South African population (Statistics South Africa 2014), but in the Western Cape, they constitute as much as 50.2 per cent of the population (WESGRO 2014). However, I conducted some comparative fieldwork in other parts of South Africa as well. I travelled to both Durban and Johannesburg where I conducted several interviews. Unfortunately, I came to the conclusion that the scope of my study would not allow for a thorough analysis of the provincial differences and this study therefore merely focuses on individuals currently living in the Western Cape.

Many of the informants had grown up or were currently living in the Cape Flats. The Cape Flats is a flat and dusty patch of land to the southeast of Cape Town city centre. It stretches all the way from the sandy beaches of False Bay in the south to the majestic Table Mountain in the west, which separates it from the central business district of Cape Town. There is no official way of determining the exact area of the Cape Flats but the grey section in the following map represents an approximation based on the informants’ assessments.
The Cape Flats was the location to which the ‘non-White’ population was relocated during the implementation of the Group Areas Act. The Group Areas Act was a policy invented by the apartheid government that divided the urban areas into racially segregated districts. During the implementation of the Group Areas Act in Cape Town, large parts of the Coloured population was relocated into modest and overcrowded flats on what is today known as the Cape Flats. The Black population was treated even worse and many were not even offered an alternative accommodation but were merely removed from the now White residential areas and left to fend for themselves in the outskirts of the city (Christopher 2001). Even today, there is still a rather big difference between the predominantly Coloured neighbourhoods, in which there are many brick or concrete houses, and the predominantly Black neighbourhoods that primarily consists of shacks without proper sanitation. Today, large parts of the Cape Flats consist of economically deprived neighbourhoods. Unemployment rates have skyrocketed during the last twenty years and this is probably one of the strongest contributing factors behind the many violent gangs that terrorise the streets of the Cape Flats (Leggett 2004).

During the initial three weeks of fieldwork, I never had the opportunity to visit the Cape Flats. When I contacted the informants they often suggested that we would meet at a café or a restaurant in Cape Town city center. I realised that the location for these meetings was not ideal since they took place in a context that was not entirely familiar
to some of the informants. Most of them lived in the suburbs and by meeting them in the busy tourist and business quarters of Cape Town, I had removed them from their everyday environment and I was unable to observe and experience many of the things they described. However, the choice to meet in these environments was not mine. Many of the informants did not want to meet with me in their home neighbourhoods because of the high frequency of crime in these areas. Instead, they insisted that we would meet close to a location where I was staying. I also got the impression that some of the informants who are living in economically deprived neighbourhoods did not want me to see their home quarters. Despite their poverty, they were all neatly dressed and many of them wore expensive designer shoes and clothes and some informants seemed reluctant to reveal the reality behind this spotless facade.

It was not until I got to know a couple of informants a little bit better that they felt comfortable bringing me to the Cape Flats. However, it was very difficult for me to move around freely in these areas and I always had to rely on someone else to take me around. This meant that I was not able to conduct as many observations and participant observations that I had hoped for. Much of the data I collected was produced during interviews and this has influenced the scope of my research. Yet, the issue of race and racial identities is ever present in South Africa and I soon realised that I was unconsciously observing and participating in the making of racial identities as I was going about my daily business. Race makes itself known as you ride the bus, purchase groceries or whenever you read a newspaper or watch television. My entire stay in South Africa thus became one extensive participant observation.

3.3 Interviews

Since interviews constituted a large part of my fieldwork, I started looking for ways of identifying ethnographic information that could shed light on the social milieu of the informants’ experiences. In an article written by Martin Gerald Forsey, the author suggests an appropriate approach, which he calls ‘an ethnographic imaginary’. The purpose of an ethnographic imaginary is to “ask questions beyond the immediate concern of the research question” (Forsey 2010:568). This approach produces ‘life biographies’ which contains indirect but nevertheless essential information and data. I followed Forsey’s suggestions and asked the informants questions about their social
and economic background. I, for instance, asked them about the kind of neighbourhood they grew up in, what school they went to and what their parents did for a living. This proved to be a time-consuming technique and at first, I felt as if I was wasting time on matters that were not directly relevant to my research question. In time, however, I found that these biographies revealed valuable information and had I not asked these general questions I might, for instance, have overlooked the complex relationship between racial identities and class identities. Forsey’s approach of an ‘ethnographic imaginary’, thus, had a huge influence on my research since it directed my attention towards points of intersection and revealed influences that would ultimately shape the scope of my research.

I conducted 27 audio-recorded interviews that lasted between one to four hours. However, as I got to know some of the informants better and spent entire days with them, I increasingly relied on notes instead of the recorder. All interviews were unstructured or semi-structured, which meant that I often had a couple of questions or themes in mind that I wanted to cover but I nevertheless always allowed the informants to deliberate on issues that they found relevant. This technique allows the informants to, as Bernard puts it, “express themselves in their own terms” (Bernard 2011:157) and I also felt that it created a more relaxed and ‘natural’ interview environment.

3.4 Following the Fieldwork

Ethnographic research is empirical in its essence but the process of analysing the collected data is an interpretative task (Bernard 2011). As I got back from my fieldwork, I initiated the process of organising and analysing my material. To begin with, I looked for regularities as well as inconsistencies in the informants’ statements and after a while, I was able to identify themes of interest. The overall process of analysing the ethnographic material was, thus, an exploratory enterprise and it was not until I had left the field that I was actually able to formulate the final research question of this study.

Looking back at my fieldwork, I am happy with the way it unfolded. I met with most of the individuals I talked with on Facebook prior to my departure but I also
employed a ‘snowball sampling technique’ and allowed the informants to refer me to new contacts as well as new topics of relevance. Yet, the results of my findings did not reveal themselves until after I had left the field and as I got back to Uppsala, I realised that I had overlooked some important topics. I also realised that I had spent relatively little time with the informants aside from the interview sessions. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to visit South Africa again later that year and I was able to meet with some of the informants once more and speak with them about issues related to my preliminary findings. My second visit to South Africa was much shorter but I felt that I was able to work more focused since I had learned from my mistakes during the last visit. I spent more time socialising with the informants and allowed myself to absorb and ingest the things I saw and heard. This allowed me to create a closer relationship with some of the informants and also helped me to better understand how the informants lived and communicated their racial identities on a daily basis.

3.5 Reflexivity

One of the biggest challenges during my fieldwork, but also during the analytical process, was my own discomfort with the concept of race. Throughout the research process, I was continuously haunted by the thought that acknowledging the importance of race meant being racist. However, I soon realised that I would have to suppress these feelings since there is no beating around the bush regarding race in South Africa where it is a category still very much in use. Race officially no longer has any legal bearing but it is nevertheless a reality in the minds of most South Africans and it is still an influential social fact that is tenacious and resistant in ways I sometimes find hard to understand.

Occasionally when I checked into a new accommodation, I was required to state my race when I filled out the personal information document at the reception. When I was faced with this predicament, I tried my best to remain politically correct and avoided the question by simply writing ‘human’. Yet, for a long time, I continued to feel like an ignorant child who always put her foot in it. I was, for instance, often unsure about
what term to use when referring to the informants. Most informants were comfortable with the term Coloured but there were also those who got offended by it and instead preferred to use the expression ‘so-called Coloured’. Yet, there were also those who felt insulted by this sort of cautiousness since they felt as if it was undermining the very authenticity of their racial identity. I usually ended up waiting for the informant to use one or the other and then simply followed his or her example. After a while, I started to get the hang of it and I became more and more comfortable speaking openly about issues of race.

However, I rarely included myself in the discussions. On the contrary, I usually became startled and even uncomfortable if an informant asked me about my own racial identity and for a long time, I was virtually oblivious regarding the significance of my own whiteness. Ruth Frankenberg proposes a plausible explanation to my ignorance. She explains that:

> when white people […] look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue that people of colour face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us. (Frankenberg 1993:6)

I recognise much of myself in Frankenberg’s statement and although race and skin colour were regular topics during the interviews, it took a long time before I started seeing myself in terms of race. The informants, on the other hand, seemed very much aware of my whiteness and some of them even joked about how much I stood out when I visited the predominantly Coloured neighbourhoods. One day when my friend and informant David and I were going to meet some of his friends at a bar in Cape Town, David laughed and said that he wondered how his friends were going to react when he showed up with a White girl. He even proposed, as a joke, that we would pretend that I was his girlfriend just to see the look on his friends’ faces. It took me a while before I started to understand that my racial identity created a distance between the informants and me. I also got the feeling that some of the informants from relatively underprivileged background wanted to ‘show me off’ to friends and family members and this suggests that my White body automatically had placed me in a position of structural advantage.
The fact that I was a researcher from a wealthy Scandinavian country further complicated the relationships with the informants. Some of them, who pursued political agendas, saw my presence as an opportunity to promote their cause. I constantly stressed that this was not the purpose of my research project but several informants nonetheless had their own ideas about what my research should focus on. Yet, being Swedish sometimes also proved to be beneficial. I was a foreigner and, therefore, able to get away with things that South Africans might not have. I, for instance, once asked David if he would have been as willing to help me if I was a South African researcher and he answered that this might have complicated the relationship. He explained that:

There is too much history and hurtful memories but because you are not from here you cannot be blamed for what happened. I am just happy to share my experiences with you. (David)

My own racial identity thus both hampered and facilitated the research process and my time spent in South Africa did not only make me think differently about the concept of race but it also spawned a new awareness of my own whiteness and the properties it entails.
4. Coloured by History

It is difficult to speak of a particular history of the Coloured population in South Africa. The Coloured community consists of an extremely diverse group of people with roots in many different parts of the world. Many Coloureds themselves are uncertain about their ancestry and today, there are several competing interpretations regarding the emergence of the Coloured community. However, most historians and other researchers agree that large parts of the Coloured population are distant descendants of relations between the indigenous Khoi and San people, the European settlers and slaves imported by the Dutch East India Trading Company from east Africa and the Indonesia (VOC) (Johnson 2004:33, Thompson 2014: 6).

In this chapter, I explore the Coloured populations’ historical connections to the indigenous Khoi and San population, the Black slave community, and the European settlers in order to explain the emergence of this racial identity. I also demonstrate how different historical currents, dating all the way back to the arrival of the first European settlers during the seventieth century, have shaped and continuously transformed the substance and meaning of Coloured identity. The purpose of this exploration is not only to describe the emergence of Coloured identity but also to illustrate how the Coloured populations’ intermediate position in the social and racial hierarchy historically has influenced the making of Coloured identities.

4.1 Coloured as Khoisan

The San are the earliest known inhabitants of the Cape. They lived in small hunter-gatherer communities that followed the seasonal game. (Marais 1957 and Welsh 2000:16). Much of what we know about these people has been recovered from rock paintings and engravings, which dates back as far as 27,000 years (Johnson 2004:7). Today, there are still scattered San communities in southern Africa. However, expanding agriculture, war and the establishment of a large-scale national park on their traditional territory has displaced large parts of the San and most of the remaining communities have little or no rights to their ancestral lands. (South African San Institute 2016)
The Khoi were also early inhabitants of the Cape. They were organised into clans consisting of about one hundred individuals who often shared the same patrilineal kinship. The Khoi were also a nomadic people but unlike the San, they also practiced pastoral agriculture. However, their cattle were primarily used as a source of milk and they therefore also relied on excellent hunting and fishing skills (Klein 1986).

There was a greater deal of contact and interaction between the Khoi and the San and the definite distinction between these two groups should actually be considered somewhat artificial. What separated them was primarily their way of living and even this is not as clear-cut as some historians want to suggest. Both groups spoke associated languages and they occasionally intermarried. Many San, furthermore, eventually adopted the Khoi lifestyle and started herding, and some Khoi became hunter-gatherers. This is why the Khoi and San are often referred to with the collective term Khoisan. However, this is clearly a simplification. Both the Khoi and the San consisted of several subcategories, clans and tribes, and it might therefore actually be more appropriate to think of the Khoi and the San in terms of language groups, instead of population groups (Johnson 2004).

The fate of the Khoi and San took a dramatic turn in 1652 as Dutch commander Jan van Riebeeck established a provision station for the Dutch East India Trading Company (VOC) in what is today known as Table Bay in Cape Town (Reid 2012). The purpose of the station was to provide water and food to passing trade vessels on their way to Asia and to look after sailors that had fallen sick during the long journey from Europe (Johnson 2004:32). During the early years of settlement, the station was populated by a small group of European settlers. They grew fruits and vegetables for the Company but also traded goods with the Khoi and San in exchange for cattle.

The initial intention was not to colonialize the Cape. However, as the VOC started allocating land rights and allowing private farming, the Dutch settlement expanded. After only about ten years, the colony had advanced into a complex society with limited autonomy (Thompson 2014:33). More and more settlers started to arrive at the Cape and scarcity of land soon became an issue. In the nineteenth century, settlers, therefore, moved further into the interior of the region, without concern of the
indigenous population living in these areas. Both the Khoi and San put up resistance against the colonialists, but they were poorly organised and often lacked guns and ammunitions. Many of those who resisted, or stood in the way of the colonialists, were brutally murdered (Johnson 2004). Both the Khoi and the San endured terrible hardships at the hand of the colonialists. Not only did they lose their livestock herds and land but they were also severely socially marginalised. The colonialists considered them backward and weak with little or no capacity for social organisation. A physician and member of social justice at the East India Company gave the following account in 1686 and it reveals just how little the colonialists thought of the indigenous population.

Their native barbarism and idle desert life, together with a wretched ignorance of all virtues, imposes upon their minds every form of vicious pleasure. In faithlessness, inconstancy, lying, cheating, treachery, and infamous concern with every kind of lust they exercise their villainy. They are so bloody in their inclinations as to practice their cruelties even upon their vanquished enemies after their death, by striking their arrows and weapons into their dead carcasses. Thus in the hardness of their hearts, resisting every impulse of humanity, they persist in the savagery of their fore-fathers. […] Wherefore whoever wishes to employ them as slaves must keep them hungry, never fully satisfied, speak to them with authority, and never fail to be as good as his word. (Rhyne 1686:123)

As the settlers gradually seized the land that had formerly belonged to the indigenous populations, the Khoi and San became increasingly desperate. They had been deprived of their livelihood and many were eventually forced to leave their homes in search for work at the settlers’ farms. This meant that the Khoi and San communities slowly started to integrate into the colonial society (Thompson 2014:38). However, they were still severely economically, politically and socially marginalised and had to work either as slaves or under slave-like conditions. According to former journalist and author Christopher, who I met during my first week in Cape Town, the Khoi and San were situated at the very bottom of the social hierarchy and they were seen as the ‘lowest’ of all people at the Cape.
Yet, since the majority of settlers at the Cape were male, the shortage of European women eventually encouraged new forms of relationships between the newcomers and the indigenous population. Many settlers engaged in extramarital sexual relations with indigenous women (Johnson 2004:33) and the first documented marriage between a settlers and a Khoi woman occurred as early as 1656. At that time, ‘interracial’ marriages were not frowned upon but even encouraged by the VOC (Ziervogel 1938) and the children of these relations were occasionally accepted into the White community. The Khoi and San remained at the very bottom of the social hierarchy but their ‘half-European’ offspring were placed higher in the social hierarchy because of their patrilineal kinship with the White settler.

However, as the growing economy continued to increase the demand for labour, the VOC soon realised that it would be impossible to meet these demands if all ‘mixed-race’ babies were to be brought up as Whites. In 1685, marriages between Europeans and the Khoi and San were therefore prohibited (Johnson 2004:35). Yet, extramarital relations continued to occur, even though they were frowned upon, and marriages between settlers and the Khoi and San took place long after these regulations were established. However, the babies of such relations were increasingly perceived as ‘non-White’ and by the late seventeenth century, they were no longer accepted as a part of the White community (Goldin 1987 and Johnson 2004). Instead, the ‘mix-race’ population was increasingly seen as a separate population group. They were not indigenous and not White and they would eventually be labelled Coloured because of their light brown complexion and mixed ancestry.

The fact that the Coloureds were the offspring of European settlers gave them a privileged position in the colonial social hierarchy. They were regarded as superior to the indigenous population as well as the Black Zulus and Xhosas who had migrated to the tip of Africa from the Great Lakes region in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Danver 2015:95 and Minahan 2002:2115). However, they were nevertheless regarded as inferior to the White population and they were never fully embraced as part of the White community.

According to Christopher, the relationship between the Coloured and the White population became even more strained with the advancement of the eugenic
movement and Social Darwinism during the late nineteenth century. Racial purity was at the heart of these movements and as they started to make headway in the region, the Coloured populations’ mixed ancestry became tainted with shame and stigma. The very existence of the Coloured population undermined the imagined ‘virtues’ of the White race since they were the living proof of ‘immoral’ alliances between the European settlers and the indigenous Khoi and San. The Coloured populations’ mixed biological ancestry became an ‘uncomfortable’ fact for everyone involved and Christopher suggested that this why so many Coloureds have disregarded or even rejected their historical connection to the Khoi and San. Today, the idea of racial purity has evidentially lost most of its magnetism but the stigma surrounding the Coloured population’s mixed ancestry has apparently not vanished entirely. Christopher claimed that Coloured identity is still marked by shame and stigma and many Coloured still shun from openly acknowledging their pre-colonial history. He explained that:

Busman or Khoisan used to be a derogatory term. The Whites would use it to insult Coloureds and I think that some people still think of it as an insult, and that is why they deny their roots and their ties to the indigenous people. (Christopher)

According to Christopher, the Coloured population is still afraid that their biological ties to these indigenous people might undermine their position in the social hierarchy. “We [the Coloureds] have always been seen as second-best after the Whites,” he said, “and this is why so many Coloureds have refused to recognise their historical connection to the Khoisan, who has always been seen as backward and uncivilized.” However, Adhikari has suggested that during the last two decades, more and more Coloureds have started to take an interest in their indigenous history. I also found evidence of this during my fieldwork. There are, for instance, several Facebook groups such as ‘Khoi-San Talk’ and ‘Proudly Khoisan’ that encourages discussions about the pre-colonial history of the Coloured community. I also noticed that these groups occasionally distribute information about upcoming community meetings regarding so-called ‘Coloured interests’.
I once had the opportunity to attend such an event during a community meeting in the predominantly Coloured neighbourhood Belhar about twenty kilometres outside of Cape Town city centre. The meeting took place in an old and ragged gymnasium after school hours. About 35 individuals attended and most of them seemed to know each other from before. Adam, who was a local community politician, had invited me and he was one of the first speakers at the meeting. He spoke about the importance of Coloured unity and urged his audience to reclaim their indigenous history.

Khoi, San, Griqua Bushman, Coloured; we are all brown people and we need to focus on what binds us together! Our power lies in collectiveness, in commonness with each other and it is time for us to come together and trust each other. Do not let the ANC tell you that you are Black! You are Coloured and a descendant of the first nation! (Adam)

The meeting lasted for about three hours. I sat quietly in the back and listened as the participants gave long and passionate speeches about the importance of collaboration and solidarity within the Coloured community. The audience cheered in agreement and clapped their hands as the different speakers shared their thoughts on Coloured marginalisation and Coloured identity. After the meeting, I tried to find an excuse to stick around; hoping that I would be able to talk privately with Adam after the other participants had left. I ended up helping him tidy the room and as we were stacking the chairs, I grabbed the opportunity to ask him some questions about some of the things that had been discussed during the evening. I asked him why the history of the Khoi and San was so important to him. He explained that since the Coloured community is so extremely diverse, it is in need of a shared history and ancestry that can function as a source for building a collective identity. “Many Coloureds,” he said, “do not know who they are and where they come from but if they only embraced their indigenous history they would eventually see that they are actually part of something bigger.” I asked if he saw any other advantages and he explained that:

The Coloured community was excluded from the land reparation that took place here in South Africa [after the dissolution of apartheid]. They were not given any rights to the land because the Black Africans saw themselves as the indigenous people, whereas in fact the Khoi and the San are the real
indigenous people. So in order to counter marginalization, Coloureds from different parts of the country now come together and say: Look, we are the rightful inheritors to the land, give us our constitutional rights! (Adam)

Adam was thus suggesting that the Coloured populations’ indigenous ties function as a means for political mobilisation. By claiming an indigenous identity Adam and his supporters were trying to make claims over land and resources that previously belonged to their distant ancestors. Whether they will succeed or not remains to be seen but I was nevertheless impressed by how Adam and his fellow activists had managed to take a previously stigmatised and undesirable past and turned it into a positive influence. The Khoi and San used to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy and few Coloured were, therefore, willing to acknowledge their indigenous history. Yet, as new opportunities presented themselves some have started to recognise a potential in their indigenous ties. The history of the Khoi and San has therefore increasingly been allowed to constitute an important part of Coloured identities but, just as Christopher suggested, many Coloureds still shun from acknowledging their indigenous ancestry and it will probably take a long time before the stigma associated with the Khoi and San has completely dissolved.

4.2 Coloured as Black

During the early years of European settlement at the Cape, the VOC allocated relatively small plots of land to the newly arrived farmers. However, as the number of settlers began to grow, the Company started to fear that the rapidly growing population would eventually want to repeal regulations and demand autonomy. In 1702, the VOC, therefore, made an amendment to its land distribution policy, which allowed the Company to allocate farms as big as 6,000 acres. The idea was that this would limit the number of farmers settling at the Cape. However, these regulations had another significant consequence for the future of the colony. The farmers could no longer till the land on their own but they had to rely on workers (Johnson 2004:34-36). At that time, there was a shortage of labour in the colony and the cheapest way to get a hold of a diligent workforce was to import workers from other parts of the world (Johnson 2004). The first slaves arrived at the Cape as early as 1658. They were
brought from East Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, India and the Indonesian Islands (Marais 1957 and Johnson 2004:36-38).

Just as with the Khoi and San, many settlers engaged in extramarital relations with the slaves. This was a common practice and during the first 20 years after the arrival of the settlers, 75 per cent of all children, born from slave mothers, were the results of ‘interracial relations’ (Marais 1957 and Ziervogel 1938). The babies of these relations were eventually also branded as Coloureds because of their mixed biological ancestry. The Coloured population is thus, not only distant descendants of the Khoi and San. They also have roots in the Black slave community.

By the late nineteenth century, rapid economic growth and advances within the mining industry drew thousands of Black workers into the South African cities. This large-scale urbanisation transformed the regional demographics and by the mid-twentieth century, the urban population in South Africa was no longer predominantly White, but Black. The purpose of the early legislations of apartheid was to hinder these progressions and to establish racial segregation in the urban spaces (Christopher 2001).

However, the implementation of segregation regulations required firmly defined racial categories. In 1950, the apartheid government, therefore, introduced the Population Registration Act, which compelled all South Africans to be classified and registered as either White (European), African (Bantu or Black), or Coloured. The category Coloured referred to “a person who is not a white person or a native” (Union of South Africa 1950). It was a rather broad and ambiguous definition and the category was therefore later further divided into the subcategories Cape Malay, Cape Coloured, Chinese, Indian, Griqua, other Asiatic, and other Coloured (Reddy 2001:75). With the implementation of these regulations, the Coloured population was officially separated from the Black majority. For several decades, the Coloured population had already been treated differently than the Black population but now they were also legally defined as a separate racial group.

The Coloured community, just as the Back, suffered difficult hardships during the apartheid era. They were systematically robbed of their political rights and by the
early seventies, the Coloured population had been deprived of both their vote on the municipal electoral roll and their participation in parliamentary affairs (du Pré 1994:19-20 and Christopher 2001:49). However, the Coloured population was nevertheless favored over the Black population by the apartheid government and they were spared some of the most humiliating discriminating implementations. Richard, who worked as an English teacher at a high school in the predominantly Coloured neighbourhood Richmond, told me that the Coloured population was rated at “second-class citizens” since they occupied an intermediate position in the racial hierarchy between the Whites and the Blacks. This, he claimed, created a gulf between the Black and Coloured population who out of fear and self-preservation found it increasingly important to dissociate themselves from their partially Black heritage. Just as with the Khoi and San, the Coloured population saw their Black ancestry as a threat towards their relatively privileged position in the racial and social hierarchy. “No one wanted to be perceived as Black,” he said, “because this meant that you would not be able to enjoy the privileges of being half-White. This, I think, is probably why the Coloureds did everything they could to hide their Black origin.”

Yet, there have been times during which some Coloureds found it beneficial or even necessary to reclaim their Black heritage. The rise of the Black consciousness movement in the 1970s bred the idea that Coloured distinctiveness was undermining the anti-apartheid struggle. Advocators of the Black consciousness movement argued that Coloured identity was nothing more than an artificial concept created by the apartheid government in an attempt to ‘dived and rule’. They stressed that the Coloured population is partially biologically Black and held that they, therefore, ought to join their Black ‘brothers’ in the struggle against White dominance. During the 1980s, the non-racial democratic movement, led by the United Democratic Front (UDF), further accelerated the rejection of Coloured identity and many Coloureds who actively engaged in the freedom struggle gradually started to consider themselves part of the Black majority instead of a separate Coloured community. They also started rejecting the term Coloured, which they felt was deceptive and derogative (Adhikari 2005).

Yet, Adhikari stresses that this was primarily a trend amongst the Coloured elite and the advancement of such movements had limited influence amongst the working class.
The apartheid government was cruel and unfair but it also created advantages for the Coloured working class such as the Coloured Labour Preference Policy, which protected Coloured economic interests by compelling White business owners to hire Coloureds before Blacks (Adhikari 2009:83-84). This is one plausible explanation for why the Coloured working class felt hesitant to unite with the Black majority. They lived and operated in a system that continuously favoured them before Blacks and saw no reason for voluntarily renouncing these ‘privileges’.

There were of course some Coloureds who actively engaged in the struggle against apartheid, but there were also those who supported the apartheid government, hoping that their loyalty would spare them the same injustices inflicted upon the Black population (Goldin 1987:21). Even until the very end of apartheid, many Coloureds continued to support the apartheid government, which had both supported and subjugated them.

When it was finally time for the first democratic election in 1994 a majority of the Coloured voters in the Western Cape voted for the National Party (NP), who were responsible for the implementation of apartheid, and thereby allowed their former oppressors to retain their power in the province (Williams 1996).

Gillian remembered the day of the first democratic general election as if it was yesterday. When we met in 2014, she was 55-years old and she had just recently retired from her many years of service as a primary school teacher. Our first meeting took place in her home, which was situated on a typical working-class street in Belhar. Her house had two small but comfortable bedrooms and a dry and rustic backyard surrounded by the typical South African two-meters-high concrete walls generally referred to as ‘vibrocrete walls’. Gillian told me that she waited in line for hours to vote in the first democratic election and she and her friends were very excited about the changes that were about to take place. However, they were also anxious about the outcomes of the transition. What was going to happen now? Could a Black government really run the country as well as the Whites had done? Where did the Coloureds belong in this transformation and what was going to be their place in the new South Africa?

Many Coloureds, Gillian explained, were also worried about what was going to happen when privileges such as the Coloured Labour Preference Policy were removed and according to her, these worries are a plausible explanation for why such a large proportion of the Coloured community did not vote with the Black majority on that day.
Statistics from the general election in 2014 indicate that South Africans have generally continued to vote along racial lines. The African National Congress (ANC) is still, to a large extent, considered a political party for the Black population and White as well as Coloured voters generally gravitate towards the historically White party Democratic Alliance (Ensor 2014). These segmentations are particularly evident in the Western Cape, which is the only province where the Democratic Alliance dominates the political landscape (Electoral Commission of South Africa 2014). The ANC is the leading political part in all other provinces but they have never been able to win enough support in the Coloured communities.

Richard claimed that this is why some high-ranking politicians within the ANC have officially encouraged the Coloured community to stop regarding themselves as a separate racial grouping. “They think that they will finally be able to win the Western Cape if we [the Coloureds] unite with the Blacks and vote with the Blacks” (Richard). There seems to be some truth in Richards’ allegations. ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe has, for instance, said that the Coloured community should stop regarding themselves as a minority and that “coloured people should not feel ashamed to be black” (Whittles 2015). However, few Coloureds have welcomed these pleads and Richard even felt insulted by Mantashe’s frivolous attitude towards Coloured identity.

We need to be proud of who we are and not let anyone else define our identity. The ANC would rather have us [Coloureds] call ourselves Black because they want us to unite with the Black majority so that they can get even more votes, but I don’t think many Coloured feel comfortable with this. I mean, why do we have to deny our identity in order to find political support? (Richard)

Richard’s grandmother was Black but he has never been able to identify with the Black community. He explained that he has roots in many different parts of the world, and to simply say that he is Black would be a simplification of a far more complex identity. According to him, most Coloureds prefer to think of themselves as a separate racial grouping rather than as members of the Black community. He explained that:
It is true that we are biologically related to the Blacks but the Coloured community was always treated as different and so we do not share a history with the Blacks and that is one of the reasons for why most Coloureds see themselves as a separate race with its own identity and why we can never feel part of the Black community. (Richard)

During my fieldwork, I also noticed that a large majority of the informants shunned from acknowledging their Black ancestry. Often when I would ask them about their identity they would give me a thorough account of their European ancestry. However, they very seldom told me about their African heritage. Amateur actor Helen, for instance, was able to describe her European lineage all the way back to eighteenth century. She had done extensive research on her family history and even brought a family tree to the interview, which she proudly showed me. I noticed that the family tree only included her Europeans side of the family and asked her about this. She explained that she had tried to find information about her African relatives but this proved to be difficult due to a shortage of reliable sources and records. Yet, she admitted that most Coloureds know more about their European ancestry and this, she claimed, is often a deliberate choice. She explained that:

People are not as interested in knowing about their African roots. Like my mother for example, she always spoke about our Dutch side, but never about our African. It was almost as if she didn’t want to acknowledge that side. (Helen)

I asked her why and she proposed that the Coloured community still regard themselves as superior to the Black population and that they therefore are less interested in knowing about their Black history. University student Warren took it even further and argued that there is much racism in the Coloured community directed towards the Black population. According to him, this is because, during apartheid, the Coloured were told on a daily basis that they were superior to the Black population and some Coloureds have not entirely forsaken this idea.

I once had the opportunity to experience the persistence of these racist attitudes during an afternoon drive in the suburbs of Cape Town with former tourist guide
Evan. We drove around for a couple of hours and one of the things that struck me while we were passing through the different neighbourhoods was the absurd disparity between one street and another. Highways, bridges and railway tracks divide the suburbs of Cape Town into smaller entities that differ significantly from one another. Some areas are extremely wealthy with streets adorned with luxury houses and beautiful gardens. However, only a few hundred meters away from these suburban delights are neighbourhoods that are severely economically deprived. Some of the streets are unpaved and many of the rundown houses or ‘sheds’ lack both electricity and water.

In one area that Evan referred to as working-class Coloured neighbourhood, we came across a community outdoor swimming pool that was crammed with both kids and adults enjoying themselves in the afternoon sun. I asked Evan if there are many community swimming pools in the suburbs. He shook his head. “There are a couple,” he said, “but most of them are located in the predominantly Coloured areas. The Black children from the neighbourhoods across the bridge are of course allowed to use this one,” he said, “but they don’t feel welcome here.” When I asked why, Evan explained that some Coloureds act cruelly towards the Black children, and try to scare them off because they are afraid that the Black children might cause trouble and steal their belongings.

It should be noted that far from all informants, particularly from the younger generations, share these racist beliefs. However, it was obvious that most informants had a rather dubious attitude towards their Black heritage. Unlike the renowned ‘one-drop-rule’, in for instance the United States and Brazil, a large majority of the informants did not feel comfortable labelling themselves Black; even though some of them had Black grandparents or cousins. In fact, I only encountered one informant who called herself Black and just as Adhikari has suggested, she was a member of the Coloured educated elite who had been inspired by the Black consciousness movement in the 1970s. Besides her, all of the informants rejected Mantashe’s call for unification between the Black and Coloured communities and saw little or no reason for identifying as Black.
4.3 Coloured as White

The relationship between the White and the Coloured population in South Africa has always been marked by ambiguity. Racial segregation officially separated these two associated population groups for many years but even during the peak of apartheid, the social and biological closeness between the Whites and the Coloureds made sure that the Coloured population maintained an intermediate and relatively privileged position in the racial and social hierarchy. In the early twentieth century, the escalation in poverty amongst certain White communities further intensified the social and spatial closeness between these two groups and even after the introduction of the Group Areas Act there were still some borderline areas where low-income Whites and Coloureds lived together (Teppo 2004, Watson 1970).

Gillian grew up in such an area called Durbanville. Durbanville, she explained, used to be a mixed residential area where you would find Coloured and White families living next door to each other. Gillian’s closest neighbours were White. They were always nice and respectful towards her family and they even stopped and exchanged polite small talk as you passed them on the street. Yet, they still kept their distance and Gillian’s parents were never able to develop a close relationship with their neighbours. They never invited Gillian’s parents over to their house and forbade their own children from playing with Gillian and her siblings. The relationship was thus never equal but Gillian and her entire family had to work hard to earn the respect from their White neighbours. She explained that:

When I grew up we were always thought of as second-class citizens. And you had to treat White people with respect because they are higher than you. I remember this one time when we were at church and some of our people [Coloureds] were really misbehaving and my mother was so ashamed! She didn’t want the White people to think we were like those misbehaving drunks. My parents had a lot of respect for our White neighbours and we all lived in harmony. We could talk to them but we still had to call them Miss or Mr, you couldn’t call them by name. (Gillian)
Even though Gillian and her siblings were treated as second-class citizens and were banned from many of the more esteemed restaurants and beaches, Gillian never thought much of these inequalities whilst growing up. She said that it was natural and not something she thought of or questioned, at least not until she got older. In her teens, she became more aware of the inequalities imposed by the apartheid system and she even eventually started to wish that she too were White instead of Coloured.

My life would have been much easier if I was considered White. I would have gone to the nicer schools and everything would have been better. As I got older I always compared myself with other White teenagers and I wanted to be friends with them. (Gillian)

Gillian’s wish to be considered White was not as farfetched as one might think. The system of racial classification invented by the apartheid system was extremely subjective and the South African Race Classification Board occasionally found it difficult to distinguish between Whites and Coloureds with a light complexion. Since there was no definite way of determining someone’s racial identity, arbitrary decisions had to be made. Government officials would sometimes assess an individual’s racial identity by examining the texture of his or her hair (Posel 2001:65). They would drive a pencil through the person’s hair and evaluate his or her racial identity depending on how easily it came out. Today, this practice is known as the ‘pencil test’ and some informants told me stories about how they themselves or family members had been subjected to this humiliating and extremely arbitrary classification strategy. Yet, some Coloureds saw the ambiguities regarding racial classifications as an opportunity for improving their social status by ‘crossing the colour line’, or in other words ‘passing as White’ (Watson 1970). The most common way to determine someone’s racial identity was by physical appearance and Gillian explained that many of her friends and family members tried to alter their appearance in order to look more European. Some would use bleaching creams or makeup and others colored their hair and straightened it with an iron.

Where you lived was also an important indicator of your racial identity and some Coloured families, therefore, resettled to borderline areas where both low-income Whites and Coloureds were living together and tried to get their children admitted to
‘Whites-only schools’. Certain low-income White areas eventually became ‘swamped’ with Coloured families struggling to find acceptance and some of the schools exclusively for White children eventually had to admit ‘doubtful children’ because of economic difficulties (Watson 1970). Gillian explained that:

I remember that some of my friends, who were also Coloured, eventually got accepted to White schools, or almost White schools. You see the principals and the teachers found it difficult to determine if that person was White or Coloured and so sometimes they would admit a Coloured child. The White parents did not like this at all and there were those who complained or moved their children out of those schools because they didn’t want their children to be associated with Coloured children. (Gillian)

However, being admitted to a White school and living in a White area was not necessarily enough. In unclear cases, the South African Race Classification Board would take qualities such as lifestyle and social relations into consideration. One important part in the process of passing as White was thus to be recognised and accepted by White neighbours and co-workers. A Coloured individual who wanted to be accepted as White and obtain a White identity card, therefore, had to attain the right virtues. This meant embracing certain habits and living life according to certain standards (Teppo 2004).

People would assess you based on the type of clothes you wore and how you presented yourself, but there were also other more subtle signs, as for example how you spoke, like what accent you had. We always spoke Afrikaans and I think a lot of people tried to sound just like the Whites. They didn’t want to remind people that they were Coloureds. (Gillian)

The pursuit for upward social mobility was a strong driving force behind these tactics. Being accepted as White meant climbing the class ladder and some Coloureds were prepared to disassociate themselves from family members and friend in the pursuit of such material rewards. According to Gillian, there are still many Coloureds who have continued to live ‘White lives’ even after the dissolution of apartheid and who until this day continued to keep their former Coloured identity hidden. Annika Teppo also
saw evidence of this during her fieldwork in Epping Garden Village in the outskirts of Cape Town. She explains that: “Once you chose the route of becoming a White, there was rarely a return. The pressure to succeed was tremendous since the original identity, family relations and friendships had to be sacrificed” (2004:95). Yet, according to my informant Ash, there are also other explanations for why some Coloureds have chosen to maintain their White identity. “Whiteness still has currency in South Africa,” he told me, “and those who are able to get away with looking White do everything they can to keep it that way.” According to Ash, you might, for instance, find it easier to find employment or to rent an apartment if you appear to be White, or at least ‘whiter’.

I have never experienced this myself, but when my friend was looking to rent an apartment he would send his girlfriend instead of going himself. She almost looks White, and he thought that maybe the landlord would feel more comfortable with her, because he looks almost Black, and let me tell you, that is not at all helpful. (Ash)

To look White, or at least look more White, can thus increase an individual’s opportunities in life. It is therefore not particularly shocking that almost all of the informants favoured fair complexion before dark. One Sunday morning, Ash and I were walking along a crowded street when all of a sudden he stopped. “Hey Sara, come look at this,” he said. He had stopped next to a newsstand and he was holding a magazine in his hand. “Remember the other day when you asked me about my ideal woman? Well, here you have her!” On the front page of the magazine, there was a picture of a young woman on a children’s tricycle. She was tall and skinny, like most photo models, and she had light brown skin and clear blue eyes. “That’s like the perfect Coloured woman,” Ash said. “Just look at her, look at those eyes! She almost looks White!” The woman in the picture looked nothing like other Coloured women I had met during my time in South Africa and I would never have guessed that she was considered Coloured. Unattainable ideals are obviously not uncommon within the fashion industry but this particular ideal was not merely unrealistic, it was also clearly related to the issue of whiteness. “She almost looks White,” he had said, as if that in itself was an indicator for beauty.
According to both Ash and Gillian, many Coloureds, especially adolescent girls, use different products and techniques to bleach and lighten their skin. The desire for fair complexion is evidentially not only a South African phenomenon but skin bleaching is practised in large parts of the world. Yet, according to Jemima Pierre, the practice of skin bleaching is often deemed differently depending on the consumer. White subjects, she argues, are excused for using cosmetics in order to appear fairer because they are merely ‘enhancing their beauty’ and ‘accentuating an inherent quality’. Black subjects, on the other hand, are often accused of ‘hiding’ or ‘transforming’ their natural features. In reality, both White and Black subjects engage in the same practice but when Black people try to lighten their complexion this is often associated with shame and stigma. Pierre explains that Black women who “attempt to bleach are often openly ridiculed – both within and outside of the community – for aspiring to become and ultimately failing in becoming White” (Pierre 2013:112).

During my fieldwork, I noticed that the stigma associated with skin bleaching is not as palpable in the Coloured community. It is not something you flaunt but most informants had a rather relaxed attitude towards the usage of such products. Many Coloureds already have relatively light complexion and the large variety of skin tones within the Coloured community makes it difficult to discern whether or not someone has used such products. Ash did not mind girls using cosmetics or other techniques to appear lighter. “It is understandable,” he said. “Girls know that they will get more attention if they look more White and they are only trying to better themselves. It’s like using any kind of makeup I guess.” None of the informants admitted that they themselves used such products but it was obvious that nearly all of my female informants had done something with their hair in order to make it less curly. Ash once joked about this and said that: “there is nothing Coloured people are more scared of than rain.” Why? I asked, quite surprised by this rather strange assertion. “Because when it rains their hair goes poof!” He made a gesture above his head to indicate volume. “It becomes all afro and curly and the Coloured people hate that! They want their hair to be straight! [Laughing] (Ash).

It is important to recognise that there is a difference between wanting to have light complexion or straight hair and wanting to pass as White. I am not suggesting that any of the informants aspired to be White but they did, however, use many of the
same techniques that some Coloureds used in order to pass as White during apartheid. Today, the objective of such strategies is no longer to pass as White but rather to access some of the resources that whiteness entails and thereby climb the class ladder. Just as Ash pointed out, whiteness still has currency in South Africa and by simulating both appearances and behaviours associated with whiteness the informants tactically tried to increase their chance of success. White people are still by far the wealthiest population group in South Africa and they earn on average 10,900 ZAR (approximately 6800 SEK) more per month than Coloured employees (Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen and Koep 2010). It is therefore not entirely surprising that whiteness has remained a strong indicator for high social status, modernity, innovation and leadership (Teppo 2004, Pierre 2013).

Yet, this is not the only explanation for why the informants preferred to emphasise their European ancestry before their African. These tendencies are obviously also a remnant of former racist ideologies, which have rooted the idea of White supremacy deep in people’s consciousness. Whiteness has lost its official value but it has not lost its symbolic value and although there are no longer any identity cards, some of the informants therefore nevertheless chose to emphasise one part of their ancestry and reject other. Black is not always deemed as bad and White is not always deemed as good but the fact that the informants seemed to value the biological and social closeness to the White population before the Black suggests that whiteness has remained a dominating influence in the making of Coloured identities, even after the dissolution of apartheid.
5. Coloured Assertiveness

In this chapter, I turn to contemporary experiences and expressions of Coloured identity. The informants presented in this chapter lived or grew up in the suburban quarters of Cape Town known as the Cape Flats. The Cape Flats consists of numerous different residential areas with different socio-economic standards but the majorities of neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats are primarily working class or even severely economically deprived.

This chapter demonstrates some of the challenges facing the informants from the Cape Flats. The objective of this is to illustrate how they tactically performed and utilised their racial identities in an attempt to challenge both social and political marginalisation. I also illustrate how the informants embodied and communicated their racial identities though daily social interactions.

5.1 Coloured Marginalisation

During the decades following the democratic transition, the South African government has struggled to amend the bitter legacy of apartheid. The nation is still facing difficult challenges and has so far only managed to achieve limited advancements towards equality. According to a report presented by the Mexican Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice in 2016, Cape Town is one of the top ten most violent cities in the world (Worley 2016). Gang-related shootings are frequent and in 2014, the predominantly Coloured residential area Mitchell's Plain on the Cape Flats had the highest number of gang-related murders in the Western Cape (News24 2014a). Crime rates are relatively high amongst most population groups in South Africa. However, in 2004, the South African Medical Research Council concluded that the murder rates in the Coloured communities were significantly higher than in other communities (Thomson, 2004). In 2008, the South African Institute of Race Relations presented another alarming analysis, which showed that the number of Coloureds being imprisoned was accelerating at a rate almost double that of Black individuals (Independent Online 2008). These disturbing numbers have received limited attention and in 2014, activist, academic,
politician Mamphela Ramphele urged the government to start taking the problems in the Cape Flats seriously. Otherwise, she said, “we will continue to read about children being caught in gun battles and crossfire” (News24 2014b).

Critical voices have been raised from several Coloured communities and in July 2014, quarrels accelerated as four-year-old Taegrin Morris was brutally murdered during a carjacking in the predominantly Coloured residential area of Reiger Park in Johannesburg (The South African Broadcasting Corporation 2015). This brutal event triggered powerful reactions across the country, and many of the individuals I spoke with during my time in South Africa blamed the government for ignoring developments of crime in the Coloured neighbourhoods. However, attempts have been made to hinder these progressions. In 2010, the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Western Cape launched ‘Operation Combat’ as a response to a major acceleration of gang-related violence on the Cape Flats. The objective of this operation was to find and arrest prominent gang leaders and it eventually led to the arrest of several high-ranking gangsters and other criminals (Swingler 2014).

David often told me stories about what it was like growing up on the Cape Flats. We met a couple of times during 2014, and eventually became good friends. At that time, he was 27-years-old and he had recently moved out of the Cape Flats into a new apartment in the up-and-coming bohemian neighbourhood called Woodstock to the South East of Cape Town harbour. He had just started a new job as a software programmer and he was apparently very relieved that he had finally found a secure employment that would help him support his girlfriend and three-year-old son.

During our first meetings, David and I usually met at restaurants or cafés in central Cape Town. However, when I told him that I was going to make yet another trip to Cape Town in December that year, David promised to show me where he grew up. He kept his word and when I finally returned to Cape Town later that year he picked me up with his car outside my hostel and brought me along to Mitchell's Plain on the Cape Flats. Mitchell's Plain is a large residential area situated between the massive township Khayelitsha and the popular surfing town Muizenberg in beautiful False Bay. It was built in the 1970s, during which it functioned as a resettling area for the Coloured population that had been forced removed from the central parts of Cape
Town during the implementation of the Group Areas Act. Today, Mitchell's Plain holds a population of nearly 300,000 (Strategic Development Information and GIS Department 2011) and the inhabitants are still predominantly Coloured.

When David and I arrived, it was a hot summer day and the streets of Mitchell's Plain were rimmed with white sand brought by the dry wind from the surrounding sand dunes. Most of the buildings were made out of concrete and many of the houses were painted in colorful pastels. As we approached the street where David grew up, David enthusiastically pointed towards the different buildings. “This is where my school used to be,” he said as we passed an old dilapidated park, “and this is where me and my friends used to go dancing.” To our disappointment, David’s parents were not at home so we decided to get lunch at a small shopping mall down the street. While we were waiting for our food, I took the opportunity to ask David about his childhood on the Cape Flats.

His mother and father were loving parents that did everything in their power to keep David and his sibling out of trouble. They encouraged David, who was at the top of his class, to focus on his education and to stay away from drugs and alcohol. The problem, David explained, was that both parents worked full-time jobs outside the Cape Flats and they had to commute long distances every day. Because of this, they were either gone most of the day or they were simply too tired to stay on top of what David and his friends were up to during the evenings. In his teens, David skipped school a lot, and it did not take long before he started getting into trouble with the law. David explained that there was a lot of animosity in Mitchells Plain while he was growing up, and gang violence was an everyday occurrence. He himself was a small and skinny teen, and this he said, was one of the reasons for why he had to adopt an aggressive image and attitude.

I was a late bloomer, so I had to be very aggressive because you had to stand up for yourself back in those days. You can’t be a soft nice person because then you will get walked all over. And I was outspoken and I had a big mouth and I didn’t shut up. I was always in fights or got arrested and ended up spending the night in jail. (David)
David felt ashamed of his former criminal life and he was glad that he had been able to move out of the Cape Flats and start a new life. However, it did not take long for me to realise that David actually had a rather ambiguous outlook on his former thug lifestyle. He had left that life behind but it was obvious that he also idealised gangsterism. This became particularly apparent one evening when he and his friends brought me along to the cinema. It was a small and damp movie theatre that was located only a couple of hundred meters away from the crowded tourist-boulevard Long Street in Cape Town. We watched the movie Four Corners, which had been released about a year earlier. David had already seen the movie once but he insisted that he would take me to see it because he felt that it might be useful for my research. The film tells the story of a young Coloured boy who grows up on the Cape Flats and gradually becomes more and more involved in criminal activities. Four Corners plays on negative racial stereotypes and Coloured males are portrayed as violent dangerous thugs. When the movie was finished I asked David why he wanted me to see this particular film. He laughed and said that:

I didn’t want to scare you or anything, but this is actually the reality in some parts of the Cape Flats. Of course, this movie exaggerates and sometimes I feel like it is bad that Coloured people are portrayed in this way by media. It gives people the wrong impression and a lot of kids are idealising the gangsters and think that you have to be like those guys in order to be a strong Coloured man. At least, I did. (David)

After the film, David and his two friends accompanied me to the hostel where I was staying. We sat down in the bar on the first floor and had a couple of beers while we continued our conversation about gangsters and thugs from the Cape Flats. David’s two friends admitted that they themselves had been members of gangs when they were younger. They had not been involved in any of the large notorious gangs but in a smaller and less organised teen gang. “It is all part of becoming a man,” David explained. “White boys become men by doing military service. Black boys become men by partaking in circumcising rites in the bush, and Coloureds boys become men by going to prison.” [Laughing]
In an article about ‘marginalized masculinities’ amongst young Coloured males from the Cape Flats, Adam Cooper and Don Foster explore some of these violent ideals. They argue that criminality and gangsterism are a means for powerless teens to exert agency and gain control over their lives. Young Coloured men, they explain, try to attain status and respect by embodying the character of the gangster, which, in turn, enables them to “resist the social dislocation produced by their historical situation” (Cooper and Foster 2008:22). Young Coloured males from the Cape Flats, they argue, are marginalised not just because of their racial identities but also because of their class identity (ibid). Both their class identity and their racial identity limit their opportunities in life and the close association between colouredness and township life has branded these young men as weak and incapable. According to Steffen Jensen, these prejudices date back to the early years of colonialism during which the Coloured population was branded as dependent and childlike by the White dictators (Jensen 2008). I once discussed this with university lector Grant and he agreed with Jensen.

The Coloureds were almost like the unwanted stepchildren of the Afrikaners. They were allowed to be part of the family, but not entirely. [...] This difficult relationship created a sort of enslavement or dependency that compelled them to seek the protection and acceptance of the Whites (Grant).

Grant also claimed that even during the time of apartheid, many Coloureds looked to their distant White ‘relatives’ for protection and support. “The Coloureds found themselves at the mercy of White dominance,” he continued, “and we have never fully been able to escape the social and moral consequences of this dependency.” There is even an Afrikaans term that is often used to describe the character of the stereotypical irresponsible Coloured man. A ‘skollie’ is an individual who is untrustworthy, immoral and weak. He is always male, Coloured and poor, and basically a menace to society (Jensen 2008). According to Tony Roshan Samara, “the skollie embodies the criminal though historical categories of race, gender, class and age, in ways that mark most if not all young coloured men in Cape Town to some extent” (Samara 2011:20). Although largely an abstract of a fictional character, the many circulating stories about the skollies have nevertheless had tangible consequences for the many underprivileged men from the Cape Flats, whose
Coloured bodies have been symbolically linked to poverty, immoral behaviours and weakness (Jensen 2008).

Just like Cooper and Foster, Jensen suggests that the gangster lifestyle offers the young Coloured men a way to escape these prejudices and gain control over their lives. The gangster lifestyle did not only bring material rewards but also respect and authority. It might sound somewhat contradictory that criminality and gangsterism represents a path to respect and authority, and it is. There are of course many residents from the Cape Flats who resented the gangsters’ presence and who see no prestige in these violent ideals. There were also alternative ways for young Coloured men to build self-esteem and honour on the Cape Flats such as through sports, academic achievements or religious devotion (Jensen 2008).

The women’s path towards respect and dignity differed quite substantially from the men. According to Jensen, the women are not subjected to the same amount of negative racial stereotypes as the young Coloured men. They are, he explains, presumed to have a different moral code, which makes them less selfish and thus more responsible (Jensen 2008). I partially agree with Jensen. They women from the Cape Flats are, to a larger extent, expected to be caring and giving and this is probably one of the reasons for why they are the primary providers of community work in the Coloured townships (ibid). However, I have found that the women too were subjected to negative racial stereotypes. Amateur actor Helen, who was also actively involved in several local community programs on the Cape Flats, told me that young Coloured women are exposed to prejudices related to sexual behaviours. “Teen pregnancy is a huge problem on the Cape Flats,” she explained, “and since premarital relations is still frowned upon, many young Coloured women are held to be immoral and even promiscuous.” According to Helen, the women are also often blamed for not being able to keep their husbands, sons or cousins out of trouble. “If a man commits a crime,” Helen said, “then the women in the family are also judged and this is why a lot of women are extra careful to demonstrate and prove their female virtues.”

There thus seems to be a clash between different ethical principles. On the one hand, crime and gangsterism are deemed as immoral and unwanted. On the other hand,
being part of a gang is also associated with respect and status. This is, of course, a simplification of a complex system of relationships in the Coloured townships. Women too engaged in gang activities and there are many Coloured young men who renounce the use of violence. However, for many unemployed teens from the Cape Flats, the gangster lifestyle is appealing since it offers them a quick way to climb the class ladder. “The gang members were like the kings in the neighbourhood,” David’s friend Paul asserted. “They had all the money and they also protected their streets from other gangs and criminals. We wanted to be like them, we wanted the same respect.”

Engaging in criminal activities and adopting the gangster lifestyle can thus be interpreted as an attempt to counter both economic and social marginalisation. Jensen explained that: “becoming a member of a gang was not a choice of the desperate and unfortunate but a choice of the strong. The symbolic construction of a community of ‘brothers’ worked as a strategy to defer the negative stereotype of the weak, parasitical and disorganised Coloured man” (Jensen 2008:94). David and his friends’ involvements in criminal activities were thus not necessarily an expression of despair. On the contrary, their engagement in gang activities might also be interpreted as an attempt to challenge negative stereotypes produced by race and class subjugation. For them, the gangster lifestyle offered a way to attain dignity and respect in an otherwise discouraging environment and as Jensen so eloquently put it, these young men had “turned the marginalisation into a choice of their own making” (Jensen 2008:97).

5.2 Proudly Coloured

When David grew up in the early 90s, he attended a school exclusively for Coloured children. All the other kids in his home neighbourhood in Mitchell’s Plain were Coloured and David very rarely interacted with either White or Black children. All the teachers at the school were also Coloureds and David especially remembered one particular teacher who, according to him, was a “Coloured nationalist of the highest order.” Every day before class was about to begin, this teacher assembled all the students in his class and had them scream at the top of their lungs: Bruin ous are the mainous! Bruin ous is slang for Coloured, but it is more commonly used in the
province of Kwazulu Natal. Mainous, David explained, means ‘the main men’, or the foremost. This means that David’s teacher urged his students to say that Coloureds are the best every day before class. I asked David if this was not an unusual behaviour for a teacher but he merely laughed and explained that:

There were many Coloureds on the Cape Flats [during the time of apartheid] who were extremely proud of their Coloured identity. I still am and I see no reason for calling myself anything else. During apartheid, my identity card clearly stated that I was Cape Coloured and even today, I don’t feel uncomfortable with this label. (David)

As David and I got to know each other, I learned that he was not only comfortable with the label Coloured, but he was also very proud of his racial identity. He, for instance, spends a lot of time discussing racial identities on the many Facebook pages and other websites that explicitly focus on ‘Coloured issues’. Bruinou.com is once such website. It was founded in 2005 and markets it as an online forum for the ‘mixed-race population’ in South Africa. It offers a range of services such as discussion forums, entertainment, and even job adverts. David liked to follow the discussions and he had even posted a couple of articles himself in which he encouraged other Coloureds to be proud of their racial identity. He explained that:

There are many Coloureds out there who feel like they are nothing, like they are not part of a community. Some Coloureds even don’t want to be called Coloureds! I think this is very sad and it has to do with all the negative stereotypes that surround our race. People think of Coloureds and think, oh alcoholism, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and it is true that there are a lot of problems in the Coloured community. But there is also a lot to be proud of and I would never see myself in any other way. (David)

David was far from the only informant who expressed pride in his racial identity. His friends from the Cape Flats shared his enthusiasm and seemed to have a rather confident approach to the issue of Coloured identity. “Coloured people are the most down to earth, most excepting, most unrestricted people you will ever find,” Paul once told me. Another friend of David named Hector, took it even further and
suggested that White girls prefer Coloured men because they are more exciting and because they dress better. Whether or not there is any truth in these assessments is not for me to say, but it was interesting to find that David and his friends seemed to have a very positive attitude towards their racial identities regardless of the many negative racial stereotypes associated with colouredness.

33-year-old Wendy from Stellenbosch was also proud of her Coloured identity. She grew up in a rough and violent part of the Cape Flats called Hanover Park. Hanover Park, she told me, is notorious for its high frequency of crime and violence and it is also home to one of the largest and most feared gangs, called ‘The Americans’. Quite obviously, Wendy was very relieved when her mother remarried a man from Stellenbosch and she and her younger sister were moved out of their old dilapidated house on Lonedown Road. Their lives changed drastically for the better, but Wendy admitted that there were also some good things about Hanover Park that she actually missed after they had moved. “There was such an increasable strong sense of community in Hanover Park,” she told me. “It was a dangerous place but we all looked after each other and you knew and spoke with almost everyone in your neighbourhood.” According to Wendy this is a typical ‘Coloured thing’ and regardless of her antagonism towards the gang members, she felt happy to have been part of the Coloured community in Hanover Park. “I still feel proud to be part of the Coloured community,” she said, “and I see no problem with calling myself Coloured.”

However, there have been times during which Wendy has been criticised for her ‘unproblematic’ approach to the notion of Coloured identity. When she moved to Stellenbosch in her late teens, she started going to a new school, which was far more racially diverse than her former high school on the Cape Flats. This was only a couple of years after the dissolution of apartheid and the issue of racial identities generated heated discussions amongst the students as well as teachers.

One week, the students were asked to write an essay about themselves and Wendy decided to write a paper about her childhood in Hanover Park. She described the many difficulties facing the residents in the area but also discussed the issue of Coloured identity and Coloured solidarity in the aftermaths of the democratic
transition. Wendy was happy with the paper but, as it turned out, her teacher was not as thrilled. He asked her to rethink her formulations and to write the word Coloured in italics. According to Wendy, the issue of racial identities was a sensitive subject at that time and her teacher was apparently uncomfortable with the term Coloured that, in his mind, was nothing but a baggage from the apartheid classification system. Yet, Wendy stood her ground and argued that:

The term Coloured was not given to us by the apartheid system. Coloureds have existed for much longer and accepting the label is not the same thing as giving credence to the apartheid system. (Wendy)

Wendy was eventually allowed to keep her formulations but she only got a C on her assignments by the teacher who apparently did not like being lectured by a young woman from Hanover Park. This was not the only time when Wendy had to justify and even defend her affirmative attitude towards her Coloured identity. “Even today,” she said, “there are those who think that you are backwards and retrogressive when you call yourself Coloured. I don’t see why and I will never stop calling myself Coloured.” I asked Wendy why it was so important to her and she explained that for her, Coloured represents not just a racial identity but also a history and a set of experiences that help her make sense of who she is today. According to her, the Coloureds have never been accepted as either White or Black and this is why it is important that the Coloured community creates a strong and positive identity of its own. “We should not accept a definition that characterises us as ‘the other’,” she said, “but we should claim our identity and claim our rightful place alongside all the other races in South Africa.” This, according to her, is why it is so important to hold on to your Coloured identity.

Several of the informants also stressed the importance of recognising the Coloured community as a separate racial grouping with its own history and identity. David explained that:

A Coloured person for me is a person with its own race. I do not consider myself a mix of anything. Yes it is true that I have a mixed ancestry, but that does not make me half a person. The Coloured community have its own identity
Paul agreed with David and said that he always gets annoyed when someone calls him biracial or mixed-race. I asked if this happened often but Paul said no. “In South Africa most people just call me Coloured but if you go abroad, it is a completely different story.” Paul’s sister and brother-in-law lived in the United Kingdom and Paul had visited them in London a couple of times. “Over there,” he said, “there is no such thing as Coloureds.” Paul explained that the ‘mixed-race’ population in the United Kingdom does not consider themselves a separate racial group. They simply see themselves as half-white and half-black and they struggled to understand what Paul meant when he asserted that he was not ‘mixed-race’ but Coloured. “They have a different way of looking at it,” he continued, “because they have a totally different historic legacy than us South Africans.” According to Paul, many of the ‘mixed-race’ individuals in the United Kingdom are the first or second generation ‘mixed’. In other words, they might have a Black father and a White mother or vice versa. They have also grown up in racially diverse communities in which they have never felt the need to identify with, or feel affinity towards, other mixed-race individuals. The Coloured population in South Africa on the other hand, has emerged from years and years of ‘interracial relations’ and they have always been both physically and socially separated from the rest of the population. “This is why” Paul asserted, “us Coloureds are different from other so-called ‘multi-racial’ people. We are not half-Black or half-White but we have our own racial identity and we are not about to let anyone tell us differently.”

5.3 Celebrating Coloured Identity

During my first two months of fieldwork in June and July 2014, I was constantly busy conducting interviews. I sometimes made plans to meet with several informants on the same day and ended up rushing between the different meetings. In a way, this was very productive since I was able to cover many questions and informants during a short period of time. However, as I returned to Sweden I began to regret that I had not allowed myself more time to actually experience some of the things the informants talk about during the interviews. I had a lot of material from the interviews but I had
conducted relatively few observations and I realised that I needed more first-hand experience in order to provide a fair and comprehensive discussion about Coloured identity. When I returned to South Africa in December 2014, I, therefore, allowed myself to wander the streets of Cape Town and enjoy some of the sights and attractions that I did not have time to experience during my last visit.

During one of my afternoon strolls in central Cape Town, I came across a crowd of people at an intersection. I noticed that the street, which is usually heavily trafficked, was closed and I asked a man who was standing on the sidewalk what was going on. “There is going to be a Coon parade today,” he explained, “but it will take a couple of hours before they get here.” I had heard about the Coon Carnival before but I was under the impression that it took place on the 2nd of January and not in December. I asked the man on the sidewalk about this and he explained that there is usually more than one parade and that the festivities are spread out throughout December and January. The Coon Carnival on the 2nd of January is the biggest parade but the smaller less official ones are definitely also worth watching. I decided to go to a café and learn more about the Coons before the parade started.

The Coon Carnival, as we know it today, began in the 1920s. However, the origin of the festival can be traced as far back as the 19th century (Martin 1999). At that time, slaves were given one day of on the 2nd of January and the festivities that took place within the slave community on this day are thought to be the predecessor of the present-day Coon Carnival (ibid). Researchers have suggested that the festivities were meant to strengthen social relations and unity within the slave community and according to Dennis-Constant Martin, the present day Coon Carnival comprise similar properties. Today the participants and spectators are primarily working-class Coloureds. They have taken it upon themselves to carry on the tradition and Martin suggests that even today the festivities serve as a means for building and strengthening social links within the diverse Coloured community (Martin 2000:378).

I returned to the site after about two hours and was shocked by the amount of people that had arrived. It was a beautiful summer day and the streets were crammed with people who had travelled into the city center in order to take part in the celebrations. Entire families had brought chairs, tables and an abundance of food and drinks, and
they were now busy setting up small ‘camps’ along the streets where the parade was going to pass in a few minutes. I noticed that there was not one single Black or White family at the forefront. I could see a couple of White people watching curiously from the far back and a team of Black security personnel who were busy keeping intoxicated spectators away from the sealed-off road. Other than that, the audience seemed to be exclusively Coloured.

While I was waiting for the parade to begin I noticed a young Coloured woman who was looking curiously at my direction. After a while, she approached me and asked where I was from. We started talking and since I was on my own she offered me to join her and her husband for the remaining part of the evening. Her husband worked as a vendor but she herself was unemployed. She asked me what I was doing in Cape Town and I told her about my research project. “Then you are certainly in the right place,” she said. “The Coon Carnival is the most Coloured thing you will ever find and we look forward to it every year!” They and a couple of friends had travelled into Cape Town early that morning to await the parade. They had brought chairs, a sunshade and drinks and snacks to keep them satisfied for the entire day.

I asked her why she wanted to see the parade and she explained that to her, the Coon Carnival was more than just a festivity. It was also an important reminder of the history of the Coloured community and a unique expression of Coloured culture and identity. When the parade finally arrived the spectators started cheering and applauding. The participants in the parade wore extravagant clothes or costumes and some had painted their faces in bright colors. Many were dancing to either live music performed by the many musicians in the parade or they had brought a boom box, which they had placed on their shoulders or in a trolley. There were also participants who seemed to have joined the parade spontaneously. They had no costumes and no makeup but they nevertheless put on a show for the spectators and danced and sang along with the rest of the parade. It was an exciting and vibrant spectacle and the audience seemed to have almost as much fun as the participants in the parade. I left the party around seven o’clock but the festivities apparently continued late into the night.
Later that evening, I met David and some of his friends at a pub in the young and vibrant part of Cape Town known as Green Point. As David walked up to the bar to order a round of beers, the rest of us sat down in the outside dining area, which was crammed with both locals and tourists. I told the guys that I had watched the Coon parade earlier that night. David and Paul had also been there but we had evidently missed each other in the large crowd of spectators. “Oh it was fun,” Paul said “but still nothing compared to the big parade in January. We go almost every year, and we drink and we dance! [Laughing] I asked what was so special about the Coon parade and Paul explained that:

The Blacks have Xhosa and Zulu celebrations and traditions. Things like that bind people together and it sort of makes people feel like they are part of something bigger. The Coon does the same thing for us. It reminds us of our heritage and it is also a way for us to celebrate our community. (Paul)

I asked the guys if they could think of any more examples of so-called ‘Coloured culture’. They deliberated amongst each other for a moment until they finally jointly concluded that their accent was another typical expression of colouredness. Most Coloureds in South Africa are bilingual although a large majority, particularly in the Western Cape, speaks Afrikaans as their first language (Webb 2002:70). However, David and his friends stressed that Coloureds do not generally speak the same kind of Afrikaans as the Afrikaners. Coloureds, they explained, have infused the language with countless expressions and slang and this has resulted in a specific jargon that some Afrikaners might even find difficult to understand. This particular parlance is generally known as ‘kombuis Afrikaans’ (kitchen Afrikaans). Yet, it is even more complicated than that. David also explained that Coloureds from the Western Cape speak differently from Coloureds living in for instance Durban or Johannesburg.

The Cape Town accent is unique, rough and cocky! [Everyone at the table laughing] It’s like our thing, and you are able to hear straight away if you are speaking with a Coloured from Cape Town or Johannesburg. (David)

I asked David and the guys to give me some examples of Cape slang. At first, they seemed a little bit embarrassed and laughed amongst each other as they were trying to
think of a good example. The first thing they taught me was ‘awe’ [ah-weh] (hello), which according to the guys, is how all Cape Town Coloureds greet each other. I actually heard David use this expression many times during my fieldwork. He would often stop and say ‘awe me bru’, (hello my brother) whenever he bumped into one of his acquaints on the street. Another typical expression is ‘ja-nee’ [yah-near] which literally translates to ‘yes-no’. You use it if you agree with something someone else just said and it more or less means ‘sure’ or ‘indeed’. Another thing that I noticed during my time in Cape Town is that kombuis Afrikaans is exceptionally theatrical. Some letters or words are pronounced really slowly as if to emphasise the importance of what was being said and gestures and facial expressions are also often exaggerated. This results in a rather captivating and even amusing communicative style that according to David is perfect for telling jokes and anecdotes.

According to Benjamin Bailey, language preferences play an essential role in the articulation of racial identities. Racial groupings, as well as individuals, consciously or unconsciously communicate their identities by using certain expressions and accents before others (Bailey 2010). Ana Deumert has further suggested that Afrikaans is sometimes tactically used by Coloureds to “signal community solidarity” (Deumert 2004:120). I also found evidence of this and David even went as far as saying that “if you don’t speak Afrikaans, you are not a real Coloured.” 26-year-old Keenan from Durban only spoke a little bit of Afrikaans and he considered this a great disadvantage. “Durban,” he explained, “has a different colonial history than Cape Town. It was colonised by the British instead of the Dutch and most Coloureds in Durban, therefore, speak English as their first language instead of Afrikaans.” I asked Keenan, who now lives in Cape Town, why he saw this as a disadvantage and he explained that he sometimes feels excluded from the Coloured community in Cape Town.

Sometimes, you can sort of feel excluded because you don’t understand everything. And even if I try to speak Afrikaans everyone will hear that I am not from here because of my accent. It is an important part of being Coloured I think. (Keenan)
There is thus a strong correlation between Coloured identity and Afrikaans and since Keenan did not speak Afrikaans as his first language, he felt inadequate in the identity he assumed. Kombuis Afrikaans as is a strong signifier for Coloured township life and David and his friends performed their Coloured identities by conforming to this norm. They embodied their racial identities by imitating contemporary ideals of colouredness and these actions furthermore effectively constituted they very identity they communicated.

However, Christine Anthonissen has shown that language shifts, from Afrikaans to English, are taking place in certain Coloured communities located in the Cape Metropolitan area (Anthonissen 2009). English is thus starting to become more common in certain Coloured communities. David and his friends recognised these changes and said that many Coloured parents encouraged their children to speak English instead of Afrikaans since they believe that this will offer them better opportunities in life. Unlike English, Afrikaans is a domestic language and therefore not always as useful or practical in the nowadays globalised and multicultural South Africa. However, I suggest that this is not a sufficient explanation for why English has started to become more popular in some Coloured communities. 23-year-old language student Warren once told me that English has become associated with the upper class. “Many upper-class families choose to speak English,” he explained, “even amongst the Black and Coloured communities.” To speak English instead of Afrikaans can thus also be understood as a tactic attempt for upward social mobility. Warren even admitted that he himself sometimes tactically chooses to speak English instead of Afrikaans in order to appear more respectable in certain professional contexts. He explained that:

If you are a Coloured person in the Western Cape, and you speak English or a more proper Afrikaans dialect, people will make certain assumptions about you. They will think that you must have gone to a nicer school where you have picked up that accent. It is a big psychological play on people today. (Warren)

However, Alfred Mautsane Thutloa and Kate Huddlestone have shown that language shifts from Afrikaans to English are far less common in working-class communities. According to them, this is because Afrikaans has remained an important indicator for
social belonging in working-class communities and that many Coloureds, therefore, choose to maintain their accent regardless of the economic and social rewards associated with the English language (Mautsane Thutloa and Huddlestone 2011:66). Bailey further suggests that:

Ways of speaking associated with less powerful groups can provide a resource for expressing pride in one’s class or racial community. Maintaining such ways of speaking, despite the stigma they carry in the larger society, suggest resistance to dominant hierarchies in society and rejection of the evaluation system that devalues them (Bailey 2010:80).

David and his friends always spoke English when I was around but I noticed that they only spoke kombuis Afrikaans amongst each other or whenever they met someone else from their home community. They obviously knew that their accent was a disadvantage in certain contexts and that people from outside of the Cape Flats, to a large extent, associated kombuis Afrikaans with township life. Yet, they nevertheless choose to maintain their accent regardless of the social stigma it entails. They considered it an essential part of their racial identities and saw little or no reason for withholding their racial background.
6. Coloured Rejectionism

One evening in August 2014, I attended a stand-up comedy show by comedian Carvin Goldstone. The show was called ‘Coloured President’ and it was a big event with several hundred people in the audience. During the one-hour show, Carvin amused the predominantly Coloured spectators by telling jokes that play on racial stereotypes. Many of jokes targeted the Coloured population. He, for instance, told anecdotes about who Coloureds are lazy and ‘full of themselves’ and even made fun of the high frequency of crime and drug abuse in the Coloured townships. At one point, he turned to a member of the audience and asked where he was from. Before the man had the opportunity to answer, Carvin stopped him and said: “NO! You better not say where you live because there are Coloured people here and they will come to your house and rob you.” The audience laughed and then Carvin pointed his finger towards the spectators and said: “No, you don’t have to worry about that. These are upper-class Coloureds.”

In this chapter, I also explore contemporary expressions of Coloured identities. However, the informants presented in this chapter were members of the upper class and educated elite. Unlike the informants from the Cape Flats, the individuals in this chapter came from relatively privileged backgrounds. Most of them were financially independent or were well on their way of completing their university studies that would ensure economic security in the future. The objective of this chapter is to explore how these individuals related to and communicated notions of colouredness in order to explore how class belongings have influenced the informants’ attitude towards Coloured identity. I also examine experienced contradictions between the informants’ racial identities and their class identities and try to illustrate the implications of such ‘conflicts’.

6.1 “Stop Racializing Me!”

The day after the Coon Carnival and my night out with David and his friends, I had arranged to meet with Gloria at a restaurant in a rather exclusive and luxurious part of central Cape Town. Four months had passed since we last met and Gloria was eager
to know how my research was progressing. I told her about my experience at the Coon Carnival the day before and asked if she had attended the event. To my surprise, Gloria started laughing. She had not participated in the festivities and she had no intention of attending the actual Coon Carnival on the 2nd of January. “The Coon Carnival is just a bunch of gangsters coming together and drinking,” she said. “It is embarrassing to watch and it is degrading for the entire so-called Coloured community.” At first, I was surprised by Gloria’s rejection of the Coon Carnival but later that week I learned that she was not the only informant who felt this way about this so-called Coloured event. Historian and author Norton was also critical towards the celebrations and said that the Coon Carnival is merely a ridiculous manifestation of a malfunctioning and shattered community. He, like Gloria, wanted nothing to do with the celebrations and considered them an event for the uneducated working class. “The well-informed,” he argued, “view the parades differently because they understand that the celebrations merely invoke a false sense of community.” According to Norton, the apartheid government encouraged the Coloureds to celebrate the Coon Carnival in an attempt to even further isolate them from the Black as well as White community. “The uneducated don’t see this,” he continued, “but they merely dance and sing along to an event that is actually a living example of former racial segregation and discrimination strategies.”

According to Martin, the Coon Carnival has been a source of controversies for several decades. After the introduction of the apartheid system, many Coloureds from the upper class and educated elite chose to renounce the celebrations. For them, the Coon Carnival represented a “display of alienation, an undignified and degrading occasion where idiots [were] making monkeys out of themselves” (Martin 2000:423). Judging from Gloria and Norton’s dismissal of the celebrations, it seems as if these attitudes have not entirely disappeared. However, a large majority of the informants cherished the events and, just as Martin suggests, it was only amongst the upper-class informants that I encountered such negative attitudes. So why did Norton and Gloria’s attitude towards the Coon Carnival differ so substantially from the informants from the Cape Flats? There might very well be several personal explanations for why a person dislikes a specific celebration but I would like to suggest that Norton and Gloria’s dismissal is also connected to their class identity.
Gloria grew up in an area called Sydenham in Durban in the 1960s. She is the oldest of four sisters and was always considered the ‘trouble maker’ in her otherwise conventional and somewhat orthodox family. Sydenham was, and still is, a predominantly Coloured neighbourhood. It was a rather poor area when Gloria was growing up and many of the residents were uneducated and unemployed. Gloria’s father, on the other hand, was a wealthy and well-educated man. He was a prominent local politician who outspokenly despised racial segregation and discrimination.

One day, when Gloria was about nine years old, a man came and knocked on the door. As she opened the door she saw a tall dark man standing on the doorstep with a black briefcase under his arm. Before the man had the opportunity to introduce himself, Gloria turned around and shouted to her father who was taking an afternoon nap in the living room. “There is an African man at the door selling something,” she called out. Her father got off the sofa but as he was making his way towards the door, Gloria noticed a strange look on his face. All of a sudden he lashed out at her and screamed furiously, “who do you think you are and what gives you the right to say something like that?” As it turned out, the man at the doorstep was not a Black salesman, but he was actually Gloria’s uncle. He had not visited his brother for many years and Gloria had not recognised him. Gloria told me that her father was very angry with her for judging and making preconceptions about peoples’ race and after that day she never again dared to mention someone’s race in the presence of her father. “My father was against all that racial classification and he taught me that I am a person, not a race.” (Gloria)

Gloria’s mother never shared the father’s resentment for racial classifications and after he died, she decided to stop socialising with her late husband’s Black friends. The family now only socialised with other so-called Coloureds and Gloria’s mother was very careful to point out that she would not tolerate that one of her daughters socialised with, or god forbid fell in love with, someone of a different race. Gloria and her sisters obeyed these rules for many years and very seldom socialised with non-Coloureds. Yet, all this changed the day Gloria met Harold. They were both sixteen years old when they started dating and it did not take long for them to fall madly in love. Harold, who was Indian, came from a rather wealthy family that owned several businesses in the area. The new couple tried to keep their romance hidden from
Gloria’s mother and they were always discreet about their feeling for each other whenever they were out together in public. Gloria explained that:

It was not an easy thing dating an Indian man back then during the height of apartheid. The security police almost tried to run us over with their cars when they saw us together. People in the street would stop and call us names. Legally we were allowed to date and marry each other. A Black and a White person could absolutely never do that! But people were still against mixed and our relationship was definitely frowned upon. (Gloria)

Yet, rumours of the mix-race couple spread fast in Sydenham and it was only a matter of time before the gossip reached Gloria’s mother. She was furious with her daughter and pleaded that she would end the relationship. Yet, Gloria and Harold could not care less and when they turned 21, they got married in the local church down the street from Gloria’s family home. Her mother refused to attend the wedding and the relationship between mother and daughter has never been fully recovered.

During our first meeting in June 2014, Gloria and I met at a lunch café close to her office. At that time, Gloria worked as a manager at a non-governmental organisation and lived in the small community Simon’s Town on the east side of the Cape Peninsula. I had told her about my research project over the telephone a couple of days earlier and it seemed as if she was well prepared and eager to speak her mind about the issue of Coloured identity. It was a lovely day and we decided to drink our coffee under the warm winter sun. We sat down in the outside dining area and I barely had time to start my recorder before Gloria eagerly started sharing her thoughts. It was obvious that she was critical towards the notion of Coloured identity and according to her, Coloured is a derogative term invented by the apartheid government in an attempt to divide and control the non-White population. She found it very difficult to understand why someone would voluntarily want to identify as Coloured and argued that:

We need to stop labelling others and ourselves in that way because if we don’t, we will never be able to truly put apartheid behind us. So-called Coloured people cling on to this idea because they are scared and afraid of change and
what that might bring. Race continues to dominate the lives of so many and people are absolutely obsessed with putting each other into neat little boxes.

(Gloria)

Gloria was tired of being, as she put it, ‘racialized’ and she first and foremost wanted to be seen as an individual and not as a member of a particular race. Yet, according to her, “this is apparently too much to ask in South Africa since people continue to obsess about race.” To illustrate this, she told me a story about what once happened when her then 10-year-old son Philip came home from school. Philip seemed troubled and Gloria asked him what was wrong. At first, the boy hesitated and Gloria had to insist before he found the courage to say what was on his mind. Finally, Philip looked at his mother and said: “I need to know what we are.” Gloria was startled by this most peculiar question and asked her son what he meant. It turned out that his teacher had been speaking about different population groups in South Africa and he had asked Philip what race he belonged to. According to Gloria, the teacher must have found it difficult to classify Philip since he has an Indian father and a so-called Coloured mother. “Things like this drive South Africans crazy,” Gloria explained. “Because they are used to categorising and labelling people according to already fix categories.”

Gloria was bothered by the teacher’s, according to her, irrelevant question. “We are all humans and South Africans,” she told her son, “and don’t let anyone tell you differently!” Unlike her mother, Gloria has always encouraged her sons to make friends with children of all racial backgrounds. She even relocated Phillip into a private school, which she claims was less racially homogenous than most public schools. Phillip’s new school was situated in an upper-class area and Gloria admitted that it was not representative of a typical South African school since most of the students came from relatively wealthy families. Yet, she still considered this an improvement since Philip at least no longer would be asked to state his race. “The teachers at the new school,” Gloria explained, “pay no attention to race and that is precisely the kind of education I wanted for my sons.”

Gloria was careful to point out that she did not want to be referred to as Coloured. “I find the term offensive,” she said, “because it has a symbolic value and it ‘colours’ others’ perspective of me.” Yet, to my surprise, I noticed that Gloria herself often
used the term Coloured but only when she referred to people outside of her family. This became apparent when she, for instance, told me about her assistant’s wedding earlier that year.

It is so typical of Coloured people to only want to socialise with other Coloureds. Let me tell you, my assistant Freda got married in February and I went to the wedding. She is Coloured and she lives in a Coloured township, and gosh! There were only Coloured guests at the wedding! Not one single White or Black person at the whole reception. I don’t see why it has to be like that? I mean, I am so-called Coloured and I have friends of all races. (Gloria)

Gloria’s tendency to refer to others as Coloureds but herself as so-called Coloured illustrates the complexity of racial belongings. She did not deny the existence or authenticity of the Coloured community but she did not consider herself part of that particular racial grouping. She explained that:

If you say that you are Coloured then people will instinctively think that you are uneducated or that you drink too much [Laughing]. There is even a saying! Suip soos ‘n kleurling onderwyser. [Speaking in Afrikaans] which means: as drunk as a Coloured teacher [Laughing]. And why would I voluntarily want to identify with that? When instead I can say, look I am a human and a South African. I almost see it as an insult if someone tries to label me as Coloured because what do I have in common with all those people? (Gloria)

Gloria seemed to view Coloured identity, not as a biological race, but as a set of experiences and social relations that she herself could not relate to or identify with. In her mind, Coloured identity signified township life and not the upper class, which she belonged to. She did not live in a Coloured neighbourhood, she had few Coloured friends, and she eschewed so-called Coloured celebrations such as the Coon Carnival. However, regardless of her attempts to disassociate herself from the larger Coloured community, she was never fully able to escape the racial taints associated with her bodily appearance. Racial identities are closely related to bodily appearances and in the eyes of most South Africans, Gloria is regarded as Coloured whether she likes it or not.
Yet, according to Gloria, people do not only make assumptions about her racial identity when they look at her. They also make assumptions about her class identity. “Most Coloureds in the Western Cape,” she explained, “come from the Cape Flats or the poor rural wine districts and people, therefore, assume that I am also poor and uneducated.” According to Gloria, this can sometimes cause misunderstandings and confusion.

Sometimes when I go to meetings or invite someone to my office they will look at me and instinctively think that I am the assistant. It even happened to me once not too long ago. The man probably expected to meet a White woman because that is what he was used to. It is like this a lot of times, and since I am so-called Coloured I have to work even harder and perform even better to convince people that I am capable. (Gloria)

Gloria was suggesting that there exists a contradiction between her racial identity and her class identity. The man at the meeting associated her appearance with the working class and he therefore instinctively assumed that she was the assistant and not the manager. This was not the first time this had happened to Gloria and she told me that she was tired of being ‘lumped together’ with the Coloured working class. She would rather have others associate her with her class identity and I suggest that this is why she found it particularly important to reject and distance herself from celebrations such as the Coon Carnival.

6.2 Non-Racialism

During the last two decades, South Africa has experienced a growing dispute between those who argue that non-racialism is the rightful path towards a truly equal society and those who consider racial categorization an indispensable aspect in efforts to uplift the previously disadvantaged. When I visited the University of Cape Town (UCT) in July 2014, I found myself in the midst of an ongoing debate between these two opposing positions.
The dispute had surfaced earlier that year when the University Council, after years of examining and debating the current admission policy, presented a proposal to alter it. The old admission policy employed race quotas in an attempt to promote and facilitate the development of equality at UCT. So far, it had proven efficient in achieving greater racial diversity at the University but some students and teachers nevertheless questioned the admission procedure.

One of the critiques of the old admission policy was that it compelled students to classify themselves according to the former apartheid race categories. Since there are no laws to assist the universities in determining someone’s race, students were asked to self-classify themselves either as African, White, Coloured or Indian. However, issues arose when it was discovered that some students ‘misleadingly’ classified themselves as Africans in order to increase their chances of being admitted. The old policy has also been criticised for being unfair since an increasing number of Black and Coloured students were now graduating from highly regarded high schools. The purpose of the new admission policy proposal was to counter the presented critique by adjusting to contemporary changes in the society. Race targets were not going to be dismissed entirely, but according to the new policy proposal, only about 25 per cent of a class would be admitted on race grounds (University of Cape Town 2014).

The new proposal was welcomed with mixed reactions. Some students became angry since they interpreted it as an attempt to keep Black and Coloured students off campus. Ramabina, who was a member of the Students’ Representative Council, was very skeptical. We met in his office, which was small and damp room with hardly any furniture. Despite this, Ramabina’s office was absolutely breath taking since a large window offered a majestic view over the slopes of Devil’s Peak to the northeast of Table Mountain. Ramabina argued that race targets are important since race in itself is a disadvantage that continues to substantially influence students’ abilities to access resources that might aid their academic careers. Further, race is still a defining factor in South Africa and “to simply ignore race is to deny the existence of racism” (Ramabina). He was more than happy to accept a new admission policy, without race quotas, if it could achieve the same objectives as race targets. Yet, he doubted that this would be possible, since “the racial experience can only be accounted for by the usage of the concept race” (Ramabina).
Yet, most of the students I spoke with at UCT were in favour of the new policy proposal. They argued that race is an obsolete and discriminating concept that should not be allowed to determine the future of aspiring students. Joyce, who was a 23-year-old language student who dreamed of one day becoming a professor of linguistics, saw no reason for applying race quotas in the admission procedure. She also pointed out that she did not want to be forced to label herself as Coloured since she would rather be seen as an individual and not as a member of a particular race. When I asked her why, she explained that she first and foremost wanted people to judge her base on her personality and achievements and not her skin colour. “I am a person and not a race,” she said, “and I am tired of being called something I cannot identify with.” Joyce admitted that race still has implications in peoples’ lives but argued that the Coloured population sometimes used their racial identities as an excuse for their misfortunes. “They blame it all on race,” she said, “and do not take responsibility for their own actions. Look at me. I am Coloured and everything I have accomplished I have worked hard for, and that has nothing to do with my race.” I asked her how she would describe herself and she said that:

I am a mother, a sister and a daughter. I am smart and I am not a nonsense person. My friends often say that I am funny and maybe I am. I also happen to be a rather capable piano player [laughing]. (Joyce)

Unlike the informants from the Cape Flats, Joyce accentuated her individuality and her personal accomplishment instead of, for instance, her biological heritage or her racial background. As it turned out, she was far from the only student I spoke with who preferred to be viewed as individuals and not as members of a race. After having spent time with the informants from the Cape Flats, I had become used to speaking openly about racial identities. Yet, for the first time so far during my fieldwork, I struggled to speak straightforwardly about race. The university students reacted cautiously or even suspiciously towards my questions. Most of them objected to being referred to as Coloured and did not feel part of a separate Coloured community.

Damian, who was also a member of the Students’ Representative Council, was unsure about how felt regarding the new admission policy proposal. He also wanted to
dispose of the old race based admission procedure but, just as Ramabina, he was worried that this would mean that fewer Coloured and Black student would be admitted. He was also skeptic towards the concept Coloured identity and when I asked him to describe himself he smiled and said that:

I guess I would have to say that I am a nerd [laughing]. I love playing computer and video games and most of my friends do as well. I have also always thought of myself as a loving person and I care a lot for my family and friends. I guess if I had to define myself in terms of race then, yes I would have to say that I am Coloured. That is how others see me and there is no easy way of escaping that. But if you ask me personally, I would prefer to call myself as a loving nerd. (Damian)

Just as Joyce, Damian also mentioned personal attributes and interests before his alleged racial identity. However, he explained that when he was younger his racial identity was much more important. He used to call himself Coloured and even thought of himself as a member of a separate racial grouping. Yet, all this changed, he explained, when he started studying at the university.

I have found that in these sorts of environments [academic environments] people fear away from talking about race. I mean generally, even the way that I was raised, you speak about race. It is not something that you question and we always spoke openly about it. But when I came to the University all that changed. It has actually been a very interesting experience because I have found that people speak less about it here than I am used to. […] The new admission policy proposal is just another example of this! They [the university management and the students] feel uncomfortable with race so they decide to pretend like it does not exist. This seems to be almost like a trend amongst the more educated Coloureds, and when I say educated I probably mean having a masters or a PhD. These people generally do not want to be classified as anything. But amongst the uneducated, and in the low-income areas, it has been my experience that people are even proud to place themselves in those categories. But here on campus, quite often I heard the ‘non-race rhetoric’ and I believe that it is because the students think that if they call themselves
Coloureds then they are accepting the apartheid labels and the former oppression that was put on us. (Damian)

I believe that Damian was right. It was obvious that the university students felt uncomfortable with the concept of race. They preferred to think of themselves as individuals and saw no reason for claiming membership of the so-called Coloured community. 23-year-old language student Warren was even skeptic towards my entire field of research. “There was no such thing as race,” he said, “so how could there be such a thing as Coloured identity?” I challenged Warren’s argument and asked him if Coloured identity could not be seen as a set of social experiences and not as a biological race? “Sure,” he said, “that makes sense, but then you will have to exclude me from that category because I have nothing in common with the so-called Coloured community.”

6.3 Breaking down Barriers

It was already five thirty when my phone finally rang. “Hi Sara, I am on my way. Sorry for keeping you waiting” Rashaad said. “I got stuck in traffic but if you look to your right you will probably see me now” I stood up and looked down the street and sure enough, I saw a hand waving eagerly from the window of a black car. “I just need to find a place to park and then I will be right over.” We hung up and I ordered another cup of coffee while Rashaad desperately struggled to squeeze his large car into a small parking lot on the crowded tourist boulevard. After a couple of minutes, he finally walked up to my table in the outside dining area and shook my hand. He had a big smile on his face, although he was obviously stressed judging from the small drops of sweat running down his forehead. “Welcome to Cape Town!” He said. “How may I help you?”

Rashaad and I came in contact through a South African friend of mine who knew that I was interested in speaking with people about Coloured identity. My friend had described him as an entrepreneur and visionary but other than that, I knew little about the man I was about to interview. He was about my height and wore expensive
designer clothes and what I guessed to be a luxury watch. I asked if I could get him anything at the bar but he kindly declined my offer and sat in the chair next to me.

Since I knew close to nothing about Rashaad I asked him to tell me a little bit about himself. He grew up in Stellenbosch, which is a town of approximately 150,000 inhabitants in the Cape Winelands district about 50 kilometres east of Cape Town. His mother was a single parent and Rashaad was the youngest of four siblings. When he was 21 years old he moved out of his mother's house in Stellenbosch to start his undergraduate studies in economics at UCT. His mother used to be a university professor and education had always been non-negotiable for Rashaad and his sibling. They were expected to attain good grades and although he sometimes struggled, Rashaad eventually managed to graduate.

When we met at the café in Cape Town in June 2014, Rashaad was 32 years old and worked part time as an accountant. He lived in a rather wealthy upper-class neighbourhood in an area called Sea Point just outside of Cape Town city center. Rashaad told me a little bit about his work as an accountant but as it turned out, economics was only one of his many passions. “What I am really interested in,” he said, “is working with kids and teens from underprivileged neighbourhoods.”

When Rashaad was 25 years old he heard about a conflict resolution programme in the United States. He convinced his mother to help him finance the trip and later that year, he was able to travel to New York and attended the event. The programme lasted for about two weeks, and during that time, Rashaad participated in seminars and workshops about youth leadership and community development with young adults from all over the world. Rashaad told me that when the programme was over he returned to South Africa with a new dedication to community service, social activism, and youth empowerment. He and five of his newly acquired friends, who had also attended the event, decided to try and set up a similar programme in Cape Town. This was the beginning of a long and challenging project that would become an important part of Rashaad’s life for many years to come.

We looked at the surrounding communities in economically deprived districts and tried to think of a way that we could make a difference. We realised that
racism and xenophobia is still a tremendous problem in our society and decided to create a youth program where we could discuss these issues with kids and teens. (Rashaad)

Rashaad and his friends worked hard to find sponsors and other financiers and after about a year they were finally ready to host their first summer camp, which took place in the predominantly Coloured neighbourhood Athlone on the Cape Flats. The participants were between fifteen and seventeen years old. The camp lasted for two weeks and consisted of workshops, games, sports and of course long discussions about self-esteem and identity. They started out by focusing on issues of race and encouraged the participants to reflect on their own racial identity. They asked the teens to think about who they are, who they wanted to be, and how others perceive and see them.

One of the topics that quickly arose was the concept of Coloured identity. Most of the participants were Coloured, and Rashaad realised that this was a challenging but important topic to address. “We wanted the teens to question the reality of their racial identities and start thinking about themselves, not as members of a race, but as members of a community.” This proved to be more difficult than Rashaad had initially anticipated. Many of the Coloured teens from the Cape Flats had never even thought of questioning their racial identities but saw it as a natural part of their personality.

I asked Rashaad how he personally felt about Coloured identity and how he preferred to define himself. “I don’t see a problem with calling myself Coloured,” he said, “but I refuse to let that define who I am and I absolutely hate when people judge me based on my racial background.” When Rashaad was born in 1984, racial classifications were still employed by the government and he was classified as Cape Malay. This stayed with him for his entire life and even after the dissolution of apartheid, Rashaad continued to state that he was Cape Malay in legal documents and other official forms. “I still feel comfortable with this,” he said, “but I realize that it is a problematic definition since it defines, not only who I apparently am, but also who I am not.” Rashaad and the other coordinators are trying to make the teens from the Cape Flats understand that there is nothing wrong with being proud of their racial identity but
that they must never allow their race to create a distance between themselves and people of different racial backgrounds. “There is still too much racial thinking in this country,” he continued, “and we want the teens to stop thinking in terms of Black, White and Coloured and instead see themselves as part of a larger national identity and community.”

When Rashaad and I met, the programme had been running for almost six years. However, during the last year, the coordinators had struggled to find the time and finance to set up yet another camp. “We are working on it,” he said, “but this is not our profession. We all have different jobs as well and some of us have found it more and more difficult to set aside time to organise all the preparations.”

I asked Rashaad for an example of one of the exercises during the camp and he told me about a workshop where the teens are asked to create a facial mask which illustrates their ‘true inner self’. The teens paint and decorate their masks however they want and when they are finished they are asked to sit in groups of five and discuss their design. “It might sound silly,” Rashaad said, “but we have found that exercises like this actually bringing forth thoughts and feelings that some teens struggle to express.”

I remember this one time when a girl just left her mask entirely blank. It was just White. And when we asked her why she had done this she explained that she didn’t know who she was. Her father was White and her mother was Black and she lived with her mother in a Coloured neighbourhood on the [Cape] Flats. I thought it was so interesting because this girl apparently looked Coloured but none of her parent were and so she did not know what to think of herself. Stuff like that really makes you realise that identity has nothing to do with your race or your appearance. (Rashaad)

Rashaad and I talked for about two hours but as the sun was slowly setting we realised that it was time to end the conversation. We shook hands again and Rashaad told me to give him a call the next time I visited Cape Town. Five months later I took him up on his offer.
It was a surprisingly hot afternoon and the sun was still high in the sky when Rashaad picked me up in his car outside my accommodation. We had written occasionally to each other during the last couple of months, and I was looking forward to finally meet him again. I got into the car and we drove off to meet with some of his friends for an afternoon braai (South African barbeque) at a beach in Camps Bay behind the western tip of Table Mountain. On our way over there, I asked Rashaad how the youth programme was progressing but unfortunately, they had not been able to host a summer camp that year due to lack of time and funding. “We are not giving up yet,” he said, “and hopefully we will be able to set aside more time next year.”

Camps Bay is a luxurious and attractive area with plenty of restaurants and cafés that attract large numbers of both foreign and local tourists. We parked just by the beach and walked about a hundred meters to the picnic area where Rashaad’s friends were waiting. Three of his friends were also coordinators of the youth programme. The all smiled cheerfully when Rashaad introduced me as the anthropology researcher from Sweden and offered me to sit down in the grass by the fire. One of the other coordinators was also Coloured and the other two were White. There was also an Australian girl who also had attended the conflict resolution programme in the United States and a Black young man from Johannesburg. Just as during my visit at UCT, I was struck by how ‘racially diverse’ the assembly was. I asked them how long they had been friends and as it turned out, none of them had known each other before they attended the event in New York. Rashaad even said that he did not have any White friends before he went to the United States.

Funny isn’t it? I had to go abroad to find my first White South African friend.

[Laughing] (Rashaad)

According to Rashaad, it is sometimes easier to connect with new people if you remove yourself from your comfort zone. He claimed that people in South Africa “stick to what they are used to and many only socialise with people from their own community, or their own race, or their own class” and that is precisely what Rashaad and the other coordinators were trying to change. Rashaad had friends from all over the country and from many different parts of the world. He considered himself
blessed and recognised that few South Africans are able to travel the world like he has.

I am lucky in a way, since I have been able to travel not only in South Africa but to many other countries as well. This has sort of made me realize how narrow-minded South Africans are. But you see, to be open-minded and tolerant is not always a matter of choice. Yes I have friends of all colours and all backgrounds but I have also been allowed to travel and experience things that most South Africans can never do. Many of the teens I meet have never even been to our capital, or even left Cape Town! They are sort of stuck, stuck in the same place and this I think is also why the sometimes get stuck in the mind. They only know about White, Black and Coloured and there is no wonder that race, or Coloured identity, continues to be a dominating force in their lives. We are trying to open their eyes and make them realize that they are much more than a race. (Rashaad)

Rashaad and the other coordinators were determined to pass on their experience and awareness on to the young Coloured teens from the Cape Flats. “It [race] is still important,” Rashaad said, “it is part of our society, it is part of our history and it is a part of our self but in the end it is only man-made and we don’t want the teens to disown their racial identities but we want them to see that it is only one small part of themselves and that in reality, we are all the same.” For a master student from Sweden, this sort of approach towards the concept of race is not particularly foreign. As I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, I was taught from an early age that there is no such thing as race and I primarily associated the concept of race with out-dated eugenic beliefs and discriminating ideologies. However, just as Rashaad and many other informants pointed out during my time in South Africa, race is ‘real’ since it has real and tangible effects on the lives of the informants. However, both Rashaad and I are privileged enough to not allow race to be a domination factor in our lives yet we both battle with the contradiction between our desire to ‘not see race’ and the actual harsh reality of racial inequalities. Those who have the economic and social means to ‘transcend racial inequalities’ can easily discard Coloured identity as an obsolete or even artificial concept. Yet, as the informant Damian once so cleverly put it: “Non-racialism is a privilege that only the upper class can afford.”
Concluding Discussion

In this thesis, I have explored the informants’ relationship with their racial identities in order to illustrate the very ambiguous and sometimes challenging notion of Coloured identity. There is evidentially no such thing as a socially or biologically homogenous Coloured community and neither one general definition of Coloured identity. On the contrary, the informants have shown that there are many different ways of understanding and relating to the concept of Coloured identity.

No racial identity is static but they always leave room for negotiation and change (Pierre 2013:4). However, I seek to argue that, in the South African context, Coloured is an exceptionally versatile and adaptive racial identity since there are very few clear signifiers of colouredness. There are few obvious indicators for who is Coloured and who is not and it is close to impossible to say with certainty where to draw the racial boundaries of Coloured identity. Instead, I have found that Coloured identity is often defined in terms of lack. The informants were not quite Black and not quite White but found themselves caught in-between these two ‘dominating’ racial categories. They were partially, but never fully recognised as members of the White, Black and Khoisan communities, and partially but never fully recognised as a separate racial grouping. Coloured identity is thus marked by both inclusion and exclusion.

In the first empirical chapter, I demonstrated that throughout history, these ambiguities have allowed the Coloured population to negotiate the content of and meaning of their racial identity. Since there are no clear indicators for who is Coloured and who is not, ancestry has played an important role in defining the racial identity of the informants. Most of the informants had roots in the White, Black, Khoi and San communities but very few of them felt comfortable embracing all parts of their biological and ‘cultural’ ancestry. Instead, they tactically choose to emphasis certain part of their heritage and suppress others. This is partially a reflection of contemporary racist ideologies but also an expression of the informants’ attempts to better their chances for social and economic upward mobility. Coloured identity, thus, has always been closely related to issues of class. Ever since the seventeenth century, the Coloured population has occupied a liminal position in the social hierarchy. They were never allowed to enjoy the same privileges as the dominating White population.
but they were nevertheless regarded as superior to the Black population. Yet, this intermediate position in the social hierarchy was always fragile since it depended on the ‘goodwill’ and approval of the White oppressors. Because of this, whiteness has remained one of the most dominating influences in the making of Coloured identities. Some of the informants and others before them have tactically accentuated their biological and social closeness to the White population and some even endorsed the White dictators’ former oppression of the non-White population. However, there have also been times when some Coloureds turned their back against the White rulers and instead choose to identify with the Black majority. This, however, was primarily a trend amongst the educated elite during the uprising of the Black consciousness movement and my findings suggest that today, few Coloureds are prepared to see themselves as part of the Black majority.

Coloured identities are thus always historically situated and continuously transformed along with changing social, political and economic relationships. This is evident in for instance the fact that, during the last couple of years, the former stigmatised indigenous Khoi and San identities have started to become more accepted amongst the informants. Adam has recognised a potential in the Coloured population’s indigenous history and he was tactically employing it in an attempt to unify the somewhat fragmented Coloured population. He suggested that the history of the Khoi and San does not only offer a source for the Coloured population to build a strong and proud identity in post-apartheid South Africa but it can also function as a means for political and economic mobilisation. These different interpretations and approaches demonstrate the complexity of Coloured identity and reveal that as social and political conditions change, so does the informants’ attitude towards their versatile heritage.

In the following two empirical chapters, I turned towards contemporary expressions of Coloured identity. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Seekings has argued that the deracialisations in public policy after the dissolution of apartheid has meant that the weight of racial identities has diminished amongst the people of South Africa and that class has become an increasingly important indicator for economic inequalities as well as social belongings (Seekings 2008). I do not oppose Seekings’ conclusions but suggest that his, in my opinion, rather unproblematic distinction between racial identities and class identities obscures the intimate relationship between these two. I
also suggest that the significance and symbolic meaning of racial identities are more or less always related to social class.

As demonstrated in this thesis, the informants’ attitude towards Coloured identity differed quite substantially depending on their class identity. The informants from relatively privileged backgrounds rejected their alleged racial identities since they first and foremost viewed Coloured identity as a set of experiences that they could not relate to or identify with. Instead, they choose to pronounce alternative, often class-related, identities. The university students were strong advocates of non-racialism and held that they would rather be seen as individuals than as members of a specific race. Rashaad and his friends were also skeptical to the idea of a separate Coloured community and actively encouraged Coloured teens from the Cape Flats to broaden their understanding of racial identities and connect with people of all racial backgrounds. These findings give credence to Seekings’ assertions since they suggest that the weight of racial identities is diminishing. However, the informants from disadvantaged backgrounds had a completely different approach to Coloured identity.

In the chapter about Coloured assertiveness, I discussed some of the challenges facing the informants from the Cape Flats and I demonstrate that their racial identity was both a negative and positive influence in their lives. Just as Jensen has suggested, there is much prejudices directed towards the men and women from the Cape Flats and although all Coloureds are potential carriers of these negative associations, young underprivileged men are particularly vulnerable to such stereotypes. This, Jensen argues, is because social indicators such as class and gender influence how we perceive and measure race (Jensen 2008). David and his friends are thus exposed to multiple subjugations. They are marginalised because of their race, class and gender. Together these three made David and his friends particularly exposed to the ‘skollie’ stereotype, which has branded these young men as weak and irresponsible. Yet, instead of rejecting their racial identity David and his friends performed and demonstrated pride in their colouredness. They, just as many other young Coloured men from the Cape Flats, embraced violent ideals and engaged in criminal activities as a means to counter these negative stereotypes. Helen, who was actively involved in several community development programmes on the Cape Flats, explained that there are very few Coloured role models in movies and in media and this is one of the
reasons for why so many Coloured teens idolise and give credence to the gangster lifestyle. The gangsters were both feared and respected and for David and his friends, they represented strong Coloured manliness and even functioned as a source for building a positive shared Coloured identity.

The informants from the Cape Flats were also careful to point out that they did not appreciate being labelled ‘mixed-race’. They stressed the authenticity of colouredness and argued that the Coloured community is a separate racial grouping with its own identity and its own ‘culture’. This expressed itself in celebrations such as the Coon Carnival, which apparently has become an important symbol for the Coloured community and Coloured identity. David and his friends also expressed pride in their racial identity by speaking a particular dialect, which in the eyes of most South Africans signifies township life and even poverty. They had taken a stigmatised accent and turned it into a positive influence that signalled not only their racial identities but also unity and solidarity with the many Coloured men and women from the Cape Flats. In the words of Vikki Bell, “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction” (Bell 1999:3). Being Coloured is thus not merely something you are but something you do and the informants from the Cape Flats performed and embodied their racial identity through everyday interactions that not only conformed to contemporary ideals of colouredness but also help to constituted the very notion of Coloured identity.

Why then was there such a big difference between how the privileged and the underprivileged informants related to Coloured identity? According to Peony Fhagen-Smith, the purpose of identity formation is to define who we are and where we belong in the world. These processes, she explains, involves exploring different identity options (Fhagen-Smith 2010:34) All of the informants were able to negotiate the content and meaning of their identity but I did notice that the informants from relatively privileged backgrounds were far more likely to express ‘alternative’, or in other words ‘non-racial’, types of identifications. The informant from the Cape Flats usually defined themselves in terms of race. When I asked them to describe themselves they often mentioned their biological heritage and even physical appearance. The university student, on the other hand, usually employed multiple
identifications. They seldom defined themselves in terms of race and instead chose to
emphasis personal accomplishments. The university students, as well as Gloria and
Rashaad, were also far more prone to define themselves in terms of individuality.
They usually drew from personal experiences whereas the informants from the Cape
Flats often described collective experiences that they themselves might not even have
lived. They, for instance, often stressed the importance of their ancestry and history
and considered it an essential part of their identity.

Fhagen-Smith provides a plausible explanation for these findings. She suggests that
middle and upper class environments, to a larger extent, stimulate independence and
individuality. Economic security, she explains, enables psychological and social
freedom since it makes people less dependent on family relationships and collective
solidarity. People from the middle and upper classes also enjoy more geographic
mobility and often work or act in environments in which they are allowed to express
independence. Working-class environments, on the other hand, are more likely to
encourage close and extended family relationships and community solidarity since
there are fewer resources and possibilities available. Kathleen Odell Korgen also
recognises these tendencies and in an article about multiracial Americans and social
class she suggests that “[a] multiracial persons of higher social classes are more likely
than those in the lower classes to recognise, expect, and utilise the freedom to choose
their own racial identity” (Korgen 2010).

My findings partially support Fhagen-Smith and Korgen’s conclusions. I also found
evidence that suggested that upper-class environments and upward social mobility
promoted individuality amongst the informants and in turn Coloured rejectionism.
However, I do not agree that the upper-class informants enjoyed more freedom of
choice in their own racial identity. Instead, I maintain that Coloured assertiveness is
also a matter of choice. It is true that the informants for the Cape Flats, to a larger
extent, expressed a desire to ‘fit in’ and to assimilate with the larger Coloured
community. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that they were any less ‘free’ than the
upper-class informants to negotiate the content of their racial identity. On the
contrary, the informants from the Cape Flats demonstrated that they had not merely
embraced the former apartheid race category Coloured, but they had transformed it
and turned it into a self-imposed identity that made sense for them in the post-apartheid context.

As demonstrated earlier in this thesis, many of the informants from the Cape Flats expressed an increasing fear of marginalisation due to post-apartheid distributional policies and other political strategies that, in their opinion, have overlooked the needs of the Coloured population. The employment of national demographics in regulations of the labour market is only one example and several of the informants expressed that they felt excluded from national efforts at uplifting the previously disadvantaged non-White population. I suggest that these fears are a motivating influence behind Coloured assertiveness amongst the informants since Coloured unifications serves as a safeguard towards social, political and economic marginalisation. Colouredness, and in turn Coloured assertiveness, is thus much more than an ascribed identity. It is also a personal and political investment and an active choice made in an attempt to reach certain aspirations and goals.

Seekings’ claim that class is becoming an increasingly significant influence in post-apartheid South Africa might very well be true. However, this does not necessarily mean that the importance of race is diminishing. On the contrary, I suggest that an increasing fear of marginalisation amongst the growing underprivileged Coloured population is sustaining and even nourishing Coloured assertiveness. Race and class are not two separated processes but they continuously influence one another and even depend on one another for content and meaning. As Richard Dyer so attentively put it, “all races are classed, and all classes are raced” and I believe that it is close to impossible to fully understand both the emergence and contemporary expressions of Coloured identity without also including other indicators for social belongings in the analysis. This is what makes the intersectional approach such a suitable analytical tool in explorations of identities and I am convinced that future researchers will be able to discover new and exciting findings concerning Coloured identity if we continue to explore the relationship between race and other social indicators such as gender or age.

When I initiated my fieldwork in 2014, I expected to encounter a discussion about the viability of the former apartheid race category Coloured. To my surprise, I found that
today, the notion of Coloured identity reaches far beyond its initial function. The apartheid government owned the power to define the racial identity of its citizens but it could never regulate the meaning and substance that individuals would inscribe in these categories. The dissolution of apartheid paved the way for the construction of alternative non-racial identifications. Yet, whether the informants rejected or asserted their alleged racial identities, colouredness has apparently remained an important inspiration in the making of post-apartheid identities and as long as the critical link between class and race continue to operate, Coloured identity will continue to influence the lives of all the informants.
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