The Emergence of Atheism in Post-colonial South Africa.

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Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology of Religion**

**School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu Natal
Pietermaritzburg
2017
Supervisor: Dr Federico Settler**

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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Abstract

This study aims to offer an account of the emergence of the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa and in so doing present a case for its admittance as a new and exciting field of research within the academy in the country. The pervasive assumptions of religious normativity on the continent and in South Africa may serve to conceal a rich and vibrant worldview of atheism which, as this study proposes, can in its own right, also attempt meaningful responses to life's deepest and most complex questions, without the need to declare an affiliation to any religious authority or sect. It is in the lived realities of atheists and in the makings of their social contexts, inclusive of its political history, its media and its laws, that this study finds its mooring and academic purpose. Given the embryonic nature of this project within a field of study which is under-researched in the country, the research design adopted includes a set of empirical components, by way of direct interviews with a set of self-pronounced South African atheists, an analysis of the phenomenon in relation to the country's legal framework and jurisprudence, and a survey of the online digital media contexts in which atheism also finds representation. This multi-disciplinary approach sought to broadly trace through factors historic and current, as well as issues foreign and domestic, which have either advanced or suppressed the emergence of atheism in South Africa. Locating this study within the historical development of the worldview of atheism from as far back as Greek antiquity up to advances made in recent years in shaping this field of formal academic research, was considered imperative as a potential gateway for new rounds of future research on atheism itself, or other related sub-categories within the broader field of non-religion. Constructs which are distinctly different but which have grown in alliance with atheism in recent years, such as secularity and humanism have also become essential to the construction of atheist self-identities and the emergence of atheism as a social phenomenon in South Africa. The dialogue developed within this study between related literature resources and the responses of interviewees pointed to a new range of perspectives on atheism which were greater than the sum of these parts, in that South African atheists had demonstrably moved beyond the confines of having their lives defined by the absence of a religious belief system or by something that they are not.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this project leaves me deeply grateful to so many, whose support and care have been a source of great encouragement and inspiration throughout. Not unlike most studies at this level, the best laid research plans carry no assurance of a successful completion. Much depends on the human relationships which develop along the journey and the almost indefinable *X*-factor which sustains the whole enterprise, particularly at points of personal and academic despair.

I, firstly, wish to record my heartfelt gratitude to the eighteen participants who were interviewed during this study. Whilst the analysis of the interview data in this thesis will hopefully do justice to the personal accounts of every interview represented, there can be no accounting for the collective impact which this set of experiences have had on the project as a whole; to mention nothing of the new friendships with which I have been so richly gifted. To the staff at ProType, thank you for attending to the transcripts of the interviews.

I wish to note my thanks to my academic supervisor, Dr Federico Settler, for his guidance and support through this project. I must also note my sincere appreciation to Professor Sarojini Nadar for her ongoing encouragement over the years and for seeing the purpose of my academic plans even when I felt that I had lost sight of them.

On the matter of 'lost sight', somewhere in the vicinity of Chapter 6, this year, I lost most of my sight in my one functional eye, leaving me unable to read or write. Life changed in an instant! As the problem became progressively worse over the month everything about this project and life as a whole had to be reassessed. Thankfully there was light at the end of the tunnel, literally. I wish to record my deepest gratitude to a set of doctors who worked over a six week period to achieve what I know to be the near impossible. To Dr Devan Naidoo, Dr Mark Harrison and the master-surgeon, Dr Enslin Uys, I will be forever in your debt, in ways that my Medical Aid Scheme could never repay. In so many ways the completion of this project is due also to your remarkable efforts medically.

To my friends and family who stood by me during this difficult period, who visited, phoned, transported me around, and who felt that the bringing of gifts of all manner of edible goodies was part of the healing process, thank you! I am told that the surgery had no chance of success without the said gifts.

In noting my thanks to the many who have had a hand in the completion of this project, I must also record that I take full responsibility for its academic standing and/or shortcomings, as well as its errors and omissions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

That the hour has arrived for the formal entry of the sociology of atheism into the academy in South Africa is an idea from which this study has drawn immense impetus and inspiration. Perhaps to recall the Victor Hugo quotation, *"Nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come"*[1], may best capture the sentiments which remained with this academic project from inception to completion. The *'coming to'* of any such study directed at understanding a social phenomenon whose currency is based on evidential reality does best when it is well invested in the epistemological and sociological developments which shaped the history and the present of a phenomenon. This inquiry into the emergence of atheism in South Africa, as with any serious phenomenological study, is characterised by a reaching back in time and thought to get to the grit as to what may, or may not, constitute the world of atheism and atheists in present-day South Africa. The purpose of this study on the emergence of atheism in South Africa is deeply rooted in discovering the historical trajectory of atheism itself and more importantly, South Africa's social, legal and religious histories which may have entrenched religious normativity in the country. The *idea whose time has come* takes on a bi-polar significance in this study, in which the reaching back to understand how a set of ideas tagged 'atheism' transacted with and through South African history, now opens a new chapter within academic research in the country, that of atheism, specifically and more broadly, the discipline of the Sociology of Non-Religion.

It is stated for the record that the primary focus of this study is the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa. References to 'non-religion', however, become unavoidable through this study and in many instances necessary, as a broader location and discipline for the subject of atheism. At the global level, the increasing social significance of atheism as being a subject worthy of serious scholarship is now uncontroversial. South Africa's lagging behind this curve, which is also beyond doubt, does however present this study with the opportunity to examine this under-researched subject as well as the reasons for this drag effect. This quest will bring this study in direct engagement with the history, nature and effects of the pervasive religiosity which was engrained into the socio-political superstructure of pre-1994 Apartheid South Africa. There can be no meaningful

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[1] Victor Hugo (1877). *Histoire d'un Crime* (The History of a Crime).

understanding of the sociology of religion or non-religion in South Africa outside of an appreciation of the *political religion* of Apartheid's Christianity which built upon colonialism's Christianity. The degree to which the fabric of religion has constitutionally morphed itself, post the 1994 democratic dispensation, into the substructure of South African social life also has a direct bearing on this study, as it does determine the status and prospects for the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

This study proposes that atheism and non-religion represent a socially significant taxon in their own right. This growing global force which could no longer be ignored was also acknowledged in the not too distant past at the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965), in which the Council expressed a special interest in dialogue with atheists, based on its recognition of the growing impact of, *"the more organic atheisms of the secularizing West"*.(Huff, 2012:2) Although, as noted by Huff (p.1), this initiative was not realised to any noticeable degree over fifty years, the significance of atheism as a global social phenomenon was not lost on the largest religious Order in the world.[2]

This project is undergirded by two key factors; firstly, the need to address the dearth of formal academic research on atheism in South Africa and secondly, to discover understandings as to the current social and legal orientation towards atheism within a post-colonial and post-Apartheid South Africa. To a large degree, a formal South African academic account of atheism is non-existent, which makes for exciting and necessary new ground for scholarly engagement.

It may be unavoidable, and indeed necessary, that this study confronts the narrative of Africa and South Africa as being a 'notoriously religious' continent and country, sentiments which have served to conceal an inherent socio-legal bias against atheism and non-religion. (John Mbiti (1969), Obaji Agbiji and Ignatius Swart (2015)) Accordingly, as the wide range of

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[2] Peter A. Huff (2012:2), in, *'Catholic-Atheist Dialogue: The Unfinished Business of Vatican II'*.

> *"Today, a half century after the opening of Vatican II, the council's connections with atheism have been largely forgotten. The record of the church's dialogue with non-believers is virtually unknown, and its outreach to the world's non-religious is overshadowed by more high-profile initiatives in ecumenical and interreligious affairs. Meanwhile, atheism increasingly becomes one of the most dynamic forces on the global cultural landscape."*

post-colonial religious movements or diverse religious traditions could be regarded as being a postcolonial response to the legacy of colonialism, I propose to suggest that atheism as a key force within the broader ambit of non-religion can be viewed and theorised as an indication of the post-colonial African condition wherein the idea of Africans as 'notoriously religious' people is problematised.

The project to understand the emergence of atheism in South Africa, particularly against the dominant narrative of the pervasive religiosity which is said to characterise African life, does raise the question as to the very 'first-cause' of atheism. Is atheism, and non-religion for that matter, primordial to the human condition, or is it a choice exercised at some stage in one's life, or is it an outcome of one's identity manifesting itself? The conceptual framework of this study was guided by the need to understand past and present theories which attempted to address this question as a basis to further understand the outcomes of interviews with participants, outcomes which may themselves constitute responses to these questions. This study, however, is not confined to regarding atheism as a 'coming to' experience, or as just being a 'de-conversion' from religion. Whilst the interview data did reflect this to have been the case in the life experiences of many participants, it did not constitute an exhaustive explanation for the phenomenon in South Africa. It became necessary therefore, to consider the historical antecedents to current understanding of atheism as previous and credible attempts to map the range of contestations which atheism mounted against religion; issues which remain pertinent to the present.

It is with a measure of circumspection that this study will approach the issue of statistical accounts of levels of religiosity in relation to levels of non-religion, as they apply to the South African context. Without wishing to disregard this important issue and any polling data which attempts to measure these phenomena and their constituent elements, serious and valid questions still hang over the last (2012) significant polling data on the subject, the WIN-Gallup Poll 2012 – Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism. Whilst recognising the cautionaries highlighted by Jacques Rousseau (2012) when dealing with data of this nature, and particularly the fact that in the WIN-Gallup (2012) instance the South African sample was comprised of only 200 respondents, a decline in religiosity is reported even against a

revised higher margin of error. As the last available data on religiosity and atheism in South Africa, the following key findings of the Win-Gallop (2012) poll[3] are summarised.

WIN-Gallup Poll 2012 Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism				
Key Question: Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious persons or a convinced atheist?				
Responses	A Religious Person	Not a Religious Person	A convinced Atheist	Don't know/No Response
South Africa	64%	28%	4%	5%
Africa	89%	7%	2%	2%
Global Average	59%	23%	13%	5%

The first point to note with regard to these results is that the 2012 South Africa score of 64% (those answering to be a religious person), against the 83% recorded in 2005, represents a 19% decline in the country's religiosity according to the index. This drop in religiosity ranked South Africa as the country with the 5th most notable decline in religiosity internationally. When considering the Atheism Index of both 2005 and 2012, those self-identifying as atheists rose from 1% in 2005 to 4% in 2012. The WIN-Gallup Poll (2012) also recorded a degree of correlation between the religiosity index and national income, noting an inverse relation between there variables. Countries with household income in the Bottom Quintiles [Low 40%], held a religiosity score of 65,50% and an Atheism Index of 8%, whilst the Top Quintiles [40%], recorded a religiosity score of 50% and an Atheism Index of 19,50%.

An earlier survey, by the Pew Foundation on Religion and Public life (2010), entitled, *'Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa'*, used a South African country sample (*n*=1504) to report a religiously unaffiliated population of 7%; the third highest such result after Mozambique (13%) and Botswana (9%).[4]

Ivor Chipkin and Annie Leatt (2011:39) in, '*Religion and Revival in post-Apartheid South Africa*', highlight the need to delve beyond just the statistical significance of data on religiosity, to establishing an understanding of the causal underpinnings of the trends which

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[3] It was surprising to note that of the 57 countries polled, South Africa had the lowest sample size (*n*=200). Macedonia (*n*=1209), Kenya (*n*=1000), Palestinian Territories (*n*=626), and South Sudan (*n*=1020).

[4] For further analysis on the social and marketing behaviour of atheists reference could also be made to the article by, Thamm, M. 2014. Godless, rich, professional, environmentally conscious: A snapshot of South Africa's atheists. *The Daily Maverick*. 5th August. Available online at, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-08-05-godless-rich-professional-environmentally-conscious-a-snapshot-of-south-africas-atheists/#.WFPsI_l97IU. [Accessed on 5th December 2016].

appear to be evident. Their work offers explanations for the 'return of religion' to public life, which, in their analysis, goes counter to the assumption that increasing modernisation will be accompanied by reduced levels of religiosity.

As a South African, having lived life under, both, the system of structural and legalised racial discrimination as well as having lived under one of the most progressive constitutional dispensations in the world, post-Apartheid, I hold strongly to the position that the institutionalised influence of religion in shaping public life and public policy must be held under close scrutiny and will continue to be an important area for formal academic research.[5] Furthermore, and as this study will demonstrate, South African history illustrates that religion has political dimensions. This study builds upon these convictions to signal the formal entry of atheism and non-religion into the academy, with the demand that the rapidly emerging field of atheism and non-religion be afforded equal time within society, the academy and public institutions. This appeal is not dissimilar to the point alluded to by Russell McCutcheon in his articulations for the inclusion of categories of non-religion into the study of human behaviour.

> *"For sure, not everyone studies human behavior in this way but, when studying this thing we call religion in a publicly funded context – a "public" comprised not just of members of assorted complementary and contradictory religious traditions but also agnostics and atheists who equally pay taxes to support the education system – it strikes me that this is the only viable option for our field."*
>
> Russell McCutcheon (2003:148)

On the aspect of education in relation to the phenomenon of atheism, a further concern of this study is the critical issue of the embeddedness of religion within the academy and its implications for the emergence of atheism in South Africa; issues which give rise to the following valid set of questions. Firstly, whose interests are represented in the knowledge production which we see reflected in the actual outcomes, particularly from State-funded tertiary academic institutions? Secondly, are these outcomes reflective of fair and

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[5] Clemens Nathan (2009:14), in his book, *The Changing Face of Religion and Human Rights*, uses stronger expressions to describe *"the atrocities of apartheid in twentieth-century South Africa"* as a representation of *"religious fundamentalism"*.

constructive discourse within the academy and broader society on the important subject of the place of religion in the public realm and in the formulation of public policy? Thirdly, is the academy complicit, with intent, in the subjugation of the field of non-religion generally, and atheism in particular?[6] Perhaps this study is my response to my own questions which have amplified in recent years; as to why Humanist post-graduate studies are non-existent in South African Universities.

These questions bring the inquiry back to the ***religion-knowledge-power dynamics*** which undergird this investigation of the emergence of atheism in South Africa and in so doing challenge and critique the normative assumptions around the production of religion in society generally and within the academy in particular. These questions also give rise to a set of contradictions and biases which have privileged the cause of religious faith, and the Christian faith in particular, thereby potentially compromising the construction of new knowledge within the Humanities. It follows, therefore, that the role of Christian National Education, Pre-1994, in constructing the religion-academy-society matrix will require careful consideration throughout this study. Universities and tertiary academic institutions are key determinants and production centres for what is brought into and what is left out of the equations which construct new knowledge and as such, represents research territory which must be constructively engaged with to fully grasp the issues which impact upon the phenomenon of atheism in the country. This personal journey reached some formalisation during my 2013 Masters project entitled,

A Post-Structural Theological Critique of the Perspectives of Christopher Hitchens on Vicarious Redemption

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[6] Kumalo, R.S. Undated. The People Shall Govern: Now they have only the possibility to vote. Available Online at, http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Files/The%20palace.doc. [Accessed on, 13th July 2015].
In his paper, Kumalo, who was Head of the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics at University of KwaZulu Natal, declared his position on atheism, the secular state of South Africa, and religion in relation to the Constitution, as follows. As to why South Africans needed to be 'protected' from atheism remains unclear.

> *"The notion of 'critical solidarity' is built on the foundations of liberation theology and theologies of reconstruction, which continues the tradition of God's preferential option for the poor. It also calls for obeying the laws of the country only if they are not contrary to the laws of God, (Acts 4:19, 5:29). The churches also base their participation on the text that says "The earth is of the Lord and all that is in it", (Psalm 24:1) thus bringing congruence between ecclesial and societal issues. This includes an embrace of the liberal constitution that declared the country a secular state. Being a secular state means that South Africans are protected from both theocracy and atheism, whilst at the same time allowing religion to exist without any constitutional impediments."*

The works and public engagements of the late Christopher Hitchens [1949-2011], through his strong critique of religion and the Judeo-Christian belief system in particular, opened the doors to the broader spectrum of critiques of religion. The study also brought into focus the worldview of atheism, and more broadly, non-religion. It was an attempt to get to understanding atheism via a theological critique of religion, almost as a countermeasure to assessments such as that levelled by Kerry S. Walters (2010:30), that the New Atheist Movement, save for Daniel Dennett, was seriously lacking in their understanding of theological literature. The impact of this point was also felt during this study which had to pry open South African perspectives from the world of theology, such as Black Theology, to understand its relevance for the present. Much of the research which underpinned my Masters project, however, was shaped by the international discourse on the subject; with the ever-present nagging need to find application and relevance for this important discourse within the South African context.

For the points in this personal journey when just sheer inspiration and a broader humanist framing of the project were needed, *The Good Book* never disappointed; the Anthony C. Grayling publication, that is.

> *"For we live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; and our time should be counted in the throbs of our hearts as we love and help, learn and strive, and make from our own talents whatever can increase the stock of the world's good."*
>
> Anthony C. Grayling (2011:2)

It was during my Masters project that structural formations and interdependencies between the church and the academy in South Africa became apparent, revealing reasons as to why the subjects of atheism and non-religion would be under-researched. In its essence, the long arm of religious privileging within broader society extended well into the academy resulting in theology and theism being undergirded by views such as that of prominent South African theologian, Charles Villa-Vicencio (1977:373), that, *"The South African political problem was essentially a theological one!"* Whilst it is noted that the context of the comment was that of Apartheid South Africa (1977), in which Villa-Vicencio was highlighting the existent of

religious justification for Apartheid advanced by the National Party government, the view that South Africa's path to democracy and reconciliation could only be understood and reconstructed along lines of theism and theology left no space for any possible contributions from the constituency of non-religion which, admittedly, had not shown its face publicly during that period.

The article by Robert Vosloo (2008) entitled, *The State of Exception and Religious Freedom: Revisiting the Church-State Confrontation Correspondence and Statements of 1988,* reflects on the history of a narrow understanding of atheism as the antithesis of social cohesion. He cites then Prime Minister P. W. Botha who articulated this prevailing anxiety, *"the expressed intention of the planned revolution by the ANC/SACP alliance is to ultimately transform South Africa into an atheistic Marxist state, where freedom of faith and worship will surely be among the first casualties."*

In an article written for the Daily Maverick, published on 3 July 2014, entitled, *White, Afrikaans universities – when will they truly transform?*, Pierre deVos recounts his experiences whilst registering for his Law Degree at Stellenbosch University and the compulsory religious classification to which he, as an atheist, was subjected. He notes his experiences with the Registration Officer,

> *"Ag nee man, there is no code for that," the woman who had to sign off on my registration form told me on the day when I had to register for my third year LLB studies at Stellenbosch University in the late nineteen eighties.*
> *I had insisted that I wanted the form changed. I was no longer a member of the NG Kerk. Instead I wanted the form to reflect that I am an atheist. The woman looked appalled. I suspected that in her eyes being an atheist was almost as bad as being a kommunis…."*
>
> Pierre deVos (2014)

This account by DeVos, albeit anecdotal, may point to a greater reality of atheism and non-religion being equated with Communism and as to how ingrained and pervasive the marginalisation and stigmatisation of atheism had become. In the case of the democratic

Constitution of South Africa (1996:s15), which pronounces clearly on the right to freedom **_of_** religion to which all are entitled, the right to freedom **_from_** religion could be read as being implicit and unambiguous. The extent to which 'old habits die hard' to now afford persons who self-pronounce as being atheist their rightful place at the South African table, cuts to the core of this study in its attempts to understand the lived realities of atheists in the country and their different life experiences on either side of that crucial South African timeline of 1994.

The marginalisation of atheists was not unique to South Africa but could be considered as being more widespread on the African continent. The 'blame-game' to which self-pronounced atheists were subjected ranged from the alleged Marxist, Communist influences of the Soviet Union in the east (P.W. Botha, 1988), to the influence of western culture (Zuckerman (ed.), 2009:76), to the un-African influences of post-coloniality (Obisakin, 2007:47). Lawrence Obisakin, in his book, *God the Holy Spirit: The Mystery of Christianity*, notes,

> *"In Africa, religion and belief in God the Supreme Being has been very rampant in the light of the revelations of their ancestors. There were practically no atheists up until recent post-colonial years. This unafrican stance could have resulted from…."*

This view is developed more extensively within the Ghanaian religious context in the book by Phil Zuckerman (ed.) (2009:76), '*Atheism and Secularity*', in which the following point is made.

> *"There is another view that claims that the whole idea of Atheism is foreign to Africans leading to the accusation that [African] Atheists have been influenced by western culture"*

1.1.   Research Question and Research Objectives

This academic attempt to understand the emergence of atheism in South Africa, therefore, could not be confined to just the lived realities of atheists, but needed to extend to problemitising atheism and non-religion as being un-African, as well as to understandings of atheism as being a contestation to the dominance and hegemony of religion in the country. It is against this background that this study was designed, with the following key research question and research objectives determined.

Key Research Question

What are the understandings of and engagements with atheism in post-colonial South Africa and what does this reveal about the legal and civic representations of non-religion?

Research Objectives

1. To understand the historical antecedents to current understandings of the phenomenon of atheism, internationally and in South Africa.
2. To ascertain what are the historical forces which have shaped or influenced the emergence of atheism in South Africa.
3. To critically interrogate how atheism has been understood and articulated in South Africa, with particular reference to the legal and civic attitudes to non-religion.
4. To understand the prevalent conceptions about non-religion in post-colonial South Africa.

1.2.   Structure of the Study

A brief outline of the structure of this study will serve to demonstrate how this project will attempt to address the research question and objectives, above. Whilst the interviews undertaken with atheists have been an empirical highpoint of this study, it did not represent the full ambit of the investigation of the phenomenon. Two further trajectories emerged as the study progressed. Firstly, the interviews revealed issues raised by participants which were not conceived of in the initial research design and which required attention. Secondly,

there were representations of atheism which the interviews could not capture, but which could not be excluded from a meaningful analysis of the phenomenon in South Africa. In this regard the representation of atheism on online digital media platforms and the impact of the law on the emergence of atheism, gave rise to two separate chapters in this project.

1.2.1. Chapter 2: The Historical Antecedents to current Understandings of Atheism

For what is a relatively new area of research in South Africa, this study has been well supported by existing literature internationally which asserts the fact that the idea of atheism, or non-religion for that matter, is as old as some of the oldest recorded philosophy. However, more than the need to recount this history is the need to draw out the understandings of the phenomenon, the development of the idea of atheism and its associate worldviews through history, as well as the constructs and vocabulary which have shaped the discourse over time. The reaching back into the various epochs which have shaped the worldview of atheism, and indeed religion itself, has served this study immeasurably. Efforts to follow the thread of atheism from its earliest expressions, through the period of The Enlightenment, to the most recent New Atheist Movement and into South Africa of the present, have also enriched the empirical engagements with atheist participants during interviews as well as improved on the interpretation and discussion of the data recorded during the interviews.

1.2.2. Chapter 3: The Literature Review

The literature review which developed alongside this study followed the three key trajectories which shaped the course of this project. Firstly, the meaning of atheism itself and the context of it's historical development. Secondly, literature which guided the conducting of the interviews and the interpretation of the resulting data and findings within the South African socio-political context and thirdly, the resources which introduced to this study the broader issues of secularism, non-religion, new media and social media. This study would not have reached a meaningful conclusion without the set of resources explored within these separate but related paths; resources which included books, journal articles, online publications and publications on new media and social media platforms.

1.2.3. Chapter 4: The Theoretical Framework

The application of a dual theoretical framework for this study has been influenced by its multidisciplinary nature; drawing strongly on aspects of South African religious and socio-political histories, alongside the evolution of the country's legislation in relation to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. The growing intersectionality between issues of religion and politics internationally and in South Africa have brought to the fore, not just the subject of freedom of religion, but also that of freedom from religion. A human rights theoretical framework brings into focus the human rights implications of freedom of conscience, which affects atheists directly and the congruencies which should exist, on the one hand, between the constitutional dispensation and on the other, the manner in which such provisions find expression within the emerging jurisprudence.

Given the fact that the very construct 'atheism' is relational to religion and that religion as it is represented in South Africa at present is in some measure a product of the project of colonialism, the extent to which atheism represents a contestation to the hegemony of religion signals the post-colonial paradigm. The post-colonial theoretical framework applied within this study places under scrutiny the lasting effects of the religion-colonialism nexus as experienced in South Africa and proposes that the task of understanding the far reaching implications of this legacy remains unfinished business, which this study on atheism wishes to address.

1.2.4. Chapter 5: Research Methodology

The research methodology designed for this study sought to address the results which emerged from the interviews with self-pronounced atheists, as well as the discovery of other representations of atheism in South African society. The interviews were to be conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule comprising of a set of 13 questions aimed at discovering the lived realities of participants, as publically pronounced atheists, as well as their perceptions of the phenomenon in South Africa. The interviews with prospective participants were secured using a non-probability snowball sampling technique. As such, this aspect of the study took the form of a qualitative inquiry from which broader statistical generalisations as to how the phenomenon presents itself in South Africa could

not be drawn. The broader research plan and methodology, however, could only achieve a sense of completion with the inclusion of research into how the phenomenon of atheism stood in relation to religion and the law, as well as how the phenomenon found expression within social formations such as electronic or online platforms.

1.2.5. Chapter 6: Atheism in South Africa – Discovery through Interviews

A set of 18 separate interviews, lasting on average of 60 minutes each, were conducted with participants who have publicly self-pronounced as being atheist. The interviews were conducted during 2016 in the following metropolitan areas in South Africa, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg. The wide geographical spread, as opposed to a concentration of participants from within one specific physical locality, was aimed at discovering how atheists in different parts of the country were experiencing or expressing their atheism, as well as the group or community dynamics which were emerging. Chapter 6 focused largely on the discussion of the interview data, accompanied by related literature which assisted in the interpretation of the data and the findings which emerged. The recounting of the interview and resulting findings followed the structure of the Interview Schedule, along the lines of the themes, Personal Biographies (Questions 1-3), Participant's Understandings of Atheism in South Africa (Questions 4-8), Journeys of Self-Discovery (Question 9), and Legal and Public Discourses on Atheism in South Africa (Questions 10-13).

1.2.6. Chapter 7: The Law, Religion and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa

The fact that atheism derives its social meaning in relation to other socio-political, legal and religious realities, requires that any attempt to meaningfully interpret the lived realities of atheists and their social engagements be understood within the South African legal context, as it relates to their rights to exercise their freedom of conscience, rights which could not be simplistically reduced to fall within the ambit of freedom of religion. Chapter 7 deals with the aspect of freedom of conscience in relation to the evolution of the South African Constitution pre and post 1994, with this discussion being undertaken alongside understandings of related social phenomena and trends such as secularism, and the extent to which South Africa is constituted along lines which characterise a secular state. In the

absence of any specific judgments being handed down which specifically tests the issue of atheism, case law particularly post-1994, related to freedom of religion is given consideration. Notwithstanding what appears to be an equitable set of provisions in the South African Constitution which addresses the needs of the religious and the non-religious, the privileging of religion in the public realm persisted as a concern which atheists interviewed felt it necessary to challenge. Understandings of the legal framework from which atheists derive their set of rights and obligations was considered necessary for interpreting how atheists meaningfully engaged with their social realities.

1.2.7. Chapter 8: Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa

It was recognised at the time of designing this project that although the interviews with self-pronounced atheists would form a crucial pillar of this study, it could not comprehensively respond to the multiple representations of the phenomenon in the country, particularly in an age of online digital social media and new media. Although a survey of this component of the study only scratched the proverbial surface of what appears to be a growing network of South Africa atheists on online digital platforms, it was too significant a manifestation of the phenomenon not to be included in this study. Also significant in the shaping of a national popular culture of atheism and non-religion is the emergence of South Africa's own genre of comedy by self-pronounced atheists which demonstrates a preparedness to openly critique and challenge the dominant narrative of the religious, thereby also signifying the emergence of atheism in the country. The extent to which the medium of online social networking, itself, had become an enabler for the emergence of atheism in the country is given consideration.

Returning to the key focus of this project, the concluding spot is earned by David Eller who captures the themes which will resonate throughout this study, as well as the philosophical and intellectual framing of the subject of atheism which has been inspirational to this study as a whole.

"Atheism is not religion: it is non-religion, the absence of religion. But Atheism is more than non-religion; it is an affirmative stance, a condition of intellectual, personal, and moral freedom. In the same way, health is not just the absence of disease nor peace just the absence of war, but health and peace are positive conditions of strength, of well-being, of ability to do things and to live and enjoy your life. So too, Atheism is a psychological and existential condition of strength and well-being and ability to live and enjoy life and use your mind and trust yourself."

David Eller (2004:14)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"the sphere of religion constitutes the ultimate challenge of the twenty-first century."
Wole Soyinka (1988:239)[7]

2.1. Chapter Introduction

The literature review will be aimed, primarily, at highlighting key works which will contribute towards examining the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa. This study presents an opportunity to examine, both, the construct of atheism itself, as well as its epistemological development through history as a basis from which to interpret the phenomenon in postcolonial South Africa. Of necessity, literature from within the broader area of non-religion, of which atheism constitutes a part, will need to be engaged with.

Having to situate this study within an existing body of formal research on the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa proved problematic, as there was no such preceding body of academic work which may have paved the way on the subject. The study, however, did develop a credible catalogue of South African resources, such as news reports and articles, which offered crucial insights as to the public perceptions of atheism and non-religion in the country. Therefore, to guide the structure, methodology and dialogue within this study, the literature review drew strongly on resources available internationally, including resources available through online social networking and new media platforms.

2.2. Connecting the Literary Dots

The very nature of the subject matter under inquiry, together with the demands of the interviews in this study, called for a thorough understanding of the historical and current trends, debates and key issues which are central to the atheist community locally and internationally. In this regard my Masters dissertation on the work of Christopher Hitchens, which also drew strongly on the literature and resources produced within the New Atheist

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[7] As quoted in, Joseph, C.L. (2015:21), *The Arrogance of Faith and Religious Imperialism: Soyinka's Radical Theistic Humanism and Generous Tolerance*, as an extract from Soyinka, W. (1988:239), *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on literature and culture.*

Movement, proved to be an invaluable foregrounding for this study and particularly for the confidence required to negotiate, secure and undertake the interviews with participants.

Throughout this study it was strongly held that whilst the origins of current understandings of atheism could be traced, in some measure, back to Greek antiquity and the Enlightenment period in Europe, this study was also inspired by the need to open up the idea of a 'comparative non-religion' with a broad transnational character. This was aimed at also considering developments in atheism as well as the broader phenomenon of non-religion which might have presented at other points in the world, so as not to be confined to just the discovery of literature which defined the European and/or North America trajectories of atheism. Therefore, this literature review will consider resources from within Africa and India, as just two further sets of representations of the phenomenon.

On the idea of an emerging field of scholarship of 'comparative non-religion' much can be learnt from David Chidester's contributions within, and challenges to, the field of Comparative Religious Studies.

> *"On southern African frontiers, comparative religion was a discourse and practice that produced knowledge about religion and religions, and thereby reconfigured knowledge about the human, within the power relations of specific colonial situations.*
>
> David Chidester (1996:2), *'Savage Systems'*

As a phenomenological study which was compelled to investigate the effects of a pervasive history of religious normativity in South Africa, particularly of the Christian marque, the literature review and indeed the study as a whole, took on a multi-disciplinary character. This almost inevitable approach identified very clear points of intersectionality between the emergence of atheism, the history of religion in the country, the laws regulating freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, and the impact of online social media and new media on the emergence of atheism. As with any sociological study of this nature it is imperative that a clear understanding be reached on the historical, non-linear socio-political contexts within which these intersectionalities manifested themself. The literature review, therefore,

had to, both, reflect this history as well as offer a platform through which participant's histories, as discovered through the interviews, could be mediated.

Due to the issues which were raised during the interview process, from aspects relating to methodology, through to the analysis of the interview data, the original literature review had to be significantly broadened to also go where the data led. Notwithstanding the focus of this study being the South African context, the need to bring the emergence of atheism in the country into dialogue with appropriate literature on the development of the phenomenon internationally, and particularly on the rest of the African continent, represents a unique contribution which this project can make to scholarship on atheism and indeed the broader fields of non-religion and secularity internationally. Bearing in mind the hybrid theoretical framework constructed to bring this project to fruition, the following key themes will be explored within the literature review to piece together a coherent account of the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

2.3. Atheism: Its History and Antecedents

Any attempt to understand a current socio-_**non**_religious construct such as atheism will need to acknowledge its epistemological development over time, giving consideration to the forces and worldviews which gave form and meaning to the construct through history. A publication which has been invaluable to this study in this regard is that of Tim Whitmarsh (2015), *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*. Whitmarsh takes this study full-circle to western civilisation's start-point on the subject of atheism, back to the ancient, pre-Christian philosophical world of Greek antiquity. In making the point for the recovery of Greek philosophical thought on atheism and a secular worldview, Whitmarsh cautions against the risk of viewing the current re-emergence of atheism as an intellectual system of thought attributable to the period of The Enlightenment which swept through Europe from the latter 16th century, reaching its peak during the 18th century. In a commentary on the book offered by Whitmarsh himself, he notes,

> *"All of the arguments used today against the existence of gods were first raised by the philosophers of ancient Greece: from the problem of evil (how can a just god permit suffering?), through the omnipotence paradox (could an all-powerful god create an unliftable stone?), to the idea of religion as a human social construct designed to repress dissent."*[8]

More than just the rediscovery of the rich history of the atheism going back to 500(BCE), the inclusion of works such as Whitmarsh (2015) and Anders B. Drachmann (1922) into the literature review also serves to uncover the etymology of the key construct of this study and how its earliest de-legitimisation, from being a worldview with its own form and identity, became criminalised with the onset of State-institutionalised Christianity in the 4th Century (CE). The significance of this history cannot be lost on any study located in the South African context with its own history of State-institutionalised Christianity, a subject which is also given careful consideration in this study.

One of the more succinct and relatively early literary treatments of pre-Christian and Greek philosophical worldviews on non-religion is offered by Drachmann (1922) in his work, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*, in which he contends that understandings of atheism remain founded on the principles and definitions which were formulated within Greek philosophical thought. Whilst it is acknowledged that the scope of literature on the subject of atheism could range widely from an analysis of the subject to strong advocacy for the advancement of atheism, this study will be focused more on the former category, whilst consideration will be given to current trends within atheism internationally and how this impinges on the emergence of atheism within South Africa. In this regard, works such as Michael Martin's (ed.) (2006), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, will form an important resource. This work brings together a range of issues from various contributors across the religion-atheism spectrum, from *Atheism in Antiquity* (Chapter 1), to *Atheism and the Freedom of Religion* (Chapter 15), a perspective which will prove useful to the discourse on the subject within the South African context.

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[8] The commentary by Tim Whitmarsh on his book, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, is available online at, http://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/BAR26-16-Whitmarsh.pdf. [Accessed on, 6th November 2016].

A significant publication, even earlier than that of Drachmann (1922) was that of Emma Goldman's, *The Philosophy of Atheism*, first published in 1916 in the American journal Mother Earth, a publication which Emma Goldman edited. The striking aspect about the article is that exactly a hundred years after its first publication the issues raised by Goldman are as pertinent now as it was then; best captured in Emma Goldman's own words.

> *"The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, oracles, and mean contentment has kept humanity in helpless degradation."*[9]

An important accompanying text to any of the works penned by Emma Goldman and her colleagues at the *Mother Earth* magazine, would have to be the Peter Glassgold (2012) publication, *Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth*. The book sets the broader social-political context and the myriad of influences which shaped the stance of Emma Goldman. Whilst our focus will remain on the subject of atheism, understandings of the socio-political variables remain significant as they also intersect with other critical issues such as freedom of expression and the application of laws in the advancement of or suppression of civil liberties. The Emma Goldman case proves the paradoxical adage that in so many respects 'everything changes and everything remains the same'. The same could be said of the works of earlier freethinker and founder of the publication Truth Seeker (1873), DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett (1818-1882), whose 1875 publication of, *An Open Letter to Jesus Christ*[10], could be regarded as being homologous with the questioning and critiquing[11]

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[9] The article, *The Philosophy of Atheism,* was first published in 1916 in the magazine *Mother Nature*, accessed online 21 May 2016 at http://govt.eserver.org/goldman-atheism.html. The article was also subsequently included in the 2007 publication, *The Portable Atheist*, compiled and edited by Christopher Hitchens.

[10] Bennett, D.W. 1875. An Open Letter to Jesus Christ. *The Truth Seeker*. Extracts republished May 2015 in, *Church and State*. Available online at, http://churchandstate.org.uk/2016/12/an-open-letter-to-jesus-christ/. [Accessed on, 23rd December 2015].

[11] From within the 19th Century, the period referred to by Martin Priestman (2006) as that of *Romantic Atheism*, the 1813 publication of Percy Bysshe Shelley, *'The Necessity of Atheism'* also stands out for its honing in on the idea of *'God as a Hypothesis'*.
Shelley, P. B. 2015. The Necessity of Atheism. Available Online at,
http://www.cardinalhayes.org/ourpages/auto/2014/7/9/61855690/The%20Necessity%20of%20Atheism.pdf.
Accessed on, 29th April 2015.

of religion which characterises much of the literature of the New Atheist Movement of the 21st Century. (Kolenda, 2013)[12] It came as little surprise that the one publication which influenced Bennett[13] the most was Thomas Paine's, *The Age of Reason* (1794), a publication whose oft forgotten subtitle (*The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology*) actually hints at its full impact as one of the earliest and most enduring pieces of Biblical criticism and contestations to religion, and which continues to impact upon the world of atheism to the present. The late Christopher Hitchens (2006) in his article, *Bones of Contention*, noted the following of this impact.

> *"In a time when both rights and reason are under several kinds of open and covert attack, the life and writing of Thomas Paine will always be part of the arsenal on which we shall need to depend."*

If the works of Emma Goldman, through the Mother Earth magazine and through her trial of 1917, depicts the mood of early 1900s America in response to atheism, it serves this study well in preparing for what was to follow in what was regarded as the trial of the century; The Scopes Trial of 1925. The Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, which was decided on 21st July 1925, was the legal case which tested the laws of Tennessee which made it illegal to teach evolution in schools. For any study on atheism anywhere, The Scopes Trial has to be mandatory reading, for the simple reality that on the contestations between evolution and creationism in the education sector, history tends to repeat itself.[14] In this regard South Africa is no different, with this very subject currently having passage through the South African legal system in the case of OGOD Versus The Minister of Education and a set of six schools.

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[12] From an earlier period, the publication of Ethan Allen's (1784), *'Reason, the Only Oracle of Man'*, also had the effect of challenging the established order in which the voice of religion was dominant.

[13] Bradford, R. 2006. *'D.W. Bennett: The Truth Seeker'*. Prometheus Books: New York. Extracts republished online by, *The Truth Seeker*. Available online at, http://thetruthseeker.net/history/d-m-bennett/. [Accessed on, 23rd December 2016].

[14] Adam R. Shapiro's (2013), *Trying Biology: The Scopes trial, textbooks, and the antievolution movement in American schools*, offers a detailed account of the Scopes Trial as well as the reasons why it remains significant across country lines and time.

> *"The Scopes trial introduced new ways of thinking about science and religion and their roles in public life throughout the United States and even across the globe."* Shapiro (2013:4)

The organisation OGOD, Organisasie vir Godsdienste-Onderrig en Demokrasie (*translated*, Organisation for Religious Education and Democracy), seeks to contest current practices of privileging religious based education which, it claims, are in contravention of the Religion and Education Policy of 2003 and South Africa's constitutional provisions on the rights of learners to freedom of religion and conscience, and their right of access to knowledge. In many respects this is South Africa's 'Scopes Trial' moment. The extensive store of literature on The Scopes Trial will serve this study well to understand the history and underpinnings of the Science Vs. Religion debate; from the very first newspaper publications by none other than Henry Louis 'H.L.' Mencken, who was one of the key journalists reporting from Dayton on the trial, to current works such as, Adam Shapiro's (2013), *Trying Biology: The Scopes Trial, Textbooks, and the Antievolution Movement in American Schools* and the much lauded, *Summer of the Gods*, by Edward John Larson(1997), which went on to win the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for History. The H.L. Mencken account of the trial, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of The Scopes Monkey Trial* (2006) will serve as source references to some of the foundational issues on the place of religious instruction in schools, as well as the Science Vs. Religion and Creationism Vs. Evolution debates which remain with us to the present and which still feature within current discourse on atheism. Furthermore, literature on this history, albeit from a non-South African source, will be necessary in trying to understand the nature and implications of the legal case, OGOD Vs. The Minister of Education and six schools in South Africa.

David Berman's (2013), *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell,* although focused on the British history on the subject, remains relevant to this study as it traces through the sociological and philosophical development of atheism from the period of The Enlightenment, between the 16th-18th centuries to the present. Of particular significance for this study is Berman's coverage of the covert nature of atheism during the 17th Century and the '*emergence*' of the phenomenon through The Enlightenment period and thereafter.

Alongside the Berman (2013) publication, but as a more substantial literary resource, *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, by Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (eds.) (2013), proved to be an indispensible guide to this study. From the pre-Socratic understandings of atheism, to the representations of atheism in the music of Frank Zappa, the publication covers a set

of 46 separate but related sub-topics within the field of atheism and non-religion, penned by some of its most respected researchers. Of particular interest to this project were Parts V, dealing with the sociology of atheism, and Part VI which covered the 'global' expressions of atheism. From Part V: *Atheism and the Social Sciences*, three chapters stood out as being directly relevant to this study, Frank Pasquale and Barry Kosmin's, *Atheism and the Secularization Thesis* (Chapter 29), Phil Zuckerman's, *Atheism and Societal Health* (Chapter 32), and Chapter 35 on, *Conversion and Deconversion*, by Ralph Wood and Zhuo Chen. Whilst Part VI, *Global Expression*, offered very useful and broader non-European and non-American perspectives on expressions of atheism, this section, and indeed the book as a whole held no record of representations of atheism in Africa. The high degree of religiosity ascribed to Africa through the book would appear to have, once again, masked out African expressions of atheism from entering the international discourse on the subject; accentuating the significance of any contribution which this academic project can make towards this discipline.

In any study of this nature, it is necessary to also recount, if only in brief, the basic tenets of the main religious traditions which are under critique within atheism. To understand atheism involves understanding what it is that is being either critiqued or advocated for. Amidst the myriad of literature on this subject, works such as that of Paul Johnson and Karen Armstrong will be considered. Paul Johnson's (2012), *A History of Christianity,* offers both a point of entry into, and a point of critique of, the history of the Christian faith. However, the usefulness of the text is that it provides a historical context of religion and the counter-proposition of non-belief, which makes clear the broader ideological, theological and legal forces which shaped the worldview of atheism. An accompaniment to Paul Johnson's work is that of Karen Armstrong's (1993), *The History of God: The 4000-year Quest for Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. The usefulness of Armstrong's work is derived from its historical overview of the three belief systems, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, with consideration also being afforded to Hinduism and Buddhism. Of further significance is Armstrong's consideration of the emergence of non-belief, from the period of The Enlightenment (Chapter 9), through to a discussion on the future of religion (Chapter 11).

The seminal work of Tomoko Masuzawa (2009), *The Invention of World Religions*, argues that the systems of classification of world religions as a construct privileged western conceptions of what constituted religion. Masuzawa traces the emergence of the study of religion through privileging Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Idolatory (or heathenism, paganism, or polytheism). (Masuzawa 2009:59)

This study seeks to interrogate the prevailing and developing socio-political milieu which shaped the broader taxonomy of religion in South Africa as a context within which atheism emerges. These aspects will also serve to determine the extent to which the classification of religion has evolved and if such changes have led to the privileging of religious belief in real terms.

2.4. Current Debates on Atheism Internationally

To consider the emergence of atheism in South Africa; together with factors which impede or advance its pace, this study cannot be undertaken in isolation from the current key international debates on atheism. Whilst it is noted that these debates cannot form the main focus of this study, the key categories within which these debates have emerged and have been framed, have shaped the understandings, nature and growth of atheism internationally. As such, these issues and debates, as listed below, and the related literature will have a bearing on the course of this study simply because they will continue to impact on the emergence of atheism in South Africa, as they already have.

Science Vs. Religion and Creationism

This debate is carried very strongly by prominent atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss and Neil deGrass Tyson in their efforts to counter the claim by theists, particularly of the Christian faith, of a 'creator-God'. The mainstreaming of literature such as that of, Victor Stenger's (2012), *God and the Folly of Faith: The Incompatibility of Science and Religion*, Richard Dawkins' (2006), *The God Delusion*, and David Mills' (2006), *Atheist Universe: A thinking person's answer to Christian fundamentalism*, and *Origins: Fourteen Billion Years of Cosmic Evolution*, by Neil deGrasse Tyson and Donald Goldsmith (2014), have over the past 10 years, brought the debate on Science versus Creationism into sharp focus.

More importantly for this study is the need to extract from this discourse the elements which define the atheist worldview, their usefulness and the manner in which these elements and definitions shape the engagement of atheists with religious interest groups, on the one hand, and the Constitution, on the other, as the regulator of public's interests, rights and obligations. The issue of religious instruction in schools does serve to illustrate this point. South African classrooms may be no different from experiences in many other parts of the world on the subject, in that at the core of the atheist proposition is the stance that rationality and evidence-based inquiry are the best ways for a child to understand the world around her/him rather than one derived from religious instruction and sacred Scripture. Understanding this debate, therefore, has a direct bearing on how one interprets the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

The Moral Regeneration Debate

The issues of ethics and morals have long been central to the tension between the worlds of theism and atheism; at the heart of which is the question as to what should inform the construction of a moral code. Strident atheists such as Sam Harris, through his books, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (2004), *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006), *The Moral Landscape: How Science can Determine Human Values* (2010), have sought to challenge the idea that one 'cannot be good without God'. Martin Prozesky (2009), in his paper, *Is the Secular State the Root of our Moral Problems in South Africa?* questioned the position on moral regeneration as expressed by leading South African church figure, Ray McCauley. The following extract quotes MacCauley's responses which appeared in the Sunday Times-RSA 14th May 2006. To the question, '*Why are we Living in Such a Godless Society',* McCauley's responses were,

> *"It's all relative, you know. It seems like there's a lot of chaos going on in the world. Places like France, Holland, they've been shocked by the moral fibre of their nation themselves. … A godless society … that's why Holland and France, being secular states, have declined dramatically in their morality. Once you become a secular state, once you get into a place that is godless, the country becomes bankrupt ...."*   Martin Prozesky (2009)

Whilst there may be no need to establish why and how McCauley reaches his conclusion that France and Holland '*have declined dramatically in their morality*', it is sufficient to note the direct positive correlation being drawn between the acceptance of, and allegiance to, a God-figure and the moral wellbeing of a society. This position is challenged within the atheist school and the debates on the subject internationally have also offered a strong rallying ground for atheists. This debate raised by Martin Prozesky is of further significance for this study as it engages the question as to whether South Africa post-1994 is a secular state and what this may hold for the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

The works of Anthony C. Grayling will be of particular significance to this study; *The God argument: The case against religion and for humanism* (2013), *The Good Book: A Secular Bible* (2011), and *Against All Gods: Six Polemics on Religion and an Essay on Kindness* (2012). These works not only represent a push-back to the assumption of religious normativity, but Grayling throughout his works offers alternative approaches to understanding reality and what it will take to make the best possible attempt at the 'good life'. To a noticeable degree, this latter point found expression during the interviews undertaken with atheists whose lived experiences were in search of a label; lived experiences which resembled the worldview of Secular Humanism which the works of Anthony C. Grayling characterises.

Contestations to Atheism

It is acknowledged that whilst the discourse between theism and atheism is not a 21st Century creation, it could be argued that the resurgence of atheism through the New Atheist Movement after 2001, led largely by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, has heightened public awareness of the subject and the related debates. It is within this context that critical debates have been popularised into the broader public realm, South Africa not being excluded. It was considered important therefore that this study also recognised the need for the interrogation of the atheist proposition as offered by authors such as, Terry Eagleton (2009), through his work, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, David Belinski's (2009), *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions*, and Alister McGrath's, *Dawkins' God : Genes, Memes, and The Meaning of Life* (2007) and *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist*

fundamentalism and the denial of the divine (2007). In his publication, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, McGrath's (2004) critique of modern atheism is also preceded by a useful summary of the dawn of atheism from within Greek antiquity, through the period of the Enlightenment, through to the advent of modern atheism. The real grit of McGrath's publication for the purposes of this study, however, is his assessment (p.269: *Institutional Atheism – A Failure of Vision*, to p.279: *The Permanent Significance of Atheism*) of the period directly preceding the arrival of the New Atheist Movement, in which McGrath (2004:277) highlights the risks under which the future significance of atheism is placed by confining itself to an overly strident oppositional stance to religion, which favoured a *"secularist agenda, eliminating religion from the public arena."* One does not have to agree with all which McGrath advances in his book, but it will be unwise to treat his critique, as well as those of the other authors mentioned as being of no or little significance to the future of atheism as a social phenomenon.

2.5. Atheism in the African context

The task of sourcing literature on atheism in Africa proved to be more arduous than anticipated. However, due largely to the workings of online media publications access could be obtained to the painful birthing or the 'coming out' of atheism on the continent through blog posts and articles published on online media websites, as well as the sporadic engagements with the subject within the academy. Within the online blogging and social media platforms, the writings of Nigerian atheist and secular humanist, Leo Igwe will be considered. In terms of scholarly articles, the assertion by Ruy L. Blanes and Abel Paxe (2015), in *Atheist Political Culture in Independent Angola*, that atheism is a politically biased concept and one which is driven by local histories and intellectual traditions, resonated with the South African context and opened this study up to considering the interconnectedness between South Africa's own socio-political history and the nature of atheism currently emerging.

The quest for literature on atheism on the African continent did, however, elicit a vast body of work on the category of scholarship classified as African Humanism. Whilst African Humanism cannot be equated with atheism, its proximity in meaning to the idea of Secular

Humanism, as well as its evolution from African traditional belief systems to popularised constructs such as 'ubuntu'[15], warrant it significant enough to be brought into the discourse on the emergence of atheism in South Africa. The works of two key African contributors will be considered within the category of African Humanism, that of Wole Soyinka and Es'kia Mphahlele, in dialogue with commentators and scholars of these modern day African philosophers.

In the case of Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Prize winning playwright and dramatist, we are treated to a rich history of personal resistance to totalitarianism intertwined with interpretations of colonialism, alongside some of the earliest voices of African post-coloniality, such as Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. Through works such as that of Biodun Jeyifo's (2004), *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*[16], we are offered insights into the construction of an African humanist worldview by one of Africa's most influential and revered thinkers.

In an attempt to deconstruct the multiple and non-linear matrices which presented themselves during this study, between post-colonialism, religion and the African context, the work of Egbunu Eleojo (2014), *Africans and African Humanism: What Prospects?,* was significant if only for its succinct account of what African Humanism is and for its literary loopback to the core inquiry of this study on atheism in South Africa. Eleojo's paper harkens back to the primordial and pre-colonial African worldview as a means to unlock understandings of the possible future landscape of African Humanism and his paper is premised on the following;

> *'It is argued here that the undercurrent of this philosophy* [African Humanism]
> *has its basis on the African worldview which is overtly humanistic in its*
> *characterization. In other words, the African outlook is ontologically*
> *anthropocentric, since everything in it is viewed in terms of its relation to the*

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[15] 'Ubuntu' is a South African (Nguni, Zulu) term which, in its most direct interpretation, represents African Humanism. The Oxford English Dictionary lists the meaning of 'ubuntu' as, *"A quality that includes the essential human virtues; compassion and humanity."* Online reference available at, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ubuntu.

[16] In 2004, at the time of publishing, Biodun Jeyifo was Professor of English at Cornell University, US. He currently serves as Professor of African and African American Studies and of Comparative Literature at Harvard University, US. *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, Postcolonialism*, was the winner of the American Library Association's 2004 'Outstanding Academic Texts Award'.

human person. As Booth graphically affirms, "it is centered more on man than
on God or on nature"'

This extract does raise the fundamental question as to the nature, extent and necessity of a supernatural deity within the African humanistic worldview. Once again, the writings of theologian John Mbiti feature strongly in Eleojo's (2014:303) attempts to answer this question by discussing Mbiti's introduction of the creator God into the African humanist worldview, which places humankind at the centre of creation, but, according to John Mbiti, with God remaining the *"upholder and sustainer"*. Congolese scholar Mabiala J.R. Kenzo (2004:1) notes that earlier than John Mbiti's (1975), *Introduction to African Religion*, Geoffrey Parrinder (1961) recorded what had become the consensus view amongst ethnologists on Africa, that Africans were considered as being *'incurably religious'*. Kenzo (p.1) does go on to note that,

"However, with the passage to postmodernity and the rise of postcolonial
criticism, the consensus around the idea of the incurably religious African, if it
is not yet broken, is showing sign of serious strain."

Add to Mabiala Kenzo's comments the fact that this was noted as far back as 2004, before the proliferation of new media resources through online mobile technology, and the significance of this viewpoint for this study amplifies itself.

Religion in South Africa, as seen through the work of a number of scholars of religion (Adamo (2011), Kumalo (2009), Villa-Vicencio (1977)), can be regarded as a social force and resource that can facilitate, on the one hand, a 'theologized nationalism' (Charles Villa-Vicencio, 1977:1) and on the other, social transformation and cohesion. (Agbiji and Swart, 2015) In his published work, *Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement*, David T. Adamo (2011) explores the dialogue and engagement between Christianity and African Traditional Religions within a post-colonial framework and postulates, using the potent idea offered by Homi Bhabha, that religion is a key variable in the broader objective to *'gesture to the beyond'*; beyond the effects of colonialism.

When considering the works of South African author Es'kia Mphahlele, which were seminal in the development of African Humanistic thought, the question of the place and necessity of a supernatural deity in relation to the key research objective of this study, becomes all the more compelling. The need to come to terms with what Es'kia Mphahlele understood to be African humanism and African communalism is well served by the contributions of Ruth E. Obee (1994) in her Masters Degree dissertation, *A Dialogue of Two Selves: Themes of Alienation and African Humanism in the works of Es'kia Mphahlele*, and in the Doctoral dissertation of Lesibana Jacobus Rafapa's (2005), *The Representations of African Humanism in the Narrative Writings of Es'kia Mphahlele*. A key theme of Obee's publication is Mphahlele's understanding of the competing 'two streams of consciousness', the African and the Western, between the colonised and the coloniser and how this influenced the construction of his philosophy on African Humanism. (Obee, 1994:52)

A further question which arises from examining works on African Humanism is, what of African Humanism in a post-colonial context? By extension, can a refocus on the worldview of African Humanism, as articulated by a 'decolonised' Es'kia Mphahlele, mark a resurgence in *'communal being'* rather than *'individualistic doing'* and in so *being* rediscover life outside of the paradigm of religious belief? These questions, alongside the literary tools identified, are crucial for this study in the South African context, if only to self-critique any reliance on the view that the emergence of atheism and non-religion is rooted only in the trajectory of atheism from the period of the European Enlightenment or even the post-2004 New Atheism Movement which is largely rooted within Europe and America. Ruth Obee, in highlighting the place of African Humanism within the South African socio-political fabric, and indeed its place within the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s and 1980s, does raise the question of whether the same set of 'tools for criticizing' Apartheid could be deployed to critique *any imposition* which could be viewed as oppressive, even that from within the hegemony of religion.

> *"In the past African humanism, by calling attention to an indigenous culture of*
> *great richness, diversity and value and by demanding its just preservation for*
> *no other reason than its intrinsic worth, served as a useful cultural weapon*
> *with which to confront the brutality and daily humiliations of state apartheid.*

While apartheid denied the black man's humanity, African humanism affirmed it. African humanism also provided a tool for criticizing the existing order, while simultaneously reintegrating the intellectual with his African past…"

Ruth Obee (2004:195)

If the works of African philosophers such as Es'kia Mphahlele and Wole Soyinka examined the dynamics of a colonised mind, culture and society, then David Chidester's (1996) work, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa,* offers one of the more detailed examinations of the earliest colonial frontier as a site where contestations about the non-religious and indigenous belief were central in understanding what constituted religion in the colony.

Of importance to this study is Chidester's examination of the understandings of religion within the project of colonialism, initially from a position of the absence or denial of religion amongst the colonised in Africa, to the "discovery" of indigenous religion in Africa. (Chidester, 1996:15-17) Chidester notes that to understand indigenous religion within the paradigm of colonialism was to understand the term *religion* itself as a construct of colonialism. This latter point, therefore, does highlight the need to examine the extent to which the term and idea of atheism may or may not represent vestiges of the colonial mind and project. Chidester's work also offers an exploration of the *power-knowledge* nexus which was at the heart of knowledge production about religion, which would facilitate the privileging of Christian normative ideas long after the formal end of colonialism in South Africa. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff's (1991), *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa,* also stands as a pivotal contribution to the body of knowledge on the intersectionality of colonialism and religion (Christianity) in South Africa.

2.6. Atheism in India

The decision to introduce a perspective of atheism in India, or a school of thought aligned with non-religion, was motivated by two key aspects. Firstly, non-religion within India represents one of the earliest recorded philosophical traditions on the subject. Secondly,

understanding this tradition is important for this study within the South African context, which holds the largest diaspora of Indians outside of India and who have remained a significant part of the religious make up of South African society. Furthermore, this study and its undergirding literature review will also reveal the important post-colonial voices from within another post-colony, on the pushback against religious hegemony; in the case of India, largely against Hinduism and Hindu nationalism.

This component of the study offers, firstly, useful insights into the earliest thinking on non-belief which continues to influence current representations of the phenomenon in India. Secondly, a sense of the current scale and status of the phenomenon and the voices resistant to the domination of religion in India and the sub-continent, and thirdly, the need to understand the reaffirmations or resurgence of ancient Vedic philosophy within contemporary Indian society, in what Meera Nanda (2004) refers to as the *'scientificity of Hindu spirituality'*.[17] From the great expanse of literature on this subject, the writings of Meera Nanda and her critics emerged as a succinct literary link to the history on the subject as well as to the current realities on the post-colonial and human rights dimensions of non-religion in India. Furthermore, Nanda's constant efforts to place religiosity within the particular political economy of India, as was the supporting idea for her book, *The God Market* (2009), holds strong significance for this study in South Africa. Throughout Meera Nanda's work, the influence of one of India's most significant social architects is prominent, that of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 – 1956), an Indian jurist and one of the writers of the Indian Constitution. Dr Ambedkar's body of work in shaping the secular Constitution of India, as well as his own writings, have contributed significantly to the emergence of what has now grown into the philosophical school of Indian Rationalism. Within this history, the daunting task fallen unto India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru to establish a secular State amidst deeply religious peoples still holds lessons on secularism for the world today. (Marbaniang, D. (2005), Engineer, A. A. (2008)) Meera Nanda's (2001), *We are all Hybrids now: The dangerous epistemology of post-colonial populism*, also serves to highlight the

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[17] Nanda, M. 2004. *Manu's Children: Vedic Science, Hindutva and Postmodernism*. Paper presented at the 18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Lunds University, Sweden. 6-9 July 2004. Available online at,
http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/July2004Vedic_Sc_MeeraNanda.pdf.
[Accessed on 5th June 2016].

need for a critical engagement with post-colonial studies as a theoretical model through which to interpret current sociological realities as well as the need to guard against the fetishisation of this important genre of scholarship.

The decision to engage with other postcolonial voices outside of South Africa on the subject of atheism and non-belief was also intent on mitigating the potential risk of casting this study within a Euro-centric, or American mould. This point is brought home in the work of Rajeev Bhargava (2006:4) in his discussions on the contributions which are being made from 'non-Western' scholarship to the subject of secularism; a point which could be applied more broadly to the subject of atheism also.

> "For a rich, complex and complete understanding of secularism, one must examine how the secular idea has developed over time trans-nationally."

2.7. Atheism, Religion and the Law

In his article, *Discrimination: SA's courts give religious beliefs and practices a free pass,* Pierre deVos (2015) examines the question as to why this is the case and why this 'free pass' is granted by society and the courts. Irma J. Kroeze (2003) goes further than deVos in her paper, *God's Kingdom in the Law's Republic: Religious Freedom in South African Constitutional Jurisprudence*, to advocate for the consideration of the rights of those who choose not to subscribe to a faith-based belief system.

Johan Van Der Vyver's (2001) work, *Sphere Sovereignty of Religious Institution: A Contemporary Calvinist Theory of Church-State Relations*, provides a comparative survey of the constitutional provisions for religion in various countries. In his paper, *The Contours of Religious Liberty in South Africa* (2007), Van der Vyver locates the discussion within South Africa but cast within the mould of considering constitutional provisions aimed at the '*equal treatment of different religious communities*' (2007:77).

Elsewhere, the issue of religious freedom is advocated in the works of Pieter Coertzen in his articles, *Freedom of religion in South Africa: then and now 1652-2008* (2008), and

Constitution, Charter and religions in South Africa (2014). Nokuzola Mndende (2013) in her paper, *Law and religion in South Africa: An African traditional Perspective*, holds a contrary view on the place of the Constitution in relation to religion and she argues that the Constitution is biased against non-normative tradition and African traditional religions in particular.

Connecting debates about freedom of religion with constitutional provisions, Mthendekwa Mhango (2013) in his article, *Recognising Religion: Emerging Jurisprudence in South Africa*, discusses the current judicial interpretations on freedom of religion under the South African Constitution, against the Christian normative backdrop of the legal history under Apartheid. Likewise Shadrack Gutto's (2001) article, *Equality and Non-discrimination in South Africa: The Political Economy of Law and Law Making,* offers a thorough discussion on substantive equality, which has implications for the place of atheism and non-religion in South African law.

As alluded to already, in the South African context, discussions on religion, humanism, secularism, and atheism will also need to consider the African concept of Ubuntu, with a view to understanding whether the set of ideas which constitute Ubuntu could stand congruent with atheism, or in conflict with it. Related to this enquiry, literature reflecting the intersection between the social realities of Ubuntu and the law will be considered. The paper by Jennifer Y. Mokgoro[18] (1998), *Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa,* will serve as an entry into the subject. Mokgoro's understanding of Ubuntu will prove useful to this study in trying to grasp any common ground which may exist between atheism and African Humanism.

> *"It has also been described as a philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources…."*

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[18] Justice J.Y. Mokgoro was appointed as a Justice of the Constitutional Court in 1994 by President Mandela.

Jennifer Mokgoro (1998)

On the other hand, Thaddeus Metz[19] (2011) in his paper, *Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa*, critiques in dialogue with Jennifer Y. Mokgoro, the application of the philosophy of Ubuntu on grounds of vagueness, its inappropriateness for a modern industrialised society and the risks of privileging community rights over individual rights, although he is supportive of its role as a basis for 'public morality'.

> *"Summing up, according to the moral-theoretic interpretation of ubuntu, one is required to develop one's humanness by honouring friendly relationships (of identity and solidarity) with others who have dignity by virtue of their inherent capacity to engage in such relationships, and human rights violations are serious degradations of this capacity......."*

Thaddeus Metz (2011:547)

Finally, Martin Prozesky's (2009) work, *Is the Secular State the Root of our Moral Problems in South Africa?*, questions the contention that the secular state is the source of South Africa's moral decay, thus bringing the association between secularism and atheism within the South African context under scrutiny.

With regard to one of the core aspects of this study, on how the South African constitutional dispensation post-1996 has served to support or curtail the rights of those who are unaffiliated to any religious belief system, works such as that of A. Keith Thompson (2011), *Religious Confession: Privilege and Common Law*, offers insights into the Human Rights dimension of the discourse. In particular, Chapter 8 by Thompson, *Religious Confession Privilege in South Africa*, examines how the constitution evolved pre-1996 to post-1996 on the subject.

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[19] Thaddeus Metz is Professor of Philosophy at University of Johannesburg.

2.8. Atheism, Secularism and the South African Socio-Religious Context

Whilst it is acknowledged that the very subject of religious fundamentalism is comprised of a wide and varied range of interpretations and definitions, and is itself not the focus of this study, it cannot be denied that the 21st Century, particularly post the September 11th, 2001 incidents in United States of America, has witnessed a rise in religious extremism from all points on the religious and political spectrums.

Beyond just the world-changing '9/11' moment, whether one has to consider the case of Norwegian mass murderer and Christian fundamentalist, Andres Brevik, or the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) and their objectives for the establishment of the Caliphate in the Middle East, there can be little doubt that religious extremism is a global reality. Of direct concern to this study is the significance of these developments and whether the international pushback against this religious extremism, or fundamentalism, has impacted upon the critique of religion in South Africa and the advance of atheism in the country. This, of necessity, engages with the extent to which South Africa may be a secular society, constitutionally as well as in practical public life. .

Talal Asad in, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity* (2003) and *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (2009), does not see secular society as a neutral space which stifles religion, but one in which religious diversity flourishes. Although Asad does articulate the impact of colonialism, his work focuses largely on European and American experiences of secularism in the face of the transnational movement of people and religions. The challenge for this study, therefore, will be to interpret his valued contributions with perspectives informed by the South African experience.

Further to Talal Asad, the works of Charles Taylor will be considered, with the research led by his 2007 Templeton Prize winning book, *A Secular Age* (2007). In this book, Taylor goes back to the Middle Ages to trace back the transformation of society from when it was impossible not to believe in God, to the present where the God-option is one amongst many. Taylor tends to move beyond the notion that secularism and belief are two

competing worldviews, and suggests that they are simply two different sets of experiences. However, the point of engaging with this body of research will be to delve deeper into these positions to seek meaning for and application to the South African context, with a view to understanding the extent to which the notion of a decline in religiosity (secularism) and/or the mechanics of a secular state find expression in South Africa.

The third key contributor to this section of the study will be Anthony C. Grayling; philosopher and author. His book, *The God Argument: The case against religion and for humanism* (2013), succinctly carries through the three key debates which have come to characterise the divergent worldviews of religion and atheism; the theism-atheism debate, about the metaphysics of what exists and does not exist, the secularism debate, dealing with the place of religion in the public square, and the debate on the source of morality. In response to the latter debate, Grayling (2013:75) makes the point;

> *"This is where humanism enters the picture, as a deep and powerful alternative to religious morality."*

The extent to which humanism and secularism finds expression within the South African religion and law matrix post-1994 does form an important part of this study as these worldviews do share some common ground with atheism on the place of religion within the public sphere. Any consideration of the South African experience in this regard will, however, also need to take into account the particular and still relevant histories and present realities of African Traditional Religions. Finding the place of, and expressions of, atheism at these crossroads remains a key focus of this study.

South African constitutional law expert Pierre deVos, in his online blog 'Constitutionally Speaking' dated 10th June 2014 found cause to respond to the pronouncements made by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng at the Stellenbosch University 2014-Religion and Law Conference. The Chief Justice expressed the view that it would be a good thing if religion influenced "*the laws that govern our daily lives starting with the constitution*"[20] In response,

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[20] Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng (2014). *The Quest for the Common Good in Pluralistic*. (pdf). Available online at,

in his article entitled, *The law vs. religion: Lets try that again*, deVos commented on the following relationship between humanism and South African constitutionalism;

> *"For example, for some of us, humanism is an attractive non-religious source of morality, given its basis on the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and its focus on the value of critical thinking and evidence over established doctrine or faith. Given the fact that the value of human dignity is one of the founding values of our Constitution and given, further, that dignity is closely associated with the moral agency of humans, it is easy to square humanism with South African constitutionalism."*[21]

Journalist Richard Poplak (2014) in his article, *God help us: Mogoeng Mogoeng takes the Constitution to church*, joins deVos in his critique of Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng and alludes to the risks of succumbing to the dictates of religion; in this case, Christianity. Poplak notes Mogoeng's comment, and responds, *"The critical question that we are called upon to grapple with* [is] *how the interplay between law and religion could yield a product that is for the common good of all in Africa's pluralistic societies."* Given these comments the hand of the religious in constitution-tampering and its over-reach into the public space is a reality which could have implications for South African atheists. However, Poplak's responses to Mogoeng's speech points to constitutional principles which safeguard a more secular dispensation and more importantly it is reflective of a confidence in the organs of State and the judiciary to uphold such constitutional principles.

> *"his Stellenbosch address is the noisome result of a pluralistic religious environment in which the Chief Justice is free to espouse his views. He is not free, however, to follow up on them. His job is not to make laws—that's for our elected representatives. And while the Constitution may indeed require*

http://www.google.co.za/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=9&ved=0CEoQFjAIahUKEwjatpj kqI_IAhVDXBQKHSMJChA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.mg.co.za%2Fcontent%2Fdocuments%2F2014%2F05%2F29 %2Fspeechchiefjusticestellenboschspeech27may2014.docx&usg=AFQjCNFVmMz_PRDVUWmSm5W4KMXzMR kSZQ&bvm=bv.103388427,d.bGg. [Accessed on: 23 September 2015] .

[21] deVos, P. (2014). '*The law vs. religion: Let's try that again*'. The Daily Maverick, 9 June 2014. Available online at, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-06-09-the-law-vs.-religion-lets-try-that-again/#.VgOqyagaLVI. Accessed on 24th September 2015.

amendments, while it is not a document carved in rock, one thing is certain: it
doesn't need to go to church."

<div align="right">Richard Poplack (2014)</div>

Nokuzola Mndende (2013) of the Icamagu Instititute [Eastern Cape, South Africa], in her paper, *Law and religion in South Africa: An African traditional Perspective*, holds a contrary view on the place of the constitution in relation to religion; in her case, African Traditional Religions. The recounting of the positions of Nokuzola Mndende and Chief Justice Mogoeng also serve this study in highlighting the realities which impact on the emergence of non-belief in South Africa. Mndende notes,

> *"This paper will therefore be straight to the point and will not be subjected to any blind loyalty either to the Constitution as the supreme law of the country or to the government programs and their attitude towards indigenous religion. It must be noted that there is a wide gap between what is said in the Constitution and the implementation of the theories documented. The Constitution of the country as the supreme law of the land is, on some very important issues too superficial and accommodating at the expense of the previously and in-fact still disadvantaged religious communities."*

<div align="right">Nokuzola Mndende (2013)</div>

Whilst Section 15 of the South African Constitution, on "Freedom of religion, belief and opinion" may be more embracing of the category of atheism, as an expression of freedom of conscience, it will be imperative for this study to respond to the issue of atheism being classified as a 'belief'. It becomes important, therefore, to mark and define the territory under research, primarily atheism, alongside other related constructs and cognates such as, 'non-religion', 'secularity'/'secularism', and 'Secular Humanism'.

In this regard this study will be guided by the Research Note published by Lois Lee (2012), *Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-religion Studies* and Paul Cliteur's (2009) publication, *The Definition of Atheism*. This effort towards understanding the construct 'atheism' is also well assisted by Julian Baggini's (2003), *A Very*

Short Introduction to Atheism, in which he highlights the 'slippery'[22] nature of the terms which find strong currency within the field of non-religion. This obviously highlighting the extreme caution and clarity with which 'atheism' and related terminology should be understood and applied.

The need for clarity and distinctions in the terminology applies no differently to the South African context. In this regard, and particularly in relation to the association between secularity and atheism, the paper by Martin Prozesky (2009), *Is the Secular State the Root of our Moral Problems in South Africa?*, serves as a good entry point to the subject, with his definition of 'secular' as '*not subject to or bound by religious rule'*, being a position which, it could be argued, shares common ground with the worldview of atheism.

2.9. New Media and Social Networking Resources

The scope and depth of this study would have been severely compromised without the resources now available on new media and social media[23] platforms. In this regard, the resources were essentially two-fold, firstly of content in the form of literature, news reports, and video recordings of presentations and debates. Secondly, social media platforms offered this study an opportunity to undertake a survey of atheist groupings and communities to establish how these platforms may reflect the evolving trends on the phenomenon; trends which would also underpin the emergence of atheism in South Africa. The necessary research care was applied to ensure that the personal information and posts of individuals within the groupings were not brought into the discussion within this study.

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[22] Further to these resources, guidance on the use of the term 'atheism', in relation to terminology within the field of non-religion, will be supported by the discussion, *Non-religion with Lois Lee and Ethan Quillen*, published on YouTube by, The Religious Studies Project. 29th August 2016. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N312JIhVaYo. [Accessed on 7th December 2016].
During this discussion Dr Lois Lee identifies the *"problem with slippery terminology"* [2.52 minutes] in this field and the need to draw careful distinctions between the terms used, whilst recognising at the same time that the meaning between these terms may sometimes overlap.

[23] Definitions of new media and social media were drawn in their most succinct form, from the same source, The Oxford Dictionary (Online).
New media definition, *"Means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet"*.
Available online at, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/new_media. Accessed on 11th December 2016.
Social media definition, "Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking". Available online at,
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social_media. [Accessed on 11th December 2016].

To have reviewed the literary works of key contributors to this study and to then view their filmed presentations (YouTube) about their works added a special depth to this literature review, and indeed to this study as a whole. To use just three examples to illustrate the point, the book publications of Wole Soyinka, Charles Taylor and Phil Zuckerman were made all the more accessible and engaging with their video presentations[24] which served as research companions to their published works. Furthermore, many of the presentations considered in this study were recorded before university audiences and were followed by question and answer sessions which often brought out issues which were not covered in the published books; to mention nothing of the invaluable humour and humanity which also brings a richness to the total discourse of these important contributors, which books usually cannot convey. The decision for this study to constructively engage new media resources, and video material in particular, has also served to break the monochromatic and dichotomous mould into which atheism has been cast in recent years, to appeal to the visual and the cinematic in all of us, to appreciate the nuances of the subject matter better and to add greater meaning to this study's contribution to the field of atheism and non-religion.

The development of this study during the interview process and data analysis which followed gave rise to the need for the digital online medium to be itself investigated as a critical variable in the emergence of atheism in South Africa. This inquiry which necessitated Chapter 8 on, *Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa*, was once again challenged by the dearth of academic scholarship on the nexus between atheism or non-religion and digital online media in the South African context.[25] The availability of literature internationally did, however, offer sufficient support to this inquiry. Marshall McLuhan's (1994) seminal publication, *Understanding Media: The extensions of*

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[24] Wole Soyinka: WGBHForum. 14th April 2014. *Black Writers: Wole Soyinka*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfnOJpE8G4E&t=30s. [Accessed on 15th September 2016].
Charles Taylor: The New School for Social Research. 8th September 2011. *2009 - The Religious-Secular Divide: The U.S. Case -- Keynote: Charles Taylor | The New School*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd6ad7jCCFA. [Accessed on, 20th February 2016].
Phil Zuckerman: Ethics Centre. 3rd April 2014. *Society Without God? - Phil Zuckerman (4-2-2014)*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2VJGooyKtA. [Accessed on, 12th December 2016].
[25] Resources relating to the South African context were, however, obtainable on the relationship between religion and media, generally, a case in point being, Roselind I.J. Hackett (2005). *Mediated Religion in South Africa: Balancing Airtime and Rights Claims*. In, Meyer, B. and Moors, A. 2005. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*.

man, as well as Eugenia Siapera's (2012), *Understanding New Media*, guided a more general understanding of the *medium* as a new province for researching the emergence of atheism and non-religion. Two resources which struck closer to the influence of digital online media on the emergence of atheism and secularity were, firstly, the paper by Christopher Smith and Richard Cimino (2012), *Atheisms Unbound: The Role of the New Media in the Formation of a Secularist Identity*, and secondly, the video presentation by Russell Glasser (2013) entitled, *How online social media is changing the face of atheism*.

2.10. Atheism and Non-religion: Beyond the Binary Order

Early on in the interview process and once the interviews had gotten under way, it became evident that a paradigmatic shift was necessary, to move beyond approaching this study with a binary mind-set, that of understanding or interpreting the responses and perspectives of participants just through the lenses of religion on the one hand and non-religion on the other. The need to be open to understanding South African atheist identities beyond what Stephen LeDrew (2016:871) referred to as being just the *"subtraction of religion"*[26] became imperative and marked a significant point of transition for this study, into being one which is open to transcending the limitations and trappings of definitions of concepts, to truly understanding what atheists are saying about themselves which may not fit pre-established categories, particularly of the binary (religion/non-religion) nature.

Without detracting from the defined research questions and objectives for this study, it became necessary to open up to the possibility that South African atheists may be representing themselves in ways far more positive than the non-affiliation to religion or just the absence of a belief in a god may tend to suggest. Towards this end, the work of Lois Lee and the work of the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN), particularly through her publication (2015), *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular*, proved invaluable in its direct significance for this study, in sharpening the conceptual frame

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[26] This phrase was drawn from a review undertaken by Stephen LeDrew (2016) of the book by Dr Lois Lee (2015), *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular*. The book review was published in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Volume 84, to be issued on 4th December 2016. Advance access available online at, http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/84/3/869.short. [Accessed on, 20th November 2016].

of this study, i.e. of atheism's standing in relation to religion but at the same time being distinct from it, the 'contradistinction', as described by Lois Lee. (2015:21) This publication also served to bring valued clarity to the vocabulary within the areas of atheism, non-religion and secularism/secularity, contributions which impacted significantly on this study.

It was in the urging demonstrated by the lived realities of participants themselves, which reached beyond the boundaries of the theistic-nontheistic binary that the works of authors such as Phil Zuckerman began to resonate strongly with this study, through publications such as, *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion* (2012), and *Society without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us about Contentment* (2008). In many respects, this South African study mirrors Phil Zuckerman's (2012) exploration in, *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion,* of the lived experiences of Americans interviewed for his study, who had chosen not to affiliate to any religious belief system.

2.11. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter introduced the key literature and online digital resources which have contributed towards shaping the structure and dialogue of this study. As an emerging and under-researched field of study within the Humanities in South Africa, and to supplement conventional literature in the form of published books on atheism and non-religion, the insights presented via online digital platforms, including news reports, opinion pieces, and relevant video material, proved indispensible to this study. What started off as a daunting challenge, given the dearth of formal academic research on the subject in South Africa and in Africa, itself transformed into an exciting and purposeful opportunity for this study to develop a set of literary resources to guide future academic developments in this field.

The literature review achieved what was initially intended, for the resources engaged with to support an understanding of the field, so as to meaningfully fulfil the empirical components of this study through the interviews with participants, the analysis of related South African jurisprudence and consideration of social media and new media platforms. Furthermore, the literature review served to form a framework for South Africa's dialogue with itself and the academy internationally on the subject of atheism and non-religion. The

literature review reflected new trends in the field in which there is an increased focus on formally researching this phenomenon internationally with a view to sharing findings, research outcomes and new methodologies in the field. The decision of the University of Miami (USA) to establish a Chair for the study of atheism[27], and the work of the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) are just two cases in point.

In many respects, my Masters project completed on the life and works of prominent atheist Christopher Hitchens, and by extension the New Atheist Movement, served as a crucial literary foregrounding for this project, which could be read as a sequel or second South African instalment towards this field of research.

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[27] Goodstein, L. 2016. University of Miami Establishes Chair for Study of Atheism. *New York Times*, 20th May 2016. Available online at, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/21/us/university-of-miami-establishes-chair-for-study-of-atheism.html?_r=0. [Accessed on, 15th November 2016].

Chapter 3:
The Historical Antecedents to Current Understandings of Atheism

"The history of atheism matters. It matters not just for intellectual reasons-that is, because it behoves us to understand the past as fully as we can – but also on moral, indeed political grounds. History confers authority and legitimacy………Atheist history is not embodied in buildings and rituals in quite the same way, but the principle is identical."

Tim Whitmarsh (2015:7)

3.1. Chapter Introduction

Whilst a detailed account of the philosophy of atheism or its origins and development through history may fall outside of the scope of this study, it will be imperative that an understanding be reached on the principle philosophical tenets and the antecedents of atheism, as a context within which the phenomenon is to be broached. In this regard, and from amidst the voluminous literary and electronic resources on the subject, this study will draw out the key subject matter and developments which may have influenced, or which may assist in the interpretation of, the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

As important as the Age of The Enlightenment and the earliest Greek thought on atheism were for the development of current representations of atheism, a further introductory declaration will be necessary to clarify that this study has, by intent, worked beyond the circumference of just these modalities of thought and the resultant philosophical trajectories which strongly influence the nature and proliferation of atheism over subsequent centuries. This point is of consequence for this study within the South African context for two reasons. Firstly, not to expand research beyond these epochs can be limiting and alienating of other rich and diverse philosophical traditions from elsewhere, in both time and geography. Secondly, whilst recognising the undeniable significance of the period of the European Enlightenment, from an African and South African perspective the Enlightenment coincided with the period of colonialism within which religion remained a

central, directing and consolidating force. These intersections will require critical assessment within this project.

In this regard, Gavin Hyman opens up the challenge to this and any such study on atheism by making the following point.

> *"Perhaps this* [The Enlightenment] *framework produces conceptions of theism and atheism that are alike inadequate. Perhaps historical investigations will discern alternative intellectual approaches that widen horizons and create new opportunities for thought. Current public debates on atheism can often appear sterile and hidebound. Recent scholarship has suggested ways in which these debates may be opened up by their being exposed to wider vistas. But such scholarship has rarely penetrated through to the wider public domain."*
>
> Gavin Hyman (2010:x)

It is this very challenge which served as a constant guide throughout this study, to recognise antecedents of atheism from a wide range of backgrounds which may have influenced the emergence of atheism in South Africa, as well as the methodologies employed to research the phenomenon. In the African and South African locations of this study the encounter with African religious traditions and African humanism serve as constructive worldviews with which to dialogue, in attempting to understand how atheism has been, or has not been, understood.

Whether one is to follow the route of considering the root traces of atheism from within Greek antiquity or from contestations to religion and concepts of God from alternate worldviews such as that from the Indian sub-continent, the appeal to rationality appears to be a key underlying and foundational premise upon which the whole philosophical episteme of atheism is built. The following summary offered by Gavin Hyman highlights this important premise, which still finds currency within contemporary discourses on the subject.

"Once the human self has been re-conceived as the knowing subject, atheism itself becomes a conceptual possibility in a way that it would not have been previously. When the task of humanity is conceived as being to master the world through rational and scientific means, then God becomes an [sic] *hypothetical object in the world, the existence of which is, in principle, open to rational and scientific investigation. Atheism is an accomplice of modernity in that it shares its fundamental conviction that the truth of the world is, in principle, accessible to human beings through the exercise of their rational, experiential and experimental capacities."*

Gavin Hyman (2010:xviii)

It was within this conceptual mindset that the threads between the past and the present are established to position this study within the rich intellectual history of atheism as well as within the broader emerging research field of non-religion.

3.2. Atheism during Greek Antiquity

The literary archaeology aimed at discovering the earliest openly advocated position on atheism appears to be an on-going pre-occupation amongst scholars.[28] Not unlike much of Western philosophical thought, the formative ideas which gave rise to atheism as it is understood today can be traced back to Greek antiquity and contestations to the polytheism which characterised that period of human history. Both David Sedley (2013) in his publication, *From the Pre-Socratics to The Hellenistic Age*, and Jennifer M. Hecht (2004) in her work, *Doubt: A History*, present the Socratic period, and the trial of Socrates (399 BCE) in particular, as a defining timeline in the emergence of atheism within the public square, within the context of Greek antiquity. Whilst much is known of the significant place of Socrates within the history of atheism, albeit largely through the writings of his scholar Plato, this timeline does beg the question as to what might have preceded the Socratic period (469/470 BCE–399 BCE) regarding the idea of non-belief.

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[28] Sedley, D. (2014:125-134). *From the Pre-Socratics to The Hellenistic Age*.
Onfray, M. (2007:27-19). *In Defence of Atheism*.
Whitmarsh, T. (2015). *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*.

Jennifer Hecht (2004:31, 153), makes repeated references to Diagoras of Melos as being one of the earliest recorded self-pronounced atheists of the 5th Century BCE. Although what is known of Diagoras is considered anecdotal, his articulations, even when viewed from the present, reflects the core of the challenge to the worldview of the religious. He openly demystified secret religious rites practiced in ancient Greece, thereby causing others to rethink through such previously uncontested practices. Jan Bremmer in his chapter, *'Atheism in Antiquity'*, also notes the other prominent 5th century BCE philosopher, Protagoras, who questioned the generally accepted belief systems, but who Bremmer considered to be more of an agnostic; a point illustrated in the following extract of Protagoras as quoted in Bremmer's, *Concerning the Gods.*

> *"Concerning the gods I am unable to discover whether they exist or not, or what they are like in form; for there are many hindrances to knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life."*
>
> Jan Bremmer (2007:12)

Building on understandings of Diagoras, Hecht (2003:36) introduces the case of philosopher and rationalist, Anaxagoras (circa 500-428 BCE)[29], who was considered the first person to be indicted for pronouncing his atheism. It took a meteorite falling to earth in 467 BCE to convince Anaxagoras that the 'heavenly bodies', including the sun, were merely material objects devoid of any mystical or divine attributes.

> *"This was the origin of a conflict between religion and science. Here, new information, new empirical data, led to a direct challenge to the way in which the gods were envisioned."*
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> Hecht (2004:36)

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[29] An approximation in time offered by Ian Bremmer (2007:13).

Developing the case of Diagoras further, Jan Bremmer highlights the personal costs and risks which accompanied apostasy and the parodying of the gods and the institutionalisation of the mysteries of the time.[30]

> *"When he [viz., Dhiyaghuras al-mariq, or "Diagoras the heretic, or apostate"] persisted in his hypocrisy [or "dissimulation"], his unbelief and his atheism, the ruler, the wise men [or philosophers, hukama] and leaders of Attica sought to kill him. The ruler Charias the Archon [Khariyus al-Arkun (415–4)] set a price on his head [literally: "spent money," badhal] and commanded that it should be proclaimed among the people: "He who apprehends Diagoras from Melos [Maylun] and kills him will be rewarded with a large sum [badra, traditionally a leather bag containing 1,000 or 10,000 dirhams]."*

<div align="right">Jan Bremmer (2007:18-19)</div>

The significance of Jan Bremmer's recounting of the repercussions faced by Diagoras for his public stand, cannot escape an academic project of this nature as this could possibly represent the first recording of a 'fatwa' type decree for apostasy; the type popularised in recent years with the pay-off price placed on the life of British-Indian author and self-pronounced atheist, Salman Rushdie, for his publication The Satanic Verses. In its principle[31], the decree by Ayatollah Khomeini the supreme religious leader of The Republic of Iran, declared on 15 February 1989 calling for the paid murder of Salman Rushdie, is not dissimilar to that decreed against Diagoras.[32] A more recent instance of the repercussions to be suffered for challenging religion is that of the murder of journalists at the French weekly

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[30] Bremmer (2007:18-19) uses the 11th Century recordings of Arab Mubashshir, whose writing in turn, Bremmer notes, is directly or indirectly derived from Apollodorus, the Athenian historian (circa 180-120 BCE).

[31] The opening quotation to this chapter (Whitmarsh 2015:7) places current day realities such as the fatwa decreed upon Salman Rushdie within the still relevant context of the history of atheism. The case of Zineb El Rhazoui, discussed below, is further illustration of the need to connect the historical dots with the present.

[32] Drawing on the significance of the account of the case of Diagoras, and of particular relevance for this study currently, is that on the 2016 anniversary (The notoriety of the decree is only amplified by a 'fatwa' having an 'anniversary'.) of the decree, Iranian media announced the renewal of the fatwa at a renewal price of $600 000, in addition to the $3 Million set by Ayotollah Khomeini in 1989.
Reference: Independent UK. Dated 21 February 2016. '*Salman Rushdie: Iranian state media renew fatwa on Satanic Verses author with $600,000 bounty*'. Available online:
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/salman-rushdie-iranian-state-media-renew-fatwa-on-satanic-verses-author-with-600000-bounty-a6887141.html. Accessed 12 July 2016.

satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and the need for the surviving staff member of the newspaper Zineb El Rhazoui to remain under 24-hour state police guard as the most protected woman in France up to the present.[33]

Lest it be construed that atheism or agnosticism were rapidly developing phenomena in Greek antiquity, Bremmer (2007:11) paints the socio-religious landscape as one characterised by temples and representations of gods within social life and with religious rites of passage through life. Although certain ideas in opposition to gods and the dominant religious rites and practices did surface, they were not widespread and were more confined to sporadic individual voices, rather than being a widespread social phenomenon.

In his acclaimed work, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, Tim Whitmarsh highlights the reality that notwithstanding a changed time and context, we continue to ask of religion and atheism the same questions the Greeks did.

> *'We are still, in the twenty-first century, grappling with issues that are at least two and a half millennia old………..Disbelief in the supernatural is as old as the hills. Already in the fourth century BC, Plato imagines a believer chastising an atheist: "You and your friends are not the first to have held this view about the Gods! There are always those who suffer from this illness, in greater or lesser numbers."'*

<div align="right">Tim Whitmarsh (2015:1)</div>

In some respects, the South African landscape of atheism and religion, not unlike that of Greek antiquity and even the Middle Ages, resemble the reality that one could not wish away religion. (Bremmer 2007:11) As were the temples, polytheistic gods and the religion of Greek antiquity, so was the permeating influence of Christianity during the Middle Ages, and so it remains for South Africa to the present, with atheism a relatively minority force.

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[33] Emma-Kate Symons (2016). *'Zineb el Rhazoui, Charlie Hebdo survivor, discusses why the world needs to 'Destroy Islamic Fascism''*. New York Times, 18th October 2016. Available online at, http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2016/10/18/zineb-el-rhazoui-charlie-hebdo-survivor-discusses-why-the-world-needs-to-destroy-islamic-fascism/. Accessed on, 6th November 2016.

As much as this study aims to construct a broad overview of the schools of thought of atheism, by drawing on the development of divergent approaches to the subject internationally and contestations to religion from within the different faith traditions, there is no escaping the central place of Christianity within the South African religious landscape. Understanding atheism in the South African context as a response to Christian hegemony, therefore, necessitates a recovery of the earliest and most formative ideas on atheism which continues to inspire and inform the development of the phenomenon in South Africa up to the present. Gary Hyman captures this general point succinctly.

"It is also worth noting at this point that the story of the appearance of atheism is part of a wider story of the appearance of 'unbelief' in relation to Christianity. For, as we shall see, atheism is but one species of unbelief that emerged alongside, or in reaction against, other forms such as scepticism, 'free thinking' and, later, agnosticism. All these varieties of unbelief have their own distinct characteristics, but they are all part of a wider story of the gradual weakening of the hold of Christian orthodoxy on Western thought and Western society in general."

Gary Hyman (2010:1)

3.3. The Period of The European Enlightenment

"God will endure for as long as the reasons that brought him into being."

Michel Onfray (2007:31)

In his publication, *The Britannica Guide to the Ideas that made the Modern World*, Anthony C. Grayling (2008:xi) draws the distinction between the 'historical Enlightenment' [Western or European] and what remains with us today as the *'Enlightenment values'*. For this study both categories remain apposite as they continue to represent pivotal historical and philosophical experiences which impact upon the nature of atheism in the 21st century. A further introductory point of relevance made by Grayling (2008:x), is that the opposition to religion was but one facet within a broader struggle aimed at *'freeing the mind of man'*. For this study undertaken within a post-colonial theoretical framework this latter point takes on

a significance of its own within the South African context. This central and continuing aim of the historical Enlightenment in relation to religion, is expounded by Anthony Grayling.

> "The rejection of religion's hegemony over thought was the crucial starting point for the task that the philosophes urged each person to undertake: to become autonomous, relying on reason and applying scientifically-minded rationality to building better lives and societies. The Enlightenment project was accordingly a creative and a reforming one, premised on the promise and demand of freedom – most especially intellectual freedom. This is the underlying tenet of today's conception of Enlightenment values. Both facets of individual liberty are implicit: the freedom to be self-creating and self-determining in a society that respects the right to be both. In addition, the individual's responsibility to be thus included respect for the rights of others to be the same."

> Anthony C. Grayling (2008:xv)

If the Enlightenment project was a creative and reforming one which fostered the idea of intellectual freedom, then it could be argued that the seeds for the self-determination and freedom of thought which the Enlightenment came to represent, were sown during the preceding period of the Renaissance, between the 14th and 17th Centuries, which bridged the period of The Middle Ages with the Age of the Enlightenment. The two-fold significance of the Renaissance period for this study is, firstly, the birthing of new epistemological pathways, particularly through the natural sciences, which in many respects heralded the scientific advances which continue into the present. Secondly, the methods which accompanied and evolved alongside scientific inquiry, relying on empirical observation and evidential reasoning to understanding the natural world, brought into question previously held explanations which were premised upon supernatural causation. In relation to its impact on the future of, both science, religion and non-religion, African philosopher D.A. Masolo in his publication, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, summarised the period of the Renaissance as follows.

"The scientific conception of the Renaissance period removed as causes of natural events all supernatural forces. Galileo Galilei, a leading figure of the period, taught that scientific explanation consist of stating the conditions of any event and showing how the event depends upon the conditions."

D.A. Masolo (1994:6)

In many respects, grasping the Enlightenment period as an antecedent to atheism prepares for a more meaningful understanding of the development of modern atheist thought. However, as influential and foundational as the key philosophers of the Enlightenment were in the development of atheism, in the majority they (Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Voltaire (1694-1778), Thomas Paine (1737-1809)) were adherents of deism. Michel Onfray (2007, p.4) notes this point and goes further to declare that they were often vigorously opposed to atheism and the worldview of materialism.[34] Notwithstanding this critique, Onfray (2007:5) reaffirms that the Enlightenment is still viable and relevant; this being based on the core aim of the Enlightenment to apply reason towards achieving self-determination, or 'self-mastery', as articulated by Onfray.

The Stanford University publication[35], authored by Roland Benedikter, entitled *The Enlightenment*, places the Enlightenment as having originated in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and America and became popularised as 'The Age of Reason'. Benedikter (p.1) regards Immanuel Kant's (1784) definition as the best explanation of the Enlightenment,

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of

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[34] This point is also shared by Wilson (2004:26) in the, *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*,

"The Enlightenment has sometimes been presented by its critics as a period of rampant atheism, but this image seriously distorts the reality. In fact, very few enlightened intellectuals, even when they were vocal critics of Christianity, were true atheists. Rather, they were critics of orthodox belief, wedded rather to scepticism, deism, vitalism, or perhaps pantheism."

[35] Benedickter, R. Undated. The Enlightenment. Available online at, https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Enlightenment.pdf. [Accessed on, 13th July 2016]. Professor Roland Benedickter has served as guest and contract professor at various universities internationally, including Stanford.

reason, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! 'Have courage to use your own understanding!' — that is the motto of enlightenment"

Not unlike Grayling (2008), Benedickter (p.2) draws out the far reaching impact of the Enlightenment history and values on the evolution of western society, central to which was the advance and propagation of public education, on the one hand, and the separation of State and religion, on the other. In America, through the work of its founders, particularly Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Thomas Paine, the Enlightenment values found expression in the Constitution of the United States (1776). In Europe, this was also the case with the Enlightenment values finding their way through to inspiring the French Revolution in 1789. The values and principles of liberty, equality and reason, Benedickter (p.2) argues, continued to gain further expression within a context of social pluralism and have in recent years shaped the outcome of The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The latter point brings the relevance of the Enlightenment full-circle for this academic project, to the Human Rights paradigm applied to this study. Where the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UN) sets out the international architecture on human rights, with rights and obligations which also accrue to every South African, it could be postulated that the South African Constitution is, on the whole, also reflective of the Enlightenment principles of liberty, equality and reason. It is acknowledged, however, that these principles finding expression within the South African Constitution cannot be attributable solely to influences from Enlightenment philosophy, to the exclusion of other philosophies and variables specific to the African and South African contexts which may also be strongly aligned with these principles. What cannot be denied is that South Africa, on either side of the timeline of democracy in 1994, is in many respects a product of western philosophical and legal constructs which were strongly influenced by the Age of the Enlightenment.

A critical aspect of the Enlightenment period on which both Roland Benedickter (p.2) and Anthony C. Grayling are in agreement is the central place of public education in the advancement of the Enlightenment cause. For Benedickter, increasing access to public education was the key to making society more open, productive, just and equitable.

Underpinning this objective, it could be argued, is the motto of the Enlightenment as offered by Immanuel Kant to, *"Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!"*[36] In this regard the work of Denis Diderot and co-author Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, the *Encyclopédie*, stands out as the Enlightenment's commitment towards this cause. Grayling acknowledges this and expands on the strong impetus which characterised the Enlightenment period, for the ability to think and reason to be supported by education. This position, Grayling notes, still carries through to any current revival of Enlightenment thinking.

> *"Acquiring the abilities requisite for knowing, thinking, reasoning requires education. On this the historical Enlightenment and present-day subscription to Enlightenment values are as one: both see education as one of the chief keys to the best individual and social possibilities, because they both see education as a tool for the illumination and thus liberation of the mind."*
>
> Anthony C. Grayling (2008:xvii)

If education was highlighted as the one of the key change agents of the period, then the battle for the minds of children was identified as one which had to be won. One of the dominant views held by Enlightenment intellectuals was that a child is born with a mind that is essentially a blank slate ready to record knowledge and sensory experiences and transform them into ideas. It was held that if children who were impressionable could be guided and controlled, they could grow up to be more reasoned and enlightened. (Wilson (ed.) 2004:170)

Whilst it may be outside of the scope of this study to establishing any direct correlation between levels of education and degrees of atheism within a society, this issue does have a bearing on the subject under inquiry in this project. Certain scholars have declared for a direct correction between the variables of education and atheism. In his article, *Why Are Educated People More Likely to Be Atheists?*, Nigel Barber (2014) advances the position that

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[36] Wilson, E.J. (ed.) (2004:xi). *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment*.
This publication by principal author Ellen Judy Wilson and consulting editor Peter Hanns Reill is a recommended reference source on the Enlightenment.

the more educated people are, the more likely they are to be atheists; this being based on his assertion that educated people are more inclined towards sceptical inquiry and critical thought. More than just the declaration of a single scholar, an article in The Independent UK, dated 12 August 2013 reported on an in-depth study entitled, *The Relation Between Intelligence and Religiosity: A Meta-Analysis and Some Proposed Explanations*, undertaken at University of Rochester UK by Miron Zuckerman, which analysed the outcome of 63 scientific studies conducted over previous decades. Zuckerman's study concluded that, *'even during early years the more intelligent a child is the more likely it would be to turn away from religion'*. This outcome tends to affirm the position of Enlightenment intellectuals regarding the place of education within the whole Enlightenment project, particularly where it relates to the minds and lives of children. It may be plausible to deduce, therefore, that the South African experience with regard to the educational and intellectual development of children may possibly yield similar outcomes, with its concomitant impact on the emergence of atheism in the country.

For the purposes of this academic project it may need to be determined, in the final analysis, whether the emergence of atheism in South Africa adds to or subtracts from the *Enlightenment values* discussed, and as articulated by Anthony Grayling. Related to this line of inquiry will be the set of core features of the Enlightenment which have permeated society since, as expounded by Roland Benedickter (p.2), i.e., technological modernisation, secularisation, pluralisation, and multiculturalisation. It follows therefore, that the corollary also be considered, as to whether the Enlightenment values and principles advance the prevalence of atheism in South Africa or not. The manner and extent to which this study and 21st century South Africa can answer the 'Kant Question'[37], as to *'What is Enlightenment'* will possibly go beyond just an understanding of the features, principles and values of the Enlightenment, to discerning whether the philosophical modalities of the Western/European Enlightenment can actually find congruence with other African and South African [Non-Western] constructions of an enlightenment worldview, or whether the

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[37] The 'Kant Question', *"What is Enlightenment"*, was posed by Emmanuel Kant on 30 September 1784 at Konigsberg, Prussia. Reference available online at,
https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/What_is_Enlightenment.pdf. [Accessed on, 13th July 2016].

invoking of the Western/European Enlightenment worldview is actually counterproductive.[38]

The phenomenon of atheism, specifically, although remaining in the minority during the Enlightenment, steadied its moorings from within the advance of scientific inquiry and an increasing focus on education. The key Enlightenment figures within these fields, such as Isaac Newton and Pierre-Simon de Laplace, although deists, contributed significantly through scientific modelling and theorising, to the renunciation of any direct divine intervention in the mechanics of the universe and the natural order; de Laplace more than Newton, in this case. (Wilson (ed.) 2004:26)

Atheism during the Enlightenment also found support from within the school of thought on materialism, which denied constructs such as the spirit and soul, which were central to the dominant religious context of the time – Christianity. Wilson (ed.)(2004:26) notes that this worldview, coupled with the advances in the sphere of science and education set in motion, at least amongst those who were recognised as avowed atheists such as Denis Diderot for example, the critiquing of the enterprise, structures, politics and power dynamics of religion, thereby amplifying the demand for the separation of religion and State. Anthony Grayling reaffirms this trajectory to non-belief through education and science.[39]

> *"By asserting that education in the sciences and humanities was the basis of good individual lives and good societies, Diderot was repudiating faith or any submission either to traditional pieties or present tyrannies as alternatives"*
>
> Anthony C. Grayling (2008:xvii)

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[38] With colonialism and imperialism being forever embedded within South African history, the Western/European Enlightenment project will always come under critique, as being in competition with what may be seen as African and South African models of Enlightenment. It is encouraging, therefore, to note the comments of Roland Benedickter (p.4), that in an increasingly globalised civil society, these two worldviews are showing signs of interweaving and developing a *"more transcultural concept of global Enlightenment appropriate for the 21st century"*.

[39] Bullivant and Ruse (2014:177) in their publication, *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, also affirm the point,
> *"Full-blown and systematic atheism may have been a minor stream of Enlightenment thought, but its appearance changed the future of European thinking. John Toland's Letter to Serena (1704), published in London (and translated into French by Holbach in 1768), was foundational to the positive, categorically naturalist side of atheism: that nothing in nature required recourse to God for explanation."*

Having considered the period of the Enlightenment and its contributions to atheistic thought, it is imperative that this study, set within an African context, considers the impact of the Enlightenment on African thought and how this might have affected, or still does impinge upon, dispositions towards religion or non-belief. Notwithstanding the set parameters of this research project, which may limit the extent of research into African contestations to the Enlightenment project, it is noted that for various reasons African protestations were registered against the European Enlightenment worldview, thereby denting, if not breaking, the totalising international sweep of the Enlightenment.

It has to be noted unequivocally, that the Age of Enlightenment of the 17th-18th centuries represented and continues to represent one of the most significant antecedents to the development of atheism internationally and to the emergence of the phenomenon in South Africa.

3.4. Atheism, African Humanism and the Enlightenment

At the heart of the critique of the European Enlightenment by African scholars and philosophers were, on the one hand, the interwoven relationships between European colonialism, the Enlightenment project and Capitalism, and on the other, the views held by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment (19th century) philosophers about Africans, views which shaped the nature of colonialism itself and the place of the religious (Christian) missionary enterprise in Africa. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (1991:35) capture the encounter of these conflicting worldviews as follows.

> *"It was also because of its* [colonialism's] *cultural origins in enlightenment humanism and market capitalism, which made the everyday the profane portal to self- fulfillment, even to eternity. The Nonconformists would confront African peoples committed in a very different way to life's pragmatic details, to the unending play of divinity and death in human experience."*

Simon Gikandi (2011:5), in his work, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, draws on the work of scholar of the Enlightenment, Dorinda Outram's interpretations of Immanuel Kant's works

and notes that the whole Enlightenment proposition was incongruent with the position in which Africa and Africans found themselves during the Enlightenment and colonial period. According to Gikandi (2011:4), at the heart of the Enlightenment project was the *individual* (subject) who was free of immediate circumstantial constraints and who could engage in autonomous self-reflection to reason and liberate themselves out of the subjugation of tradition and religion; backed by a reliance on science and rational inquiry. If this was the premise then, according to Gikandi, the Enlightenment and European post-Enlightenment thinkers paid no regard for the circumstances of Africans and their place within the project internationally.

> *"That the mass of African slaves who drove the European economies of the time were not free was not a matter that bothered Kant or his British interlocutors, such as David Hume, because the Black was excluded from the domain of modern reason, aesthetic judgement, and the culture of taste. Kant and Hume, often considered to be rivals in the battle to define the contours of reason and taste, would still find concurrence when it came to the question of an alleged Black inferiority, either in morals or rationality."*
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> Simon Gikandi (2011:5)

Simon Gikandi[40] expounds on the point by quoting an extract from Immanuel Kant's engagement with David Hume (1711-1776) who was a leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment and whose views, Gikandi notes, was not as isolated as may appear to be the case, but which were commonplace amongst European intellectuals. Whilst the extract makes for difficult reading against the best laid plans for the Enlightenment developed above, it does strike at the heart of the in-built prejudices and weaknesses inherent within the Enlightenment, particularly from the European wing. Of critical importance to this study is the present-day re-examination of views such as those of David Hume and Immanuel Kant.

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[40] Simon E. Gikandi, of Kenyan descent, is Professor of English at Princeton University, USA.

To bring the matter right up to date in South Africa, October 2016, Joel Modiri in his article, *'In the Fall: Decolonisation and the rejuvenation of the academic project in South Africa'*, raises the issue of the racism which was evident in the work of certain proponents of the European Enlightenment project, particularly Immanuel Kant, thereby highlighting the obvious, yet oft ignored, need to re-read the depth and breadth of a phenomenon including the motivations of its key proponents.

> *"Most acts of decolonisation – at least in the intellectual and conceptual domain – begin with a serious undoing and ruthless critique of the colonial and racist assumptions embedded in Western canons of knowledge, which of course requires actually reading the racist Kant, the Occidental missionary diaries, the Eurocentric Marx, the colourblind Rawls."*
>
> Joel Modiri (2016)[41]

To return to the difficult extract from the work of Kant (1764), the question which is being brought into focus is whether the resurgence of these issues into the present has any bearing on the growth or representations of atheism in South Africa.[42] Simon Gikandi (2011:5) notes the following extract from the writings of Kant.

> *"The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feelings that arise above the trifling. Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though some continually rise aloft from the lowest rubble, and through special*

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[41] Modiri, J. 2016. In the Fall: Decolonisation and the rejuvenation of the academic project in South Africa. *The Daily Maverick*, 16th October. Available online at, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2016-10-16-in-the-fall-decolonisation-and-the-rejuvenation-of-the-academic-project-in-south-africa#.WCQRz4VOLIX. [Accessed on, 20th October 2016.] Joel Modiri is a lecturer in Jurisprudence and Legal Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, Law Faculty.

[42] This aspect will be developed fully in Chapter 8 of this study, *'Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa'.*

gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between
these two races of men, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental
capacities as in colour."[43]

In a similar vein, and in direct reference to the constituent elements of the European Enlightenment, D.A. Masolo, a contemporary of Simon Gikandi, sees the science and technology of the Enlightenment project as the enabling armoury of European expansionism in Africa.

"....as the creators of negritude would later put it, a tough, individualistic,
competitive, violent, and materialist European civilisation armed with science
and technology was at war against the sweet and human but weak African
civilisation. In other words, the two formed a thesis and antithesis vis-á-vis
each other."

D.A. Masolo (1994:11)

One of the clearest South African responses to this Euro-centrism of the Enlightenment project was from philosopher and African Humanist, Es'kia Mphahlele. One of the foremost African interlocutors on the work of Es'kia Mphahlele over the past decade has been Lesibana Rafapa.[44] In his doctoral dissertation, Rafapa (2005:2), in dialogue with the work of Mphahlele, takes his critique of this Enlightenment Euro-centrism as being a type of racism. As to how public intellectuals such as Mphahlele responded to the place of religion within the Enlightenment and the European humanist philosophy of the period, Rafapa notes the following important distinction.

'African humanism differs with scientific humanism in its outlook on religion
(Mphahlele suggests) because (being originally a religious state of mind)
today "African humanism still has a religious base" with morality remaining
the primary criterion to assess the ethics of conduct ("The Fabric" 154-55). In

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[43] An extract from Immanuel Kant (1764), '*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'*.
[44] Lesibana Jacobus Rafapa is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of English Studies at the University of South Africa.

other words, while both European and African humanism frown upon intrusion by extraneous authority in their human affairs, such rejected authority includes religion in the former while in the latter it ex[c]*ludes it.'*

Lesibana Rafapa (2005:19)

The two striking aspects of this extract are, firstly, acknowledging the significance of Mphahlele's declaration that religion is foundational to African humanism and secondly, the inference which could reasonably be drawn that, according to Mphahlele, African humanism derives its morality from this "religious base".

Further to the Tleane (2014) critique developed below on the famed John Mbiti comment about Africans being 'notoriously religious', Agbiji & Swart (2015)[45] in their engagement with Mbiti's (1990) renowned publication, *African Religions and Philosophy*, strike closer to the essence of Mphahlele's viewpoints with regard to religion and the African worldview.

This extract from Agbiji and Swart (2015:2) focuses on one of the core research objectives of this academic project; to determine whether the emergence of atheism represents, in itself, a contestation to this interpretation of the African worldview and the central place of religion within it.

> *"John Mbiti, for his part, has argued that it is difficult to define religion. He argues that it is even more difficult to define religion in the context of African traditional life. Despite this difficulty, he asserts that for Africans, religion is an ontological phenomenon: it pertains to the question of existence or being (Mbiti 1990:15). Religion has rules about conduct that guide life within a social group and it is often organised and practised in a community, instead of being an individual or personal affair. All African societies view life as one big whole and religion permeates all aspects of life."*

Agbiji and Swart (2015:2)

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[45] The paper by Obaji Agbiji and Ignatius Swart entitled, *Religion and Social Transformation in Africa: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective*, was presented at the October 2013 University of Ghana, Legon Conference: "Politics, Probity, Poverty and Prayer: African Spiritualities, Economic and Socio-political Transformation,"

The striking aspect about the Agbiji and Swart paper is its complete and uncritical buy-in to the John Mbiti mind-set on African religiosity. In fact the paper goes further to reinforce the normative assumption that religion in Africa is central and indispensible to every aspect of African life. This viewpoint is given further muscle in a directly South African manner by way of internationally renowned Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1995, p.xvi) who noted,

> *"The African world view rejects popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual. All life is religious, all life is sacred."*[46]

Interestingly, D.A. Masolo (2010:40) notes the remarks of renowned African author Chinua Achebe in this regard also that, *"religion is one thing so fundamental to any community's culture that it just cannot be replaced by another"*[47], which once again reinforces the hegemony of religion on the continent. This overarching pervasiveness of religion as a social determinant, through such pronouncements by prominent personalities offers a glimpse as to what atheism is up against. A further more global case in point is the statement issued by American President Bill Clinton in 2000, which was relayed across the world, announcing the first draft of the Human Genome Project. World renowned scientist Francis Collins, who was present with Clinton in the White House at the time of the statement, relays his account of the announcement.

> *'"Today," he said, "we are learning the language in which God created life. We are gaining ever more awe for the complexity, the beauty, and the wonder of God's most divine and sacred gift."*
>
> *Was I, a rigorously trained scientist, taken aback at such a blatantly religious reference by the leader of the free world at a moment such as this? Was I tempted to scowl or look at the floor in embarrassment? No, not at all.'*
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> Francis Collins (2006:2)

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[46] As quoted in, Roux, C. 2006. Children's spirituality in social context: a South African example. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11(1), 151-163.
[47] Masolo, D. A. 2010. *Self and community in a changing world*.

The Agbiji and Swart paper, published as recently as 2015 from within a South African institution (UNISA), and against an African socio-religious and political landscape which is rapidly changing, brings into sharp focus both the insular mind-set of the academy as well as its inability to question the current validity of the Mbiti premise[48]. According to Agbiji and Swart, within this *'created order'*[49],

> *"The importance of religion includes the fact that religion is the root from which the different branches of life sprout and grow and by which they are continually nurtured. Religion concerns the deepest root of human existence and integrates human life into a coherent whole"*
>
> Agbiji and Swart (2015:14)

Whilst there is no denying the importance of religion within the fabric of African life, this claim by Agbiji and Swart (2015:14)[50], and their continued advocacy for the entrenchment of religion and the religious within the public sphere, as the *'bastions of morality'* (2015:14) only serves to reinforce the hegemony of religion within African society; a position which comes into direct critique within this study. In the context of publications such as this and given the fantastic claims made as to the indispensible role of religion in positive social

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[48] Tleane, C. 2014. Why are we 'notoriously religious'? *The Sunday Independent*, 28 September. Available online at, http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/why-are-we-notoriously-religious-1.1756867#.VZqjWqgaLmI. [Accessed on, 6th July 2015].
In his September, 28, 2014 article, *Why are we 'Notoriously Religious'*, Console Tleane explores the idea of Africa as a continent of deeply religious people, through his reflections on the September 2014 church building collapse at The Synagogue Church of All Nations in Nigeria, owned by Pastor TB Joshua. Of significance, Console Tleane recounts the work of the renowned African theologian, John Mbiti, to whom the phrase, *'African people are notoriously religious'* (1969) is often attributed; and he goes further to note the adoption of the phrase in 1971 in the writings of theologian, Barney Pityana. Whilst Console Tleana does not appears to be in disagreement with this sentiment, he is critical of having this view remain unchallenged and points to the dangers of blindly and cultishly following religious leaders.
[49] *'created order'*; two words which demonstrate the theological framework within which the Agbiji and Swart paper is carried and applied in this instance with academic abandon.
[50] It is further noted that it is of no minor significance that this paper is authored by a doctoral graduate (Dr Agbiji) and a senior professor (Professor Swart) who are of very influential social and academic standing; this therefore bringing under closer scrutiny the numerous and fantastic claims made in this paper, much of which follows closely on the work of scholars and active clergy such as Dr Ogbu Kalu.

> *"Religion creates hope and optimism in spite of failed governments and economic institutions in Africa. African Christianity, through African Pentecostalism, offers a typical example of the enormous hope that extends from religion to the society. Hope and optimism are mediated through emphasis on the power of the Word of God in spiritual formation and in resisting evil forces."*
>
> (Agbiji and Swart 2015:10)

transformation, the key question which is brought into focus is whether the claims made of how powerful and widespread religion is in Africa, are themselves self-refuting claims constructed within a circular set of arguments, when matched up against the realities on the ground of rampant poverty and corruption.

Not entirely dissimilar to the African humanism of Es'kia Mphahlele, a counterpoint to the position advocated by Agbiji and Swart (2015) can be found in the life and work of African author and public intellectual, Wole Soyinka. As intellectually gripping as Wole Soyinka's body of work is, the demands of this project will require focus on his articulations on religion within the context of African humanism, as he understood it. For this, the work of Celucien L. Joseph (2015) has proven invaluable. Joseph (2015:19) makes the point that Soyinka's humanism is informed by the wisdom and principles of both the worldviews of African indigenous humanism and African traditional religion and spirituality, and that Soyinka's views in this regard were derived from belief systems of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Furthermore, this African indigenous spirituality is viewed by Soyinka as being the humanism for the 21st century.

Wole Soyinka, according to Joseph (2015:24) rejected the 'absolutism and dogmatism' of religion as this was seen to be the root cause of violence and a threat to human advancement, this becoming for Soyinka the central social issue of the 21st century, replacing the issue of 'Race' which in his view dominated the 20th century.

Notwithstanding his strong critique of religious extremism and religion as a hotbed for violence, Soyinka did not negate the idea of the *spiritual being* at the heart of African humanism and African indigenous religiosity which he was not disinclined towards. As Joseph summarises,

> "the essay presents Wole Soyinka as a religious critic and radical theistic humanist who affirms the contributions of African religions in the project of human solidary, open-mindedness, peace, and collaboration."
>
> Celucien L. Joseph (2015:19)

Soyinka was, however, unapologetic in his position that the demise of religion in the world would leave him a very happy person.

> "If religion was to be taken away from the world completely, including the one I grew up with, I'd be one of the happiest people in the world. My only fear is that maybe something more terrible would be invented to replace it, so we'd better just get along with what there is right now and keep it under control."
>
> Celucien Joseph (2015:27)

Celucien Joseph offers an exposition on Wole Soyinka's disposition to religion within his construction of African humanism. An important feature of this account, and whilst fully recognising Soyinka's denunciation of religion, his (Soyinka's) critique often falls at the door of religious extremism and its violent manifestations, without extending to a critique of its core texts, doctrines and systems of belief.[51] Joseph notes Soyinka's responses to the 2012 Boko Haram massacre of Nigerian students in Mubi, Nigeria.

> "Soyinka, having denounced the murderous orgy, argues that it is actually "the psychopaths of faith" who are guilty of bringing disrepute to the religion of Islam, whose mission, in the name of their prophet, constitutes the "commission of crimes that revolt our very humanity."
>
> Celucien Joseph (2015:28)

Of significance for this study is whether the emergence of atheism in South Arica reflects any alignment with the African humanism of Wole Soyinka or Es'kia Mphahlele and whether present-day representations of non-belief and the renunciation of religion in South Africa also marks a renunciation of the absolutist and fundamentalist elements of the religious

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[51] This point is supported by an extract from Wole Soyinka's (2004:7), *Climate of Fear Reith Lecture – 3: Rhetoric that Binds and Blind'*. Available online at, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/20040421_reith.pdf. [Accessed on, 17th July 2016].
> *"The fault is not in Religion, but in the fanatic of every religion. Fanaticism remains the greatest carrier of the spores of fear and, the rhetoric of religion, with the hysteria it so readily generates, is fast becoming the readiest killing device of contemporary times."*

traditions which finds expression in Africa, including those from within African Traditional Religions.[52]

In a much broader yet pertinent sense, the question at the heart of what became popularised as the *'Mamdani affair'* in 1997 remains with us to this day. The 'affair' related to the resistance which Mahmood Mamdani received towards the curriculum he had developed for Africa Studies whilst he was Professor of the Centre for African Studies at University of Cape Town, South Africa.

The central question which guided Mamdani's development of the curriculum was, *"how to teach Africa in a post-apartheid academy?"*[53] Although there may be no need within this study to explore the detail of the Mamdani affair[54] and the role of the University of Cape Town therein, it remains consequential to this study that the questions at the centre of the controversy remains to be answered by the academy in South Africa. Firstly, how to address the hegemonic control which the Christian religion has held over universities and secondly, how do we deconstruct and reconstruct a new non-Eurocentric tradition of African Studies in a post-Apartheid and truly post-colonial sense.

Responses to these questions, the latter in particular, arrives by way of Mamdani himself who does not appear to have relented on advancing his ideas on *'how to teach Africa'.* In his article entitled, *'Africa's post-colonial scourge'* (2011)[55] Mahmood Mamdani cautions against an uncritical reading of historical developments such as the Enlightenment as an exclusively European experience, and pushing to the margins similar thinking in Africa and

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[52] In his publication, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*, Boidun Jeyifo (2003:76) does temper this point and notes,

> *"the essay* [The Credo of Being and Nothingness] *implicitly but forcefully critiques the unacknowledged theological or doctrinal predisposition toward exclusivism in all the dominant monotheistic religions of the world, a predisposition which, in Soyinka's opinion, haunts these religions' efforts at ecumenism and mutual tolerance."*

[53] Rhodes University. 2015. Anger over Rhodes vindicates Mamdani. Available online at, https://www.ru.ac.za/history/historynews/angeroverrhodesvindicatesmamdani.html. [Accessed on 15th November 2016].

[54] For a detailed account of the 'Mamdani affair' reference could be made to the statement issued by Professor Mamdani himself entitled, Is African Studies at UCT a New Home for Bantu Education?. Available online at, http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/mamdani.pdf. [Accessed on, 15th November 2016].

[55] Mamdani, M. 2011. Africa's post-colonial scourge. *Mail and Guardian*, 27th May 2011. Available online at, http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-27-africas-postcolonial-scourge. [Accessed on, 15th November 2016].

elsewhere; insights which are of vital importance to this study given the development trajectory of atheism traced through the Enlightenment period within this study.

> "Our ambition should be to challenge the foundations of the prevailing intellectual paradigm, which has turned the dominant Western experience into a model that conceives of research as no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform to or deviate from that model. This dominant paradigm dehistoricises and decontextualises other experiences, whether Western or non-Western."

> Mahmood Mamdani (2011)

3.5. Chapter Conclusion

The need to locate this study within a long and rich history of scholarship on atheism and non-religion offered a context within which to develop a South African response to the subject, through a hybrid post-colonial and human rights paradigm. The arguments presented through the ages on the atheism *vs* theism debate resonate into the present and still offers current scholarship the framework, the vocabulary, and the rigour from which to develop new articulations and methodologies on the subject. The challenge facing a study of this nature within a South African context, however, is how to weave a set of constructs on atheism and non-religion which are at least as old as the oldest recorded thoughts on philosophy, into a new and emerging area of formal scholarship. This study holds to the position that one of the surest ways of anchoring down this new and exciting discipline within the academy is to place the current analysis on the subject within the context of its historical development; as presented in this chapter.

This chapter sought to briefly explore the thread of atheism from Greek antiquity, through the period of the Enlightenment (17th-18th Centuries) in Europe into current South Africa and Africa and in so doing, present a critique of the Enlightenment as well. Irrespective of the nature and extent of the critique of the Enlightenment period, or Greek philosophical thinking on atheism and non-religion for that matter, there is no denying the influence

which these histories have had on the development of the subject of atheism, to the present.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

4.1. Chapter Introduction

This study will be set within a dual theoretical framework; a post-colonial framework and a human rights framework. This approach is motivated by the need to reach back into the history of religion and non-belief within the colonial period in order to understand any post-colonial contestations to hegemonic religion in post-Apartheid South Africa. Bearing in mind the core focus of this study, on the emergence of atheism in South Africa, the application of the human rights theoretical framework is motivated by the need to examine 'religion'; 'religious freedoms' and 'freedom of conscience' in the context of contemporary human right discourses. Both these paradigms were considered appropriate and necessary to interrogate, in the first instance, the historical and residual effects of the colonialism-religion complex on the emergence of atheism in South Africa, and in the second, the evolution of the rights of atheists in both pre and post the country's democratic dispensation.

4.2. The Post-Colonial Theoretical Framework:

"The Empire Writes Back"[56]

The post-colonial theoretical framework offers a critical understanding of the history of colonialism and its interconnectedness with religion – and opens new accounts related to the suppression of atheism and non-religion and the privileging of Christian religiosity during the colonial period. Drawing on the works of, Edward Said, Robert Young, D.A. Masolo, Anne Stoler and Mahmood Mamdani, among others, the theory underpinning the constructs and school of thought on post-colonialism will be explored, thereby demonstrating how the dynamics of power and privilege over what constitutes morality, the truth and the just city, continues well beyond the formal demise of colonialism. In the latter regard, and within the pre-Apartheid South African context, the Afrikaner worldview as well as the liberation struggle were both characterised by Christian normative ideals, but for reasons which were

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[56] An idea drawn from the chapter by Aruna Srivastava, *"The Empire Writes Back": Language and History in Shame and Midnight's Children*, in the Book by Adam, I and Tiffin, H. (eds.) (1990). *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism.*

diametrically opposed. An understanding of this socio-religious backdrop will be necessary to interpret the period post-1948 and the onset of South African post-coloniality.

Robert Young (2003:7), in stating the overarching claim made by post-colonial studies, that all people on earth have the right to the same material and cultural well-being, also notes that there is no single set of defined static ideas which constitute post-colonial theory, but that it is about a set of ideas and practices in relation with one another, which is always in flux, and often in tension as well as in harmony. Young goes further to explain that post-colonialism is often viewed as being *disruptive* as it challenges and threatens privilege and power.

Therefore, to understand the deeper dynamics of power and privilege to which post-colonial theory mounts its challenge and disruption would require that the widely asserted view of Africans as being innately religious be contested. In this study, the view that Africans are irredeemably religious is considered as being essentialist and is re-examined and challenged within a post-colonial critique of the historical empire of religion in South Africa.

This interpretation of the post-colonial framework introduces an exciting dimension to this study in that alongside the achievements of political independence from the structures of colonialism, the work of understanding the dynamics of power and privilege is on-going. More specific to the purposes of this study is the need to understand the place of religion and non-religion within the workings of these power relations between the State and civil society and within civil society, generally. In the context of this study, and inherent within the post-colonial theoretical framework is the need to continually critique the paradigms and dominant power structures which stand opposed to '*the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being*' to which Robert Young (2003, p.7) refers. It could be argued that, in many respects, there can be no complete emancipation from the mind-set and enterprise of colonialism, without a clear understanding of the place of religion and Christianity in particular, through which colonialism derived much of its authority. (Masolo, 2010:206)

Towards this end, it will be necessary to acknowledge the two important points advanced by Masolo with regard to the post-colonial African landscape. Firstly, that there was no uniformity or agreement on the best type of political dispensation for the newly independent post-colonial African state. (Masolo, 2010:105) Secondly, and as is becoming more and more apparent into the politics of the present, that the African post-colonial ruling class may always act in the best material, political and cultural interests of all citizens of the independent African state, may be an assumption too dangerous to contemplate. In this regard, Masolo notes,

> *"With time, it has become evident that the implication of the anticolonial argument—that political freedom is a necessary condition of a society's collective right to self-determination—has not become obvious to many as having implications for the freedoms and rights of individuals and groups in a politically liberated (postcolonial) state. Instead, the former "liberators" and "protectors" of the masses from the ideological and socioeconomic apparatuses of the colonial systems have become the new class of persecutors and thieves of the public wealth from their own fellow citizens."*
>
> D.A. Masolo (2010:105)

The post-colonial theoretical framework will be used to examine the history and underlying causes which contributed to the privileging of religion in post-Apartheid South Africa, as well as contemporary African ascription to atheism and non-religion as a form of anti-colonialism, against representations of Africa as, at best religious, and at worst superstitious and pre-modern.

For a study located in Africa which adopts a post-colonial paradigm the question of the place of Arab expansionism in Africa in relation to European colonialism, would require a response. From a South African location the response is perhaps simpler than would have been the case for a North African account. In any event, besides the fact that Arab expansion cannot be equated with European colonialism, the historical record of Afro-Arab relations, particularly from the onset of official political de-colonisation in 1957 in Ghana, was characterised by a response to the colonial project which could be regarded, on the

whole, as being unified. (Adeoye A. Akinsanya, 2010:12) In recognising the very distinct nature of post-colonial studies as a response to European colonialism, this study takes the predominance of European colonialism and its impact on the South African socio-religious context as its focus for this academic project.

The application of a dual theoretical framework for this project is also motivated by the position that the colonial enterprise was, in essence, an affront to the most basic human rights of the colonised. Masolo summarised the point as follows.

> *"Throughout the continent, many Africans from many walks of life have argued, in their diverse yet almost always very strong ways (and rightly), that colonialism was an unjust system because it denied us what belonged to us as a basic human attribute; we framed colonialism, in all its manifestations, as an inhuman system, meaning that it was a system whose goals and objectives directly denied its victims fundamental (human) rights as individuals and as nations."*
>
> D.A. Masolo (2010:123)

It must be highlighted that the post-colonial theoretical framework finds its full form in the more comprehensive discussions undertaken throughout this study when dealing with issues such as, African humanist thought and the construction of atheist identities in a post-colonial and digital media context. As such, the ideological threads of both the post-colonial and human rights theoretical frameworks weave their way throughout this study and accordingly, cannot be confined to this section alone but derive their significance through the development of this study.

No scholarly effort which adopts a post-colonial paradigm to examine the intersections between colonialism and religion in South Africa can be complete without consideration of the devastating critique of colonialism's Christianity by Black Consciousness leader Stephen (Steve) Bantu Biko (1946-1977). This study's engagement with Steve Biko's writings and pronouncements on religion and Christianity in particular, is purposed on briefly reassessing, both, his critique of Christianity as well as the nett effect of his pleadings to the

South African fraternity of 'Black' Christian clergy to recalibrate their theology to respond to the real disenfranchisement, subjugation and oppression of 'Blacks' under Apartheid South Africa. This study aims to introduce a perspective from the viewpoint of atheism and non-religion to the discourse on Steve Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy in relation to religion.

To facilitate the discussion further, focus will be held on the publication by Tinyiko (2008) entitled, *May the Black God Stand Please!: Biko's Challenge to Religion*[57] which offers a succinct synthesis of Steve Biko's critique of religion and his proposed agenda (p.120) for Christianity to redevelop its relevance for the South African 'Black' community. Maluleke draws on Biko's public lectures and essays, particularly, *We Blacks* to demonstrate that despite his damning criticism of Christianity as a *"cold cruel religion"*[58] Biko did not argue for a eradication of religion or Christianity but for a reconfiguration of its theology; a call to clergy to *"redefine the message of the Bible . . . to make it relevant to the struggling masses"*. (Maluleke 2008:121) Tinyiko Maluleke also makes the following assertion.

> *"Biko's basic problem with Christianity was not so much its given content as it was the refusal of those who peddled it to adapt it to local needs and conditions. Worse still, it was used as the very instrument of deculturization and colonization. He was therefore fearful that it was fast becoming irrelevant—especially for the young."*
>
> Tinyiko Maluleke (2008:119)

The take-up of Biko's call to the Clergy gave rise to South Africa's Black Theology. It would be reasonable to deduce, therefore, from the account offered by Maluleke, and indeed as is evident from the works of Steve Biko themselves as cited, that the essential tenets of the

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[57] Published in, Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, N.C.(2008). *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko.*

[58] The full extract reads,

> *'Elsewhere he calls Christianity a "cold cruel religion" whose early proponents preached "a theology of the existence of hell, scaring our fathers and mothers with stories about burning in eternal flames and gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone. This cold cruel religion was strange to us but our forefathers were sufficiently scared of the unknown impending danger to believe that it was worth a try. Down went our cultural values!"'*
>
> Tinyiko Maluleke (2008:120-121)

Christian faith were not found to be problematic, provided it was 'redefined' to be more 'relevant' to the South African context and that even the Black Consciousness philosophy held out hope for the hand of Christianity in the emancipation of South Africans. Even without the benefit of 45 years hindsight the question protrudes from this part of Steve Biko's legacy as to why he would not consider altogether abandoning that which he was so devastatingly critical of in the first place. Whilst respecting the points advanced by Maluleke, from this study's post-colonial frame of mind and to push on a door left open anyway by Biko's strong critique of Christianity, it is argued that Steve Biko could not see beyond the context of the Christian normativity within which he was immersed. One of the real and lasting and manifest successes of the colonial project against which this study's non-religious, post-colonial critique mounts its challenge is that this very Christian normativity also impacted the mind of one of South Africa's greatest thinkers, Steve Biko.

This study will also appeal for the reopening of South Africa's chapter on Black Theology from a perspective of non-religion within the academy as a path to reconsidering and constructively critiquing the relevance which Steve Biko sought for religion generally and Christianity in particular, for the country. It would appear that the urgency for such research is already upon us, especially in the light of the recent resurgence and regrouping within Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism flanks in South Africa which have already shown signs of reasserting the cause for the full emancipation of all South Africans from the vestiges of colonialism.

4.3. The Human Rights Theoretical Framework

The human rights theoretical framework, in the context of this study, focuses on how rights to freedom of conscience are either advanced or limited by drawing on *international covenants, conventions and declarations.* In this regard the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 18, "*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion*", and the South African Constitution – Section 15, "*Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.*", makes for a sound starting point and

justification for the application of the human rights theoretical framework for this study.[59] The engagement with works of scholars in this section of the study will be aimed at establishing the degree to which the principles of *equality*, *universality, accountability and enforceability* are upheld within South African jurisprudence and public life.

This discussion, however, proceeds from the view that in the South African context there appears to be an implicit limitation to the application of the principles of *universality, accountability and enforceability* with this limitation being confined to the area of freedom of religion, without the principles being explicitly extended and applied to the category of atheism and non-religion as well. The primacy of the human rights theoretical framework within this study is derived simply from this very appeal for the rights which flow from the principles of equality, universality, accountability and enforceability to be afforded to those who choose not to align with any faith-based religious belief system, in no different measure to that accorded the religious. Shadrack Gutto (2001), in his paper, '*Equality and Non-discrimination in South Africa: The Political Economy of Law and Law Making*' noted the follow views in this regard.

> *"The conceptual framework and understanding of substantive equality goes beyond the parameters of the constitutional equality clause. It treats the subject matter of equality as a central constitutional value and equality as a fundamental human rights concept."*

The implications of *'equality as a central constitutional value'* brings into focus the question of the application of the four human rights principles already alluded to, within a context of religious normativity. One of the more immediate challenges in this regard is the proposed South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACRRF)[60], and the issues which the charter poses to the landscape of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in South

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[59] As a supplementary reference, consideration has been given to the Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions, dated 10th December 1998, which also addresses the universal rights of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and the discussion of this declaration by, Runzo, J., Martin, N., & Sharma, A. 2014. *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*.
The Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions is available online at, http://gcwr2011.org/pdf/UDHRWR_en.pdf. [Accessed on, 28th December 2015].
[60] South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (2009). Available online at, http://www.familypolicyinstitute.com/fpi/CharterInnerFinal2.pdf. [Accessed on, 25th September 2015].

Africa. The SACRRF is an initiative of various religious and civic organisations, who aimed to have this charter endorsed and approved by Parliament.

This issue is introduced into this discourse on the emergence and status of atheism in South Africa simply because it strikes at one of the key focus areas of this study, that of the question of freedom of conscience. Therefore, the extent to which instruments such as the SACRRF privilege one grouping, the religious, over the non-religious, does have serious implications for the emergence of atheism in the country. The issue of the SACRRF in relation to the constitution does, however, raise the question as to whether the SACRRF is necessary in the first place. The charter itself and papers published in its wake will be a valuable resource to interrogate the issues of the rights of atheists, as well as the question as to whether religion, and Christianity in particular, still retains the hegemony over the contested area of public life in South Africa.

One of the key aspects which has informed the theoretical framework and the course of this study is that of the theories of religious freedom; theories which both explore and critique the nature of, and need for, religious freedom. Cécile Laborde[61] (2012) in a paper entitled, '*The Politics of Religious Freedom: Protecting Religious Freedom in the Secular Age*', presented in honour of, and in dialogue with, the works of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, interrogates the subject of religious freedom, premised on the following position and question.

> "*In the secular age, as Charles Taylor has amply illustrated, religious belief no longer structures our social imaginary. Instead, it has become one option, one possibility, among others: one of the ways in which we give meaning to our lives. The secular age, then, is characterized by the fact of pluralism—an irreducible pluralism of beliefs, values, commitments. Yet we secular moderns also give special primacy to freedom of religion. Freedom of religion is standardly presented as the archetypical liberal right. So the paradox is this:*

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[61] Professor Cécile Laborde is Director of University College of London's Religion and Political Theory Centre and leads the centre's key project, *Is Religion Special? Secularism and Religion in Contemporary Legal and Political Theory*, which deals with the status of religion in western political and legal theory, within the context of the current experiences in the relationship between religion and politics.

how (and why) do we protect freedom of religion in an age where religion is not special?"

Cécile Laborde (2012)

The profundity of this extract is that it captures the context of a plurality of worldviews, inclusive of the religious and the non-religious; a theme which weaves its way through much of Charles Taylor's work. For this study, his published works will be considered alongside valuable new media resources (YouTube) in the form of public lectures in which he explains his revisions to secularisation theory and what constitutes a secular model for society. Two such presentations in particular are given full consideration during this study, the first is, *2009, The Religious – Secular Divide*[62], and the second is, *Charles Taylor – Reimagining the Role of Religions in Public Life*[63]. Both these resources obtained off electronic platforms, proved indispensible to understanding Charles Taylor's philosophy on religious pluralism and freedom of conscience within a secular context.

Michael W. McConnell[64] (2012) in his paper, *Why Protect Religious Freedom?*, offers a comprehensive response to the question posed by Cécile Laborde; albeit by tracing back the experiences of the United States of America to the intent of its founders on the subject of religious freedom, a history which can still serve as a rich literary resource for this study. For McConnell, religious freedom is summed up as follows.

".....religious freedom does not proceed from any official presuppositions about religious truth. It allows everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, the right to form their own convictions about transcendent reality and to live in accordance with them, subject only to the constraint that they must not invade the rights of others or damage fundamental aspects of the overall common good."

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[62] Taylor, C. 2009. *2009, The Religious – Secular Divide*. Published by The New School for Social Research, 8th September 2011. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd6ad7jCCFA. [Accessed on, 20th February 2016].

[63] Charles Taylor (2014). *'Charles Taylor – Reimagining the Role of Religions in Public Life'*. Published by The Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke University, 24th November 2014. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YChPGzELqMU. Accessed on, 21st December 2015.

[64] Professor Michael McConnell is the Director of the Constitutional Law Center, Stanford Law School, USA.

On the other end of the *religious freedoms spectrum*, the views of authors such as Winnifred Fallers Sullivan[65] will need to be considered. Sullivan (2005) in her book, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*[66] asserts that this 'impossibility' is derived, firstly, from the difficulties experienced in establishing what counts as religion and, secondly, the tension between secular law and religion.

In the South African context, Pierre deVos, has long been at the forefront of the religious freedom debate. His article, *Discrimination: SA's courts give religious beliefs and practices a free pass* (2015)[67] examines the question as to why this is the case and why this 'free pass' is granted by society and the courts? Notwithstanding the constitutional provisions for the equality of persons before the law, deVos asserts that;

> *"Our courts – like courts in other constitutional democracies – have tended to side with the members of dominant and powerful religions against members of vulnerable and marginalised groups. It is for this reason that it seems unlikely that a South African court today will order a church to stop discriminating against women if that church claims the gender discrimination is authorised by God. It is also for this reason that a court may think twice before labelling homophobic speech hate speech – despite the fact that the hate speech provision in the Equality Act does not provide for a religious exception to hate speech."*
>
> Pierre deVos (2015)

Remaining within the South African frame, Irma J. Kroeze[68] (2003) is in agreement with deVos on the key point quoted. In her paper, *God's Kingdom in the Law's Republic: Religious*

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[65] Professor Winnifred F. Sullivan is Chair of The Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University.

[66] Sullivan, W. F. (2005). *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*. Princeton University Press.

[67] deVos, P (2015). *'Discrimination: SA's courts give religious beliefs and practices a free pass'*. The Daily Maverick. Published 30th July 2015. Available online from: http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-07-30-discrimination-sas-courts-give-religious-beliefs-and-practices-a-free-pass/#.VgJZLagaLVI. Accessed on, 23rd September 2015.

[68] Irma J. Kroeze is Professor of Legal Philosophy at University of South Africa.

Freedom in South African Constitutional Jurisprudence (2003). Kroeze does go further to advocate for the consideration of the rights of those who choose not to subscribe to a faith-based belief system.

> *"I also have no doubt that the concept of religious freedom needs to be expanded so as to include the right not to believe. But that would require a court that is willing to abandon its benedictory role in favour of a prophetic role; a court that is willing to tinker with majority assumptions about stability and normality."*
>
> Irma J. Kroeze (2003:117)

To expand on the human rights theoretical framework, attempting to understand the emergence of atheism in South Africa is a task inseparable from the need to understand how an individual's **right** to choose not to be affiliated with any faith-based religious position is either advanced or limited.

When considering the legal status of atheism in South Africa in relation to a human rights paradigm, it will be useful to note the very complexities associated with the definitions of religion, belief and atheism, generally, which could apply to the South African context as well. Natan Lerner (2006:5-11) in his book, '*Religion, Secular Beliefs and Human Rights*', highlights the challenges faced in the United States of America and within the United Nations in reaching consensus on terms such as 'Religion' and 'Belief'. Lerner notes the controversial point, in relation to atheism, that atheism was classified as a 'Belief'.

> *'In certain United Nations instruments, the term belief has been adopted to cover the rights of nonreligious persons such as atheists, agnostics, rationalists, and others. The debate that accompanied the inclusion of the word belief in such documents is instructive in identifying the underlying political motivations. U.N. Special Rapporteur Arcot Krishnaswami, in order to limit controversy, considered the phrase religion or belief to include various theistic creeds and beliefs such as "agnosticism, free thought, atheism and rationalism."'*
>
> Natan Lerner (2006:7)

In further support of Natan Lerner's viewpoints on how even one of the world's highest guardians of human rights, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), missed the mark in protecting the rights of persons of non-belief, the challenge posed by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)[69] to the United Nations Human Rights Commission review conference held in 2009 in Geneva aimed to correct this position. The 2009 Geneva conference was tasked with reviewing the 2001 UNHRC Conference on Racism held in Durban, RSA. It is noted that although the 2001 conference was headlined as a conference on racism, it also aimed to address ethnic hatred and discrimination on grounds of religion.[70] The IHEU challenged the dangerously ambiguous representation of persons of non-belief in the draft text of the Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference[71], in which the position of atheists, apostates and persons of non-belief were thought to enjoy sufficient protection under the classification, "various theistic creeds and beliefs".

Without wishing to enter into the debate at this point about atheism not being a 'belief' of any sort, the non-specific reference to the rights of atheists in the draft text was clearly not adequate. The International Humanist and Ethical Union felt likewise and challenged the draft text of the Outcome Document and noted the following in their submission to the Durban Review Conference in Geneva.

> *"We find paragraph 10 of the draft outcome document to be deeply flawed in that it singles out only Christians, Jews and Muslims as named victims of "phobias". Furthermore, while the term "Islamophobia", for example, is undefined, it is used to falsely equate disdain for, or opposition to Islam with intolerance of, or violence and hatred towards Muslims.*

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[69] IHEU Report on the 2009 Durban Review Conference. Available online at, http://iheu.org/putting-non-believers-agenda-durban-review-conference/. [Accessed on, 13th November 2016].
[70] Durban Review Conference – 2009: Basic Facts About the Durban Review Process - Why the Process is Important. Available Online at, http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/pdf/InfoNote_04_BasicFacts_En.pdf. [Accessed on 13th November 2016].
[71] The final outcome document of The Durban Review Conference held in Geneva 2009 is available online at, http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/pdf/Durban_Review_outcome_document_En.pdf. [Accessed on, 13th November 2016].

Secondly, no mention is made in paragraph 10 of discrimination, intolerance and violence towards non-believers, Polytheists, apostates, and free-thinkers. Yet the human rights of non-believers, free-thinkers and those of other faiths are systematically denied in many parts of the world, and many face discrimination, abuse and even death.

We urge delegations to recognise that all are entitled to protection from discrimination, whatever their belief or lack of belief."[72]

The pleas of the IHEU went unheeded and the final Outcome document of the Review Conference in Geneva 2009 reflected the following clause (12) which was expected to address the rights and protection to which persons of non-belief were entitled.

"12. Deplores the global rise and number of incidents of racial or religious intolerance and violence, including Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Christianophobia and anti-Arabism manifested in particular by the derogatory stereotyping and stigmatization of persons based on their religion or belief"[73]

It was, however, in the intellectual post-colonial architecture of Edward Said's (1977) magnum opus, '*Orientalism'*, that this study found the pointers for its synthesis between the post-colonial and human rights theoretical frameworks. More specifically it was in Said's 2003 preface to his book that his post-colonial and humanist motivations are brought back home, as it were. Although his 2003 re-purposing of his work are clearly influenced by global developments post '9/11' (2001), the core ideas which shaped his contestations to the colonial mind-set and to orientalism remain and actually take on a deeper significance given the very post 9/11 world which could not have informed the inaugural publication of

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[72] International Humanist and Ethical Union submission to the United Nations Durban Review Conference in Geneva in April 2009. Published by IHEU as article, *'Putting non-believers on the agenda at the Durban Review Conference'*. Available online at, http://iheu.org/putting-non-believers-agenda-durban-review-conference/. [Accessed on, 13th November 2016].

[73] *United Nations: Outcome document of the Durban Review Conference - SECTION 1*
Review of progress and assessment of implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by all stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels, including the assessment of contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Available online at, http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/pdf/Durban_Review_outcome_document_En.pdf. [Accessed on, 13th November 2016].

Orientalism in 1978. One of the key ideas to which the reader is drawn by Said is one in which, "***Orientalism*** *once again raises the question of whether modern imperialism ever ended*"; a question which this study re-interprets within its post-colonial framework in order to excavate the South African context to discover, understand and critique the residual colonialism still present. Furthermore, Said's call for a reflective humanism which is always conscious of the hand of history in its shaping is indispensible to this study and it is in this call that the merging of the dual paradigms applied in this study finds further impetus and inspiration.

> *"By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake's mind-forg'd manacles so as to be able to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding and genuine disclosure. More-over, humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking, there-fore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist."*

> Edward Said (2003:xvii)

To the question as to what all of this has to do with a study on the emergence of atheism in South Africa, the response has to be that, the answers are hidden in plain sight. Echoes of Christopher Hitchens'[74] repeated and similar deployment of the metaphorical William Blake expression *'mind forg'd manacles'*[75] may serve only to heighten the call to more rational, reflective and historically cognisant modes of thinking which is not beholden to what Said describes as *'ideological fiction'* (2003:xix), and *'orthodoxy and dogma'* (2003:xxii). These are calls which resonate strongly with the worldview of atheism, which critiques religion as a key production centre for the 'mind forged manacles' which inhibit the humanism to which

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[74] Christopher Hitchens penned the Foreword to Ayaan Hirsi Ali's (2008) book, *Infidel*, in which he noted (p.xiii) the following of Ali's journey out of Islam.
> *'Thus the other journey described here, and a no less arduous one, is the gradual*
> *emancipation of the self from the "mind-forged manacles" of theocracy.'*

[75] The expression is drawn from the William Blake (1757-1827) poem, 'London' (1794), and located in the second stanza.
> *"In every cry of every Man,*
> *In every Infant's cry of fear,*
> *In every voice, in every ban,*
> *The mind-forg'd manacles I hear."*

Available online at, http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/london.pdf. [Accessed on, 28th December 2016].

Said refers, thereby creating a proximity of purpose between atheism and humanism which is of direct significance for this study.

This study finds its voice from its deliberate location within, and analysis of, the distant and more recent histories which shaped South Africa's socio-religious and legal landscape. This enterprise, of finding atheism's emergence from within these histories, alongside other related constructs and social phenomena such as, secular humanism and secularity itself, once again, found immeasurable structural support from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, (2003, p.xxiii).

> *"The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings. Human agency is subject to investigation and analysis, which it is the mission of understanding to apprehend, criticize, influence and judge. Above all, critical thought does not submit to state power or to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy......... Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority......... And lastly, most important, humanism is the only, and, I would go as far as saying, the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history."*
>
> Edward Said (2003:xxiii).

4.4. Chapter Conclusion

Whilst the application of the dual theoretical framework did organise and facilitate the engagement with existing theories and knowledges supportive of this project, and although the aspect of the rights of atheists had been addressed in literature previously, the study of atheism as a social phenomenon within a post-colonial framework is unexplored.

This study is embracing of the fact that to be aligned with theories and assumptions from within post-colonial studies this project would represent a direct critique of, and a challenge to, the *empire of religion* which was central to the colonial project of Europe. The post-

colonial theoretical framework also served to highlight that the integral role which religion played in the colonial effort did not diminish with the onset of minority Afrikaner rule, but that Apartheid rule since 1948 had religion (Christianity) as its central and prime enabler. In the absence of an established body of South African literature or jurisprudence on the specific rights of atheists, discussions of the human rights paradigm applied in this study was a balancing act between, on the one hand, the discourse on freedom of religion as it pertains to South Africa, and on the other, the rights enshrined in the Constitution which protects an atheist's right to freedom of conscience.

The hybrid post-colonial and human rights theoretical framework applied throughout this study is in itself a journey which traces back and critiques (Post-colonial paradigm) the role of religion in the suppression of the worldview of atheism and non-religion, as a basis from which to understand the present socio-legal milieu as a context which either advances or retards the rights of atheists in South Africa (Human Rights paradigm).

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1. Chapter Introduction

One of the immediate challenges facing this study was establishing how to engage with a phenomenon that was, to a large degree, *still in hiding*. The post-fieldwork mind-set of greater confidence as to the scope and depth of the phenomenon belies the trepidation experienced at the outset arising from the thought of venturing into unchartered academic territory to explore a subject which could still potentially attract negative consequence for persons who self-pronounce as being atheists. It was clear, therefore, that constructing the research methodology for the interviews would be significantly more arduous than that for the other components of the study, i.e. understanding the law-religion/non-religion nexus and the survey of representations of atheism on social media and new media platforms.

The initial concerns with regard to constituting the sample, however, were eased once relations were established with atheist communities within the main metropolitan centres in the country. The application of the snowball sampling method within this network of relationships yielded the projected sample size for the study.

Whilst an absolute representative sample across South Africa's full demographic segmentation was not an objective in this study, consideration was given to avoiding a concentration of the sample within any of the specific population categories of, age, race, religious background, geographic location, occupation, gender, income, and education. Notwithstanding these considerations and as there was no way of accurately calculating in any statistical representation of these categories, the *non-probability snow-ball sampling* technique was applied, given that this was a research project based on an in-depth *qualitative and interpretive approach*, supported by a sample size which was not statistically representative of the total population of South African atheists. Accordingly, it is understood that generalisations could not be imparted to the total population of South African atheists, or any related sub-groupings, based on the outcomes of the non-probability snow-ball sampling method applied. (Lucas, 2014:394) It is acknowledged though that the non-probability snowball sampling technique did result in a sample with

'White' males in the majority; this being an outcome of the sampling method itself. Of the 18 participants, 6 were persons of 'colour'. Whilst this may not necessarily be a limitation of the study in relation to answering the key research question at hand, it does point to future research opportunities which will examine the phenomenon of atheism in balance with the racial and ethnic demographics of the country.

The requirement that all interviewees be South African citizens was maintained in constituting the sample.

As a qualitative research method in a phenomenological study, it was critical that the sample which was finally settled upon offered an adequate research base from which the key research question and research objectives could be meaningfully engaged with. To the extent that qualitative research is more about establishing meaning as opposed to drawing generalised hypothesis deductions, the sample size settled upon for this study was considered adequate. (Manson 2010:1) In this determination of adequacy of the sample, the further guidance offered by Manson (2010) in understanding the idea of saturation in relation to the sample size was also considered. In its strictest sense, the point of saturation, in the context of the use of interviews within academic research, is achieved *"when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation."* (Manson 2010:1)

Given the very nature of the phenomenon under inquiry, it could also be argued that there could be no point of saturation attainable when dealing with the particular histories and journeys through which each participant reaches, or finds, their individual points of non-belief, or have lived life in no other manner other than one devoid of any belief in a supernatural deity. One of the great rewards of the interview process itself and the outcomes achieved is that each interview, without exception, captured a unique set of life experiences, with each account being immensely powerful in their own right, in terms of both, their research value, as well as just being very compelling stories about how people genuinely grapple with all the challenges and joys which accompany any journey of discovery of self in relation to the reality one is surrounded by. Whilst acknowledging that each history uncovered will reveal its own uniqueness, be it a sample size of 18, 50, or 200,

as to whether this study would have reached its saturation as a qualitative research project can only be a function of the extent to which the interviews, individually and collectively, offer adequate responses to the key research question and objectives. This, it is posited, has been satisfactorily achieved through the set of interviews undertaken.

5.2. Defining Atheism

More than the obvious need to fully understand the key terminology with which this study comes into contact, defining the central term ('atheism') of this study as well as related constructs, such as non-religion and secularism, is necessary to establish the differentiated meanings which these terms denote, so as not to conflate or confuse interpretations of these terms. Without settling the aspect of the definition of the term 'atheism' this study could not proceed onto the research design and onto addressing the complexities and nuances with which the phenomenon of atheism finds its meaning and representation within the South African context. Furthermore, defining 'atheism' is particularly necessary in order to dispel what Julian Baggini (2003:2) refers to as the *'dark smudge'* which is often *'smeared over'* the term atheism.

As much as the term 'atheism' had been previously adequately defined (Michael Martin (2006), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, Kerry S. Walters (2010), *Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Julian Baggini (2003), *Atheism – A Very Short Introduction*), the publication by Lois Lee (2012) entitled, *Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-religion Studies,* has proven to be seminal in further defining atheism and related terminology *in relation to one another*, in what appears to be a broader, new and increasingly important field of formal academic research, that of non-religion. The positive impact of Lee's (2012) contribution in surveying and defining the territory and terminology of non-religion, atheism and secularity, is already evident in the post-2012 publications of respected scholars in the field such as, Phil Zuckerman, Luke W. Galen, and Frank L. Pasquale (2016), *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies*, Lori G. Beaman and Steven Tomlins (eds.) (2015), *Atheist Identities: Spaces and Social Contexts*, and Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (2015), *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*.

Both Stephen Bullivant (2015:10-12) and Michael Martin (2006:1) invest the necessary effort in highlighting the negative, unnecessary, and damaging connotations ascribed to atheism and atheists with definitions which denotes atheism as 'lacking' a belief in a God or gods; a 'without-ness' of a belief. Paul Cliteur (2009:1) identifies the inaccurate association made by a staunch advocate of Christian apologetics Alistar McGrath in regarding atheism as a religion. To address the risk of such misunderstandings and the term 'lack' being '(mis)taken' to denote a 'deficiency' of some sort on the part of atheists, Bullivant (2015:10-12), also emphasises that the 'a' in atheism which denotes the 'absence' of a belief in a God or gods, must be viewed as being **'value**-neutral'. Michael Martin traces the etymology of 'a' in atheism to its Greek origins, meaning 'without' to draw the following distinction,

> *"In Greek "a" means "without" or "not," and "theos" means "god." From this standpoint, an atheist is someone without a belief in God; he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist. Still, there is a popular dictionary meaning of "atheism" according to which an atheist is not simply one who holds no belief in the existence of a God or gods but is one who believes that there is no God or gods."*

> Michael Martin (2006:1)

As useful as the explanations offered by Michael Martin are to this study, the use of the term 'believes' does become problematic given its obvious derivation from the term 'belief' and its association with the world of the religious. In the emerging research field of non-religion within which this study on atheism is situated, the refinement offered by David Eller (2010:1)[76], is considered to be more 'value-neutral'.

> *"At its core, atheism [...] designates a position (not a "belief") that includes or asserts no god(s)"*

The structure into which Lois Lee (2012:130) organises the essential terminology has proven to be extremely useful to this study, in offering more meaningful understandings of the

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[76] As referenced in Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (2015, p.7), *'The Oxford Handbook of Atheism'*.

term 'atheism' by virtue of establishing its location within the field of non-religion, as well as its relationship with other related terminology. Lois Lee offers the following schema for the terminology within the field of research of non-religion.

> "1) those which take religion as their root (non-religion, irreligion, a-religion, anti-religion),
>
> 2) those which take theism as their root (atheism, non-theism),
>
> 3) those which take the secular as their root (the secular, secularity, secularism)."

This structure displaces 'atheism' as the central construct within current discourse and argues for 'non-religion' as being the 'master concept' within which atheism as a contestation to theism, takes its place. Non-religion is defined by Lee as follows.

> "Non-religion is any position, perspective or practice which is primarily defined by, or in relation to, religion, but which is nevertheless considered to be other than religious."
>
> Lois Lee (2012:131)

The fact that terms such as non-religion and atheism are relational[77], in this instance to religion and theism, respectively, should not impart to these terms and particularly atheism, any religious connotations.

> "atheism is an intellectual or cultural position which is primarily defined by its relationship to a religious phenomenon (theism) while not being considered to be religious itself."
>
> Lois Lee (2012:131)

These understandings of atheism and related terminology are however put to some testing in the South African context, which actually results in a deeper and more country-specific

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[77] Even in the simplest understandings of the term 'atheism', such as that of Daniel Dennett (2006:218), *"Atheism is the negation of theism, after all."* this relational approach is evident.

interrogation of these definitions and understandings. The dawning of a democratic dispensation post-1994 and its accompanying and apparently harmonious 'Rainbow Nation' public relations, may belie a society which remains deeply fractured along lines of race, class, wealth, income, gender and sexuality and one in which the *"challenge to race and class blindness"*, as articulated by Spivak (1985) remains. (Gandhi, 1998:1) The complexities still associated with South Africa's as yet not too distant history of a racially stratified social order is clearly reflective of a society which is far from any semblance of a homogeneous and undifferentiated singularity. The decision to apply the non-probability snowball sampling technique was not an attempt to side-step this reality but rather to not be dictated by it.

At the heart of what is still a society dealing with a history of separateness is the issue of race; an issue which even touches the subject of atheism and amplifies the definitional caution with which this study should approach the subject in South Africa. The discovery of the existence of a branch of The Church of Creativity (Previously known as The Church of the Creator) in South Africa tested the very atheism-theism contradistinction which has undergirded this study. The Church of Creativity (Also known in Afrikaans as, Kerk Van Die Skepper, Suid Afrika) is a White supremacist organisation which rejects any faith based religious belief in a divine or supernatural deity and is explicitly dismissive of the Christian, Islamic and Judaic religious traditions.[78] According to the University of the Witwatersrand archive of the, *Historical Papers: Right Wing Directory* (2012:25), The Church of Creativity rejects any belief in a theistic God and views *'race as their religion'*.[79]

The implications of this latter statement for this study become apparent given its non-theistic dimension or *a*-theistic character in the context of the oppositional and relational

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[78] Klaasen, B. 2016. *Nature's Eternal Religion*. The Creativity Movement. Available online at, http://www.resist.com/Natures_eternal_religion.pdf. [Accessed on, 24th December 2016].
[79] This view is borne out by The Church of Creativity in their websites (https://rahowadirectory.com/sacreativity/ and https://creativityalliance.com/) in which their Five Fundamental Beliefs are declared;
> *"I. WE BELIEVE that our Race is our Religion.*
> *II. WE BELIEVE that the White Race is Nature's Finest.*
> *III. WE BELIEVE that racial loyalty is the greatest of all honors, and racial treason is the worst of all crimes.*
> *IV. WE BELIEVE that what is good for the White Race is the highest virtue, and what is bad for the White Race is the ultimate sin.*
> *V. WE BELIEVE that the one and only, true and revolutionary White Racial Religion - Creativity - is the only salvation for the White Race."*

atheism-theism understandings adopted thus far in the study. However, the fog over this conundrum of meaning begins to lift in the light of Lois Lee's full definitions of both atheism and non-religion as discussed above. The case of the South African Order of The Church of Creativity, whilst being clearly non-theistic but religious at the same time, is not a representation of atheism in the fullest sense of the Lois Lee definition which this study is aligned with, that, *"atheism is an intellectual or cultural position which is primarily defined by its relationship to a religious phenomenon (theism) while not being considered to be religious itself."* Recounting the case of The Church of Creativity also serves as an example of a situation in which Alistair McGrath's (2004:277) cautionary to atheists when dealing with, religion as *'a moving target'*[80], should be heeded.

Whilst being entirely respectful of and in agreement with the schema presented by Lee (2012), this study holds strongly to the need to're-claim' atheism (Beaman and Tomlins 2015, p.1) from the historically negative connotations with which it has been associated. This is necessary, not just to bring clarity to the understanding and use of the term within future scholarship on the subject but because it will also serve to mitigate against the real social discrimination, negative social perceptions and the marginalisation which atheists are often subjected to within public life. In doing so, recognition must also be given to the new possibilities being opened up by what Christopher Watkin regards as new *post-theological* thinking about atheism, which could represent a constructive challenge to the relational atheism-theism approach.

> *"A thinking radically without God is integrated with a retention of the notions otherwise associated with God. These two ideas taken together account for our characterization of thinking after atheism as a 'post-theological integration'. It is this integration that makes the new post-theological thought truly new:* ___it is a turn to religion in order to turn the page on religion___*."* (Emphasis added.)
>
> Christopher Watkin (2011:13)

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[80] Although Alistair McGrath refers specifically to Christianity in this instance, in the context of his broader discussions of atheism as oppositional to religion, this more general adaptation is considered reasonable.

5.3. Research Design

The research design was comprised of two principle research components. The first being a detailed review of literature, case law, online video resources and media reports on the subject. The second was the fieldwork in the form of interviews which was structured as a qualitative phenomenological inquiry focused primarily on discovering the 'lived experiences' and personal perspectives of a set of self-pronounced atheists in South Africa in relation to the subject of atheism. The research data therefore was comprised of the recordings of the interview narratives, with a detailed qualitative analysis conducted of the full set of interviews once completed.

Central to the research design was the set of research objectives, or the research problem, which sought to give form and focus to the study. Given the relative dearth of formal academic research on the subject, as well as what appeared to be a very real but suppressed social phenomenon, there was throughout this study, an air of 'the veil being lifted' on atheism in South Africa; which brought to bear on the project a set of new research challenges and opportunities which had to be addressed. In this latter regard the end-to-end process from the invitation to participants, to the research instruments applied during the interviews, to the very questions and issues broached, had to be carefully formulated to keep to the declared academic focus, whilst not placing the required academic rigour of the study under any risk.

The key research question and the accompanying set of research objectives which held up the study, throughout, were:

Key Research Question

What are the understandings of and engagements with atheism in post-colonial South Africa and what does this reveal about the legal and civic representations of non-religion?

Research Objectives

1. To understand the historical antecedents to current understandings of the phenomenon of atheism, internationally and in South Africa.

2. To ascertain what are the historical forces which have shaped or influenced the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

3. To critically interrogate how atheism has been understood and articulated in South Africa, with particular reference to the legal and civic attitudes to non-religion.

4. To understand the prevalent conceptions about non-religion in post-colonial South Africa.

The South African experience on atheism in relation to the development of the phenomenon internationally was suggestive of a case of 'blurred borders'; reflective of the **globalisation of ideas**. Central to this transnational non-separation and immediate unrestricted accessibility to information on atheism is the workings of the internet and social media and new media. This latter platform has been indispensible to this study and had to be factored into the research design. The survey undertaken of the phenomenon on social media in particular sketched the emerging networks of atheists in South Africa and the scale thereof.

5.4. Literature and Archival Research

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to examine literature resources and selected legal judgements related to freedom of religion, and freedom of conscience, making it possible to also examine the philosophical orientations that informs and shapes prevailing approaches to atheism. CDA is also aimed at understanding the power dynamics within social and political discourse, with a view to ultimately resisting inequality. In this regard, the work of Teun Van Dijk (2003), *Critical Discourse Analysis*, proved to be an important introductory resource.

Alongside CDA a Critical Reading Method was applied, as guided by the University of Leicester guidebook on Critical Reading.[81] The thrust of Critical Reading is not to find fault with a particular resource but to assess the validity or strength of the evidence presented and the arguments advanced in order to accurately formulate conclusions on the phenomenon under study. Towards this end, information was also sought from databases such as The Southern African Legal Information Institute (SALII) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) which are important resources to trace through the development of South African jurisprudence in relation to religion and the law.

5.5. Designing the Interviews

This phenomenological study applied qualitative data collection and analysis methods to understand the lived experience of a set of South Africans who self-identify as being atheist, as well as to ascertain the legal and social contexts within which contestations over atheism are mediated. In order to achieve this, 18 separate interviews were conducted with self-identifying atheists. Archival research using literary and online media resources was also undertaken to establish the prevailing legal and social orientations toward atheism and non-religion.

5.5.1. The Sample of Participants

The set of 18 interviews were distributed across the following geographic locations; Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg. The list of participants detailed below, *Table 7*, reflects the demographic composition of the sample set. As alluded to above, and given the terms of reference of this undertaking, the composition of the sample as well as the non-probability snowball sampling technique applied, there could not be a research objective constructed into the process which would result in the composition of the sample being reflective of the country's national demographic. To have set such a

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[81] University of Leicester handbook on Critical Reading. Available online at:
http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/study-guides-pdfs/writing-skills-pdfs/critical-reading-v1%200.pdf.
[Accessed on, 10th March 2015].

pre-defined objective would have risked distorting the flow of information and referrals by participants on other potential interviewees.

Once potential participants had been identified, either a phone call was made, or an email sent if no contact telephone numbers were available, briefly explaining the research project and inviting them to participate in the study by way of an interview. Other than in the case of 3 of the participants who were not contactable via email prior to meeting, a formal Letter of Invitation was emailed to the other 15 participants, accompanied by a copy of the Consent to Participate in the project, a personal declaration by myself as the researcher, a letter of support from the project supervisor, as well as a copy of the University Ethical Clearance Certificate. For the 3 participants who were not contactable through email, the Invitation Pack with the Consent to Participate was completed on the day of the interview.

The invitation pack proved to be crucial in securing the interviews and allaying any reservations which participants may have held, which reservations were expressed during the interviews. The concerns expressed were mainly around the legitimacy of the research project and the persons involved in carrying out the study. A copy of this invitation pack is enclosed as an Addendum. In every instance a separate Consent to Participate in the project document was signed by participants. All 18 signed Consents have been lodged with the University for safekeeping.

5.5.2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Validity, Reliability and Rigour

One of the main reasons for applying the semi-structured interview to this study is that the planned interviews were a once-off experience with participants from several metropolitan areas across the country. The interviews were aimed at establishing the experiences of atheists and to discover new information on the phenomenon that would otherwise not have been considered.

Interviews were conducted with persons who have indicated their alignment with atheism as well as persons who have made public pronouncements on the subject. The sample consists of 18 persons between the ages of 25 and 63 who have self-identified as atheist.

Throughout the design and execution of the fieldwork, the research imperatives of validity, reliability and rigour remained as central guides. The structure and set of questions for the interviews were foundational to ensuring that these research imperatives were achieved.

Drawing from the guidelines offered by Nahid Golafshani (2003) in her paper, *Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research*, it was clear that to satisfy the criteria of 'validity' the research outcomes had to offer qualitatively findings on the declared research objectives. To be valid, the research outcomes for this study had to reveal some understandings of atheism in post-colonial South Africa and the manner in which it finds legal and civic representation in the country. Accordingly, it becomes imperative that the 'means of measurement' be fit for purpose; requiring that the Interview Schedule be accurately constructed to stay focused on the key research question and the research objectives.

With regard to the criteria of 'reliability' it was crucial that the research instrument and the interview process itself ensured the mitigation of any extraneous factors which could impede consistency throughout the process. In order to ensure that the final research product is viewed as being trustworthy and dependable, the focus had to be maintained on the Interview Schedule so as not to allow the interview to be subsumed into an apology or advocacy for a particular cause or viewpoint; a very real risk always in sight given the subject matter under inquiry.

The overall rigour of this study will be established to the extent to which the research outcomes support the formation of conclusions which respond to the declared research objectives, whilst adhering to the principles of thoroughness and accuracy. This required also, that the study during the interview process, the literature review and the writing of the thesis, not be contaminated by any predisposition I may hold, declared or otherwise, on the subject under inquiry. The findings had to emerge from the data.

The data was subjected to a *thematic analysis* approach, to draw out common and divergent views expressed during the interviews, which respond to the key research question and the research objectives.

The sample set of participants was secured through, both, the snowball sampling method as well as direct invitations to self-pronounced atheists identified, either through social media or through their well-established public profiles as atheists. The sensitivity attached to the subject under investigation required that the invitation pack had to be comprehensive, yet concise, and reflective of this being a serious and unbiased academic project. The inclusion of a personal declaration on atheism to accompany the university's Ethical Clearance Certificate and the Informed Consent served well to illustrate the significance and authenticity of the research. Whilst the usual persistence was necessary to follow through on the numerous invites dispatched, the response overall was overwhelmingly positive.

Whilst it may not appear to be a formal research outcome, the initial responses of participants to the invitation and the project as a whole are significant and worthy of being mentioned. Other than the further probing experienced from two participants [Derek and Reuben], as to the nature of the project and as to how they were identified as participants, the overwhelming response from the remaining participants was one of excitement at, firstly, the opportunity to participate in the project and, secondly, the fact that a formal academic study was being undertaken on the subject of atheism within a South African university. Two participants [Martinus and Ruby] mentioned that upon receiving the invitation, they undertook an online audit on the parties involved in the project to ensure that the credentials declared were legitimate, prior to agreeing to participate in the project.

5.5.3. Analysis of the Sample of Participants

The participants were derived from the following sources.

Table 2. Originating link to Participants

Variable	Number
Participants reached through Direct Contact	5
Participants reached via Snowball Sampling	9
Participants reached via Online Social Media	4

It is noted that once the project was under way the number of potential interviewees who had expressed an interest in participating in the project far exceeded that required to make up the intended sample size.

To give credence to the interviews and the analysis of the data which resulted, it will be necessary to understand the demographic composition of the sample set.

Table 3. Gender and Age of Participants

Variable	Group	Number and Age of Participants [n=18]				
		20-29 Yrs	30-39 Yrs	40-49 Yrs	50-59 Yrs	60-69 Yrs
Gender	Female (n=2, 11%)	1	0	1	0	0
	Male (n=16, 89%)	1	3	7	3	2
	Totals	2	3	8	3	2
	Percentage	11%	17%	44%	17%	11%

Although it is noted that the majority of the participants [44%] were older than 40 years, and given the points alluded to early regarding non-probability snowball sampling, generalisation cannot be applied as to this demographic variable translating into the manifestation of the phenomenon in the country. These statistics are meant to offer an insight into the composition of the sample in order to support a more meaningful interpretation of the interview data.

Table 4. Location and Timing of Interviews.

Location	Number	Dates
Cape Town	5	June/July 2016
Durban	2	April 2016
Johannesburg	6	April/May 2016
Pietermaritzburg	2	April/May 2016
Pretoria	3	April 2016

The decision to identify participants in a set of key centres in South Africa, as opposed to concentrating the study within one geographic location was vindicated by the interview outcomes. In essence, conducting the interviews in the different provinces nationally drew

out the experiences of participants from different social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, this approach offered insights into the different atheist networks and forums which operate in the different provinces. As the full set of participants began to form it was evident that participants engaged with would be based within urban centres as opposed to rural areas, which suited the practical and logistical arrangements to undertake the interviews. Once again, it is highlighted that no inferences can be drawn regarding the manner in which the phenomenon may present itself in urban centres as opposed to rural areas.

One of the factors which influenced the path of certain participants to atheism was their experiences of entering tertiary education, a point which is discussed in detail during the analysis of the interview data. More than just the exploration of new knowledge fields and the questioning of previously held beliefs, the world of universities and colleges represented a break from the social and intellectual isolationism which characterised the pre-matriculation schooling career of many participants, particularly those who completed schooling between 1970s-1990s [*n*=12]. A summary of the participants post-schooling academic and vocational experiences are noted under *Table 5*, below.

Table 5. Participant' Academic and Vocational Background

Variable	Highest Academic Qualification (Sample *n*=18)				
	Matric	Diploma	Honours	Masters	Doctorate
Academic Background	2	5	2	6	3
Percentages	11%	28%	11%	33%	17%
	Occupation Categories				
	Student	Self-Employed	Employed	Professional	Retired
Occupation	1	7	10	0	0
Percentages	6%	39%	55%	0%	0%

With regard to the participant's backgrounds in religion, two participants reported significant affiliations to both Hinduism and Mormonism during their adult lives and are counted within both these categories. One participant reported historical affiliations with both African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and Christianity and was counted within both these categories.

Table 6. Participant's Background in Religion

Variable		Religious Backgrounds				
	Hinduism	Christianity	Islam	AIR	Mormonism	Judaism
Numbers	2	14	1	1	2	1

The analysis of the interview data will follow broadly on the structure set out on the Interview Schedule, aimed at discovering participant's experiences and perspectives using the following themes.

- Personal Biographies and Formative Years (Questions 1-3)
- Participant's Understandings of Atheism in South Africa (Questions 4-8)
- Journeys of Self-Discovery (Question 9)
- Legal and Public Discourses on Atheism in South Africa (Questions 10-13)

The interview schedule was structured to prompt the interviewees to articulate their personal accounts of their own life experiences in relation to religion and atheism, as well as their understandings of the status of atheism in South African society. What was not accounted for at the inception of this study was the depth to which interviewees would go in offering up deeply personal accounts of their experiences with religion, within family and community. The risk of becoming emotionally involved in these accounts was ever-present and had to be guarded against. Notwithstanding this, these personal biographies (Questions 1 to 3), in every instance, brought an authenticity and frankness to the discussions which served to firmly ground the rest of the interview, particularly Question (9), on the interviewee's personal account for their self-pronounced status as an atheist. The decision not to have Question (9) follow immediately on the early personal biographies was guided by the need to establish the participant's understandings of atheism itself, in order to facilitate a more meaningful interpretation of responses to Question (9).

Whilst this structured analysis is aimed at examining the responses to the four key themes detailed above, the interviews were not closed to exploring new themes which emerged which were congruent with the objectives and mandate of this study. Prior to being interviewed, participants enquired about the questions to be asked and in a few instances, sought a list of the interview questions. The research was aimed at drawing out responses to the interview which were intuitive and spontaneous instead of being prepared for. This was explained to participants and the requests were accordingly not acceded to. Participants were accepting of this decision.

5.5.4. The Interview Schedule and Conducting of the Interviews

The decision to embark on a set of semi-structured interviews was influenced primarily by the nature of the subject matter being researched which required in-depth questioning, within an approximate one hour timeframe. The construction of the Interview Schedule and its constituent questions, therefore, had to devolve from the research questions and the research objectives set for this study.

The interview questions were structured to address two key areas, firstly, the personal experiences of the participants in relation to their alignment with the worldview of atheism and secondly, their understandings of the social impact of atheism in South Africa. An important component of the personal histories of participants was a discovery of their past experiences, if any, within religious institutions and how this may have influenced their path to atheism and the nature of any current engagements, if any, with such institutions. It was considered important that this study also explored how atheism manifests itself in the context of family and spousal relations.

The negotiation of atheism in the public realm was developed through a set of questions in which participants were asked to offer their understandings of the social phenomenon of atheism and how public policy issues may or may not impact upon their decision to live, privately and in public, as self-pronounced atheists. A copy of the Interview Schedule is attached, as an Addendum.

It is also important to record that the drafting of the interview schedule and conducting of the interviews themselves was preceded by extensive research on the current South African and international landscape of atheism and the issues which feature in the current discourse on the subject. The research undertaken during my Masters Degree project, as discussed above, served well to prepare for and undertake the interviews.

For all the interest and controversy which the proponents of the New Atheist Movement have stirred up in the last decade, they have been extremely successful in globalising their message when compared to what might have been the international landscape of atheism

prior to the publications of, particularly, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett over the last ten years. Almost as an extension to this fact is the connectedness which the international and South African atheists communities enjoy through online platforms and social media networks; supported at all times by an immeasurable repository of subject material accessible instantaneously through countless online channels and sites.

The impact of this connected reality was researched during the Masters research project and actually formed the basis for that study to be undertaken reliant largely on online resources, as well as on conventional library methods and materials, to a lesser degree, though. The recognition of this resurgence in the international social consciousness of atheism and its 'rewiring' into the national grid, meant that there could be no illusions on the part of any researcher on the subject as to how informed, and even savvy, South African atheists had become over the past decade. This view was certainly vindicated during the interviews.

As a final preparatory step before going 'live' with interviews a test-interview was conducted with a colleague, attending to all questions on the interview schedule. The recording of the interview was analysed jointly with the project supervisor which resulted in the interview techniques applied being refined. The exercise proved extremely useful in establishing a set of guidelines by which all interviews were to be conducted. All interviews were audio-recorded.

The arduous task of transcribing the interviews, in the end, proved to be one of the highlights of this study, as it marked the first such documentation of detailed first-hand accounts of a sample of atheists, on issues which start to map the contours of the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa. These documented interviews, therefore, constitute a key pillar of this study, and in combination with the review of the other key components of the study (literature review, online social media resources, and the legal framework undergirding the phenomenon) offers a meaningful reflection of the emergence of atheism in South Africa at present. All participants in this project were anonymised through pseudonyms.

5.6. Theories to Support the Data Analysis

The interpretation of the interview experience and the outcomes were guided by a set of theories which, in the first instance, aims to explain, more generally, the formation of individual and group identities around a social phenomenon and secondly, theories which relate more specifically to the subject at hand, as to how individuals who self-pronounce as atheists reach such points of self-identification and the social meaning of such declarations for themselves and the groupings with whom they choose to associate. With regard to the latter set of theoretical accounts, it is noted that research internationally on the sociology of atheism remains in its early stages of development and appears to be concentrated largely within the United States of America and England. On the other hand, the South African research landscape on the subject remains entirely unexplored. The opportunity, therefore, to bring this study in dialogue with other established theorists internationally was deeply challenging and at times daunting.

As a more general entry into the field of Social Identity Theory (SIT) the work of Henri Tajfel (1919-1982), his co-researcher John Turner (1947-2011), more specifically on Categorisation Theory (SCT)[82] proved useful. It is noted, however, that in the context of this research project, the insights drawn from the work of, both, Tajfel and Turner will concentrate largely on the constructions of individual identities, rather than examining how such identities engage with and find expression within a group context; more a case of understanding the 'group' within the individual rather than the converse. One of the motivating factors behind locating this analysis within SIT and SCT was to develop a broad theoretical basis to understand any 'de-conversion/conversion'[83] process which participants may demonstrate in developing their identities as self-pronounced atheists.

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[82] Chen, Y. and Li, S.X. 2008. *Group Identity and Social Preferences*. Available online at, http://yanchen.people.si.umich.edu/papers/Chen_Li_identity_20080711.pdf. [Accessed on, 2nd September 2016].

[83] The idea of 'de-conversion' as presented in the study undertaken by Julie Krueger (2013), which was conducted using a similar research methodology as this study (Interviews with self-pronounced atheists, obtained through 'snowball-sampling' techniques), will be drawn upon in further analysis of the interview outcomes.
Krueger, J. 2013. The Road to Disbelief: A Study of the Atheist De-Conversion Process. *Journal of Undergraduate Research XVI (2013)*. Available online at, https://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/PDF/2013/krueger.julie.SOC.pdf. [Accessed on, 1st September 2016].

It is noted that interviews in the main centres, Durban, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria and Johannesburg, revealed that organised groupings of atheists have already been in existence and that meetings are regularly held, usually monthly, with a predetermined subject negotiated for debate or discussion, followed by a meal shared together. Although I had attended one such meeting during the course of this study, these events organised by these groupings fell outside of the scope of the research plan and the Ethical Clearance parameters for this study and will accordingly be excluded from this analysis, other than for what was revealed during the interviews by participants.

In its essential form, according to Sabine Trepte (2006:256), Social Identity Theory, *"is a social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behaviour with the help of group processes."* With it being an implicit objective of this study to understand the makings and evolution of the South African atheist identity, and notwithstanding the fact that the interviews were not undertaken within a group context, to not consider the *social* identity dimension of each participant's responses, would be to discard the rich historical personal accounts of group dynamics within mosque, church, temple, school, family and community which, collectively, would have influenced a participant's trajectory towards an atheist identity, and perhaps of equal importance, the decision-making on key life issues which results from such identity constructions. Chen and Li capture this theoretical base upon which the usefulness of Social Identity Theory and Social Categorisation Theory to this study could be developed further.

> *"Social identity is commonly defined as a person's sense of self derived from perceived membership in social groups. When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group."*
>
> Chen and Li (2008:1)

Regarding participant's intersectionalities between self-identity, social histories and social realities, and to further explain the summation offered by Chen and Li, above, Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010:2) expound on the point, as follows.

"It [social identity] *stresses the sociality of the construct in at least three ways. First, social identity is a relational term, defining who we are as a function of our similarities and differences with others. Second, social identity is shared with others and provides a basis for shared social action. Third, the meanings associated with any social identity are products of our collective history and present. Social identity is therefore something that links us to the social world. It provides the pivot between the individual and society."*

This account by Reicher, et.al. almost begs the question as to the social mechanics of these *'similarities and differences'*, to which Sabine Trepte responds with her explanation of the Social Categorisation Theory.

"Social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to take many forms of social action……They create and define the individual's place in society."

Sabine Trepte (2006:257)

Notwithstanding the positive impact which other pioneering research on the subject have had on this project, the challenge remained one of discovering representations of atheism and non-religion from the interview outcomes which may be characteristically South African and perhaps distinctly African. The analysis of the data, therefore, reflects a dialogue with the interviewees but in on-going further conversations with other researchers and drawing also from a wide range of epistemological developments over the ages on the subject of atheism and non-religion.

Julie Krueger's study interviewed 16 self-pronounced atheists to establish the nature of their de-conversion histories, based on Krueger's (2013:2) assertion that there were very few American atheists who were raised as atheists, outside of the influence of religion. Krueger develops her theory on the shoulders of, largely, two earlier sets of research related to the 'defection' of persons from religion to non-belief, as was the case within Armand Mauss' (1969) study, *Dimensions of Religious Defection*, and Jesse Smith's (2011) study,

Becoming an Atheist in America: Constructing Identity and Meaning from the Rejection of Theism.

Armand Mauss located his study within the Church of Latter Day Saints, Utah [Mormon Church]. Mauss regarded 'defection' as, *"the withdrawal from fellowship or activity by church members who have had some history of regular attendance and involvement in the church, not merely nominal affiliation"*, and notes that the term does not denote 'denominational switching' but a full dropping out from the church. (Mauss 1969:128) This theory of religious defection is summarised as having three dimensions, the social dimension, the intellectual dimension, and the emotional dimension. Krueger expands on these elements as follows.

> *"One who experiences the social dimension of defection may have encountered weakened social ties within their religious community or an unsatisfying social experience within the church. The intellectual dimension involves disbelief of certain central tenets of a religion and a belief in a secular doctrine. Emotional defection may be indicative of earlier childhood trauma, the guilt or shame associated with disobeying biblical law, or an emotionally deprived family environment."*
>
> Julie Krueger (2013:2)

The study by Jesse Smith[84] offers a comprehensive review of research up to 2010 on becoming an atheist in America. Similar to the Julie Krueger (2013:1) study (*n*=16), Smith was interested in establishing the *processes* through which self-identification as an atheist was achieved, also using the research method of in-depth interviews (*n*=40). Smith's research objectives and the outcomes also validate the need to develop some understanding of Social Identity Theory in order to, both, meaningfully undertake the research interviews, as well as interpret the resulting data. Smith argues,

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[84] Jesse Smith is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Western Michigan University, US.

"that an atheist identity is an achieved identity, and one that is constructed in social interaction. Focusing on the interactional processes and narrative accounts of participants, I discuss the process of rejecting the culturally normative belief in God, and the adoption instead, of an identity for which the "theist culture" at large offers no validation."

Jesse Smith (2010:1)

This extract from Smith's paper strikes at the near universality of a process through which a 'defection' (Mauss) or a 'de-conversion' (Krueger) from religion takes place, to achieve an identity as an atheist. In this context, Smith's drawing on works from the discipline of Social Psychology (Hewitt, 2000) to reach an understanding of the term identity is also useful to this study; *"identity is that which we use to locate and understand ourselves in social life"*. Furthermore, in dealing with the sociology of non-religion and any process of de-conversion, it is this very fluidity or non-static nature of identity which permeates the analysis of the research, American and South African, alike.

"Identity is also that which individuals use to describe and define their membership in groups, their relative positions in social life, and the various ascribed and achieved statuses they hold. Like most scholars today, I take identity to be fluid and shifting, rather than fixed and permanent. This is consistent with how most of the participants in this study moved from religious identities, to atheist identities, as a result of important changes in meaning and social context."

Jesse Smith (2010, p.217)

The study undertaken by Jesse Smith (2010:219-230) revealed four key phases in the participant's path to self-identifying as atheists.

- The ubiquity of theism: Recognising the all-pervasive nature of theism, where religion is "*deeply ingrained culturally*" in American society. (p.220)
- Questioning theism: The articulation of doubts about previous held religious beliefs, thereby opening a space for an atheist worldview. (p.223)

- Rejecting theism: Beyond just questioning, the deliberate and active stage of rejecting theistic beliefs; *"Atheism as a Rejection Identity"*. (p.227)

- "Coming Out" Atheist: The expression and validation of one's atheist self-identity through social interaction (p.229); the birthing of a full atheist social identity, the stage that an atheist identity began to crystallize. (p.230)

One of the noteworthy findings of Smith's study was that the decision, at the fourth phase, on the part of interviewees to publicly declare an atheist identity, although initially difficult, was an important step towards a new self-concept which was accompanied by a greater sense of independence and empowerment. (Smith 2010:230) This finding was also borne out by a study undertaken by Luke Galen (2009:45) published as, *Profiles of the Godless: Results from a survey of the nonreligious*, in which it was established that, "*Confident nonbelievers such as atheists were more emotionally well-adjusted relative to tentative nonbelievers*".

The study undertaken by Julie Krueger (2013) builds upon the works of Armand Wauss and Jesse Smith, as explored thus far, to propose her five-phase theory of de-conversion from religion, towards self-identification as an atheist[85]; phases which are characterised as follows. (p.8)

- Detachment: The participant disassociates emotionally from their religious identity and experiences weakened social and emotional ties to their religious community.

- Doubt: Identify exactly what it is within their religious identity that they are dissatisfied with.

- Disassociation: The abandoning of a previously held religious identity and alienation from religious groupings.

- Transition: The adoption of an alternative identity which serves as a precursor to atheism.

- Declaration: A commitment to a secular worldview and the rejection of any divine or supernatural authority.

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[85] Krueger's paper also refers to an earlier study of Bridget A. Fitzgerald (2003) entitled, '*Atheists in the United States: The Construction and Negotiation of a Non-normative Identity*', which could prove useful as a further reference on the subject.

Krueger summarises the completion of the de-conversion process and the adoption of an atheist self-identity, as follows.

> *"The de-conversion process is complete as the individual validates their atheist identity in social interaction. In time, their atheist identity becomes central to their self-concept."*
>
> Julie Krueger (2013:8)

The brief recount of the Social Identity Theory and the Social Categorisation Theory, and tracing through the theories of Armand Mauss, Jesse Smith and Julie Krueger developed specifically within the sociology of non-religion, will prepare the path for the analysis of the interview process as well as the data which emerged from the interviews undertaken. It is noted that any reliance on these earlier studies is also mindful of their respective social contexts, which may not necessarily equate with the South African context and accordingly, care will be exercised to obviate any crude application of the theories discussed. This study aims to present developments on these theories, based upon a recognition of the issues which participants may themselves present during the interviews which may relate to the rich diversity of socio-political, cultural and religious traditions prevalent in South Africa and the opportunities which such disclosures may present. Notwithstanding the different contextual circumstances which are apparent, a review of these studies has already proven useful in guiding the interpretation of the data obtained in this study.

A further critical point to note in considering these preceding academic studies is that defection or de-conversion from religion may not serve to explain the full set of experiences which bring persons to self-pronounce as atheists. Theoretical ground must be left open for the atheism of some, or many, which may have had nothing to do with any de-conversion experience from religion.

Accordingly, it is intended that the analysis of the interview data will be interspersed with appropriate supporting literature and social analysis to offer a more comprehensive and academically cogent interpretation of the data.

5.7. Challenges to and Limitations of the Study

The absence of formal academic research into the phenomenon of atheism in South Africa did, initially, prove to be daunting, almost leaving this study methodologically rudderless and without the conventional direction one draws from a trail of academic research and literary resources on a subject. This, however, proved the need for an academic undertaking such as this and presented this study with a unique opportunity to seek out material, academic and otherwise, on various public and media platforms, in order to construct a meaningful interpretation of the phenomenon of atheism in the country. Furthermore, meaning had to made of how atheism in South Africa stood in relation to the phenomenon in Africa and globally. Whilst it is now acknowledged that formal studies in atheism and non-religion is a developing area of research internationally, the sparsity of research on the African continent on the subject points either to the disregard with which the academy looks upon the subject, or the active hegemony of religion over the academy, or both; or expressed in terms characteristically South African, that the academy remains 'captured' by religion, and Christianity in particular.

The survey of religion and the law in South Africa undertaken within this study revealed that case law on the subject is largely within the area of freedom of religion, with the issues of atheism and *freedom of conscience* on matters of religion not having been tested fully as yet within the legal system. This is acknowledged as a reality which this study will need to work with.

As the study progressed, the initial concerns about not being able to secure the requisite sample size fast developed into a widespread interest in the project with many atheists expressing an eagerness to participate in the study. It is noted further that such interest was increasingly expressed by 'Black' South Africans. Regrettably, it was not practical to undertake interviews with all those who expressed an interest in the study and the ultimate sample size had to be managed in line within the academic terms of reference for the study and within the very real constraints of time and resources allocated to this project. The strong interest shown towards this project, however, does hold promise for future broader research on the subjects of atheism and non-religion in South Africa.

One of the very real challenges facing the interview process, on a highly charged subject such as atheism, was the need to maintain focus on the research objectives, as represented through the open-ended interview questions, whilst being sensitive to the individual and unique accounts of participants, so as not to suppress what Cohen and Crabtree (2008) refer to as the, *"topical trajectories in the conversation"* which may appear to be deviations from the set questions but which could be vital contributions to the research objectives of the study. On numerous occasions during the interviews conducted, such departures from the set questions revealed enlightening personal experiences on either the participant's journey to atheism, or activities currently engaged in which have contributed immensely to understanding how atheism as a phenomenon is evolving in South Africa.

5.8. Chapter Conclusion

The research design and the methodologies applied towards its realisation, derived from this study being comprised of two key and interrelated components. The first dealt with the construction of a set of historical, social, literary and philosophical contexts for the study as a whole. More specific to the country location of this study, it was imperative that the socio-political, legal and religious histories of South Africa be explored, as factors which impacted directly upon the phenomenon of atheism in the country, in either its advancement or its suppression. The second component, the interviews themselves as well as the process of the data analysis of the outcomes, vindicated the parallel approach of constructing the contexts alluded to above, as a necessary component in and of itself, but also to support a more meaningful interpretation of the interview data and the study in its totality. The non-probability snowball sampling method was considered the most appropriate sampling technique to be applied. This together with the semi-structured interviews formed the backbone of the empirical research of this study and yielded what could be considered as being a credible and qualitative set of research outcomes commensurate with the declared research objectives.

Chapter 6:
Atheism in South Africa – Discovery through Interviews

6.1. Chapter Introduction

The interviews undertaken with a sample of atheists in South Africa formed a key pillar of the empirical substance of this study. The research challenge which this project embraced decisively was the need to understand a phenomenon which, until recently, did not have a *'public face'* in South Africa. Whilst it is acknowledged that social media and online information portals such as Facebook and YouTube have presented atheists with a relatively new platform for engagement with one another and to explore and shape their identities as atheists, the need for direct face-to-face interaction with a sample of atheists was considered indispensible to a study of this nature.

The decision to undertake a set of interviews was motivated by the need to elicit the philosophical positions, personal biographies and journeys to self-discovery of atheists, together with their identities and opinions on the legal and public discourses which could point the way to what has comprised the emerging phenomenon of atheism in South Africa. Beyond just the interview outcomes themself, the whole process in its totality, from establishing the sample group, to months of painstaking negotiations and securing appointments with participants around the country, through to undertaking the actual interviews was, and will forever remain, a remarkable educational experience in itself.

An unexpected and welcomed outcome of the interviews, which could not have been foreseen during the preparatory phase of the whole interview process was the added scope brought to this study by virtue of the work being undertaken by participants themselves, individually and in groups, to advance the cause of atheism, as well as their efforts to contest the privileging of religion in South Africa. A case in point is the discovery of the history which gave rise to the formation of the organisation, OGOD [Organisasie vir Godsdienste-Onderrig en Demokrasie] and the current status of the precedent setting legal action which OGOD initiated.

Another example of the interview process revealing new developments within the atheist community is the growing demand for secular celebrants for weddings and funerals and the fact that there are already atheists practicing in this capacity. Although this aspect is worthy of deserving a separate and more detailed study on its own, it does stand out as a significant development under the new constitutional dispensation and could signify the start of a trend similar to that already experienced within other countries, particular in Europe and America.

The approach to the interviews had to also be considerate of the reality for some atheists who may have had no upbringing within a religious environment and accordingly had no need to 'de-convert' from any faith-based religious predilections. Therefore the study also had to make way for the latter manifestation of atheism to express itself, which it did in this study, amidst the more prevalent experiences of participants who had experienced a de-conversion from religion to atheism.

From the outset it was recognised that this study located in South Africa will, as an academic inquiry, be embryonic and would need to grasp a clear overview of the constituent elements of atheism as an emerging social phenomenon, whilst at the same time identifying the possible new vistas within the South African context which will open up for further academic research. In this latter regard, the interview outcomes have proven invaluable in identifying new opportunities for research.

The interviews and the analysis of the outcomes thereof opened up two particular areas which became imperative for further exploration. Firstly, the need to understand how atheists presently represent themselves within current legal and public discourses in South Africa and secondly, the extent to which atheists see themselves, and atheism generally, being integrated into South African public culture in the future. That these were natural outflows from the interviews made sense. It was the interviews with the participants which accentuated the significance of online social media as a push-back to the structural isolationism, of pre-1994 South Africa, socially and culturally, compounded by the religious normativity of that period and the pervasiveness of Christianity in particular.

To grasp the nettle of the interviews, that is, to understand what atheists say about themselves, could not stand isolated from the concerns which atheists share about their legal standing in relation to the Constitution and related jurisprudence as it has developed to date. Also, connectivity to online social media and to the internet as an information resource, particularly with the plethora of opportunities for user driven content, represents an extension of the research terrain in which atheists pronounce their identities, individually and within groups. Therefore, constructing a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of the emergence of atheism in South Africa would stand incomplete without chapters seven and eight, dealing with these subjects respectively.

The data from the interviews will emerge from what is distinctly a South African context, with a very specific and interrelated religious and socio-political history. The Table (6.2. below) reflects this diverse South African context. Identifying strands from South Africa's complex history will also open up the study to opportunities for further academic investigation into how facets of this history, such as, Christian National Education, or the principles of the Black Consciousness Movement, or the effects of the Group Areas Act under Apartheid, or any other related social variable, would have influenced the world of atheism or non-religion.

It is in these respects that the analysis of the interview data is intended to bring a set of new South African perspectives to the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of atheism and the way persons of non-belief construct their atheist self-identities, with consideration given to the social forces and dynamics which influence their paths to such declarations.

6.2. The Sample of Participants

Table 7 of Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Residence	Occupation	Ex-Religion	Marital	Education
Hameed **Male**	60	Durban	University Vice-Chancellor	Islam	Married	PhD
Garth **Male**	38	Johannesburg	National Radio & TV Presenter	Christian Anglican	Single	-
Charles **Male**	43	Johannesburg	Copy Editor Journalist	Christian Catholic	Single	Dip.Fine Arts Baltimore US
Pierce **Male**	53	Cape Town	Professor	Christian NG Kerk	In Relationship	LLD.
Janet **Female**	29	Johannesburg	Business Owner	Christian	In Relationship	MSc.
Simphiwe **Male**	25	Johannesburg	Student	African TR. Christian	Single	2nd Yr BSc.Eng
Thembiso **Male**	34	Pretoria	Product Auditor	Christian Catholic	Married	Dip.Elec.Eng.
Nithia **Male**	48	Pretoria	Business Owner Consultant	Hinduism Mormon	Married	MBA.
Harold **Male**	43	Pietermaritzburg	University Lecturer	Christian	Divorced	MSc.
Hendrik **Male**	57	Cape Town	Businessman	Christian NG Kerk	Married	BA. (Honours) MBA
Reuben **Male**	63	Johannesburg	Businessman	Judaism	Married	BSc.Eng. MCSD-Micrsft
Justin **Male**	44	Cape Town	University Lecturer	Christian	Married	MA.
Anesh **Male**	41	Durban	Business Strategist/Owner	Hinduism Mormon	Married	Dip.Bus.Mgt. NQF6
Alwyn **Male**	30	Johannesburg	Online Marketing Specialist	Christian	In Relationship	Honours Degree
Derek **Male**	46	Durban	Professor Univ. – Lecturer	Christian	Married	PhD.
Martinus **Male**	42	Pretoria	Colonel SANDF	Christian NG Kerk	Married	Diploma in Photography
Ruby **Female**	48	Cape Town	Student	Christian Baptist	Single	M.Ed.
Peter **Male**	50	Cape Town	Business Owner	Christian	Married	Diploma in Refrigeration

6.3. Personal Biographies - The Formative Years [Questions 1-3]

The insights offered by participant Charles during his introductory comments on his understandings of religion in relation to the formation of individual and group identities will also serve to prepare the ground for the analysis of the total set of participant interviews. In a project of this nature which aims to establish how and why a particular phenomenon presents as it does, it was deeply encouraging to encounter a participant who was prepared to offer up his theories and explanations for his social realities in a manner in which Charles did. With regard to the place of religion in the construction of social identities, Charles [10.55 minutes] offered his interpretations on the formation of social groupings, initially around a communal language, which becomes the transmitter of traditions, laws, social practices and what they consider to be moral behaviour and ethics. Through the passage of time and as groups come into contact with one another the need to preserve one's culture against foreign influence becomes a dominant objective, based on what Charles regards as a primate human instinct, which is also accompanied by the need to maintain territorial integrity for the group. It is the codification of this culture, and sets of laws and social norms, according to Charles, which sets the basis for group formations along religious divides.

> *"So what they do, they try and codify this collection of instructions, this culture, and that develops into a religion. All religion from history is a function of government. It's a nationalistic endeavour. It's the same, as you know, as, the fourth century Jews in Canaan. It's the same as Nazi Germany. It's the same as, wherever else. Whenever, kinds of societies get that developed and sophisticated then they start forming massive group identities. It's kind of important, because it allows humans to interact and live in far bigger communities than is actually physically possible……..Religion is a function of nationalism. They codify their myths, their origin stories, where they come from and what makes their society or culture greater than everybody else's. It also allows them to demonise their neighbours and enemies."*
>
> Charles [12.40 minutes]

Whatever position one may wish to take of Charles' articulations, the significance of his account extends beyond just the value of his views on the dynamics of group identities. It demonstrates a sincere eagerness on his part, which was demonstrated throughout the interview and on the part of the other participants generally, to understand the social realities which ultimately factors into the defining of their own individual identities. In Charles' case, it is also significant that he is not a scholar of religion or sociology but works a full day-job as a copy-editor and journalist at a Johannesburg newspaper.

This extract from Charles' interview signifies an earnest pursuit of knowledge and understanding which came to characterise the set of interviews undertaken, as a strong influencing factor in participants deciding to adopt an atheist worldview. The clarity with which the participants articulated their perspectives and viewpoints was indicative of identities constantly in search of new knowledges with which to make their worldviews more meaningful and are reflective of identities which were not confined to just being oppositional to religion.

The first three questions on the interview schedule dealt with the participant's early history with religion, or the absence thereof, as a context from which to understanding their alignment with the worldview of atheism. The responses to these questions ranged from, a complete disinterest in matters of religion, because of it being simply boring, to not having been raised with any religious influence at all from within the family context, although being nominally Christian [Harold, 5.00 minutes], to being raised as a child, along very rigid religious teachings and guidelines [Ruby, 36.57 minutes]. Of the eighteen participants interviewed, fourteen had grown up in a household which adhered to the Christian faith, some if only nominally Christian. Two participants were raised in a strictly Hindu tradition, with both thereafter going on to joining the Mormon Church. One participant had early childhood experiences within the Islamic faith, and another participant was from a Judaic background.

Prior to any further analysis being undertaken on the actual responses, it will be pertinent to understand the social realities under which the participants experienced their childhoods, particularly the information systems or channels open to children or adolescents then, in

relation to the one demographic, the average age of the sample. To grasp this historical reality is important, not just to understand the past, but to understand what the future potential of atheism may look like for the similar age demographic currently, given the prevailing and rapidly improving networked digital electronic knowledge systems.

With the current (2016) average age within the sample being 41 years, the first 15 years of the participant's lives would have, on average, been lived between the years 1975 to 1990. Two critical sociological realities, which have a direct bearing on this study emerge from this periodisation. The first being specifically South African; the socio-political system of Apartheid based on racial discrimination and the spatial segregation of people based on an entrenched system of racial classification, which ended with the dawn of democratic rule in 1994 and the adoption of a new constitutional dispensation in 1996. Fourteen of the eighteen participants would have received their senior secondary education under the Apartheid schooling system. The second is more global, that this period during which the majority of participants grew up preceded the advent of the internet as a knowledge and communications resource. For participants 41 years and older [*n*=11] the information systems [Books, hardcopy newspapers, magazines] and media platforms [Radio and television] of the time (Pre-1990) were crucial in shaping their respective relationships with religion. For reasons which will become clear through the interpretation of the interview data and the remaining chapters of this study, the South African social milieu was characterised by, not just the separation of South Africans from one another based on racial classifications and class structures, but by a distinct State-controlled isolationism from worldviews considered hostile to the enforced social order. Under Apartheid rule atheism was perceived as representing such hostility and a threat to the welfare of society.

For the participants who were raised within a Christian tradition, particularly those from a history within the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk), religion was infused into all aspects of cultural and family life; a way of life in which religion and culture could not exist as distinctly separate social experiences. Reuben, of a Jewish background himself, articulates the point as follows, at [25.35 minutes].

"The Apartheid regime married itself to Christianity. The three sister churches, the three Afrikaner nationalist churches and religion was a part of public life and supposedly the Dutch Reformed and the other two churches found theological ways to support Apartheid."

Hendrik [04.25 minutes] offers an insight into this world, from his recollections of his adolescent years and of his parents as being intimate and skilled educators.

"When you grow up in the Free State, Dutch Reformed is the de facto standard. I knew there were people like Jews, I had no idea what they did. The term atheist just never came up. I wasn't aware that there were atheists in the world. And the RGS which was the more liberal sort of Christian thing, those guys were going to hell. We knew that they were on the wrong path. I knew about Catholicism, though, at that point I never knew what they looked like, whether they were a different race or whatever. So, the main thing is you are brought up; I was brought up in a good household.......The most liberal reading you could get was the Scope Magazine. And I never knew about evolution until after school, it just wasn't presented. So you are brought up ignorant more than stupid."

Hendrik's depiction is also characterised by a reality of isolationism; a socially structured isolation from other religious traditions, a systemic isolation from other race groups and alternate worldviews through Apartheid education and the Group Areas Act, and made all the more insular by the content and methods of media designed to foster separation along the lines dictated by the State policies aligned with Christian Nationalism. It is also significant to note that Hendrik's knowledge of other religious traditions was formed in relation to Christianity. Whilst participants from an Afrikaner or Dutch Reformed Church tradition may be more readily associated with what Dames and Dames (2013:1) refers to as, *"resistant monocultural 'laager' mentality of minority races"*, to manufacture this monocultural mentality was a core objective of the Apartheid policies of 'separate development', as made manifest in all its supporting statutes and policies, enforcing this isolationism onto every racial classification in the country. In this regard, the interviews

outcomes are supportive of the findings demonstrated during the review of literature (Charles Bloomberg, 1990) earlier in this study, particularly on the central and motivating effect of religion in upholding the policies of Christian Nationalism.

For Pierce [09.19 minutes] the reality extended further than just one of separation. Religion and culture were strongly infused, resulting in a world inescapable from religion; until one escapes from that world itself.

> *"**The religion was obviously, was part of the culture and in a way one's identity**, I guess. You know I went to a school where there was religious observance, both, every Monday and every Friday people would read from the Bible and pray. We had Bible Study which was only the Christian religion obviously……….These were public schools, exclusively, racial exclusive, this is the 1970s, so racially exclusive White Afrikaans public schools in which the whole ethos was one of, of Christian religion and strongly so, Christian Nationalism. So, in a way the religion was almost very strongly entwined with one's identity as a White Afrikaans person. If I think back, the two things are very closely related, so it's almost like, it's almost like you didn't even really have to think very hard about issues of belief, of faith, or whatever. It was part of your culture."*

The significance of the last comment from this extract cannot be overestimated, in that it points to the degree to which Christian Nationalism succeeded in the Christian religion becoming a defining characteristic of one's identity and the collective psyche of the 'White' Afrikaner people; identities which were reinforced by church, school and nation. Stepping out of the 'laager' for Pierce happened during the early 1980s on entry into university life as a student.

> *"When I was at university two things happened. I read, it's a bit embarrassing to say but, I read these books by, when you are eighteen or nineteen its very attractive for a person, by Ayn Rand, yes, you know, very self-centred kind of thing, but, also very against religions. Hmmm, I'm not sure I believe in religion,*

especially not organised religion. And then I went to university and I became politicised. So, I thought, firstly, I don't think I'm religious at all, secondly, the Dutch Reformed Church promotes Apartheid. So, I wrote a letter to the Minister of the church where I was associated with, saying I want to now give up my membership of the church because I cannot justify morally to be a member of a church that is based on racial exclusivity."

Pierce [7.20 minutes]

These comments highlight the contestation to, and rejection of, the manufactured coherence between religion and racial segregation and race-based discrimination, as represented in Christian Nationalism which dominated public policy up until the 1990s. Of direct significance for this study is the fact that it was the policies and doctrinal positions of the Dutch Reformed Church, itself, which brought about the alienation between Pierce and the church. The work of Ayn Rand towards this end is, however, also interesting.[86] This was an era pre-the New Atheist Movement and online new media where access to resources on non-religion are now available at the click of an application on a mobile phone. This was an era when such material on atheism could have been considered positively subversive to social order.

The public policies of racial segregation and social isolationism, from the perspectives of 'White' families ran into difficulties when it came to matters of housekeeping and the raising of children. The internal migration of domestic workers across the racially divide residential zones brought 'Black' workers into the homes of 'Whites'. This phenomenon which was, and still is, commonplace in South Africa brought with it a cross-pollination of religious and cultural experiences which, it could reasonably be deduced, represented the only early childhood or adolescent exposure to non-Christian religious worldviews for many 'White' children or teenagers. This was the experience of Martinus who notes [4.25 minutes] that,

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[86] Ayn Rand (1905-1982) was an American cultural icon who was publicly outspoken on her atheism. Her cogent responses on atheism are captured in her interview with television host Phil Donahue, '*Ayn Rand – No Proof of God*', available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-kXok4tznU. [Accessed on 27th August 2016].

"I didn't know for the longest time that other religions existed. Very isolated…….Apart from the African religions, or the traditional African belief systems, which was not seen as an official religion by my parents, and by our little community…..The only other religion I saw into my younger adolescence into teenage years was African Belief Systems, so that",

Interviewer: *"So how did you come into that?"*

Martinus: *"We saw it. That's the only other belief system that we were exposed to……..The nanny, the gardener. They would have certain rituals, not really rituals, symbols they would wear. Or they would look different at certain times…….That's the only exposure I had as a child to any other religion."*

Once again the entrenched separateness and isolationism of the social policies left room for only the faintest window into other worldviews, in this case, into African traditional belief systems, thereby maintaining the dominance of the Christian religion.

For participants Ruby and Simphiwe life across the racial and cultural divide was markedly different; in the former, an upbringing with a strict adherence to Christian Baptist teachings and the latter, an abandoning of African Traditional Religious practices in favour of Christian Pentecostalism. The cases of Anesh and Nithia, which will be covered in greater detail further on in the study, marks an interesting departure from their respective family's background in the Hindu tradition, into Mormonism and thereafter abandoning that for the worldview of atheism.

Simphiwe (25 years) was born and raised within a family who were Christians [Church of Zion] but who still aligned with the precepts of African Traditional Religion on issues such as ancestor veneration. For Simphiwe, the path from being a Christian to becoming an evangelist for the faith was a very short one. Whilst still at school, at the age of 15/16 years he was a Christian youth evangelist and led Christian groupings at school. As a member of The Universal Church of God, Simphiwe could not square his newfound faith in Christianity with his family's beliefs in ancestor veneration and thereby invoked rejection from members of his family. [8.25 minutes]

> *"They* [Parents] *are more strong in their traditional Zulu beliefs, you see, those things like ancestors and stuff. I grew up in part of that family. So, I was a sort of an outcast in the family, 'cause most of the time they will believe in their ancestors and me, I was strong in the church. I thought maybe they were demonised………The Bible was my tool, I used to carry the Bible everywhere. "*

An area of interest for this study was the discovery of what motivates a move to an atheist worldview for a person like Simphiwe who was so steeped in the Christian faith at such an early age, that he was an active evangelist whilst still at high school, intent on converting people to Christianity. [9.35 minutes] Not unlike Pierce, Simphiwe started questioning his Christian faith upon entering university and notes the influence of two non-fiction authors who had shaped his early critique of the Christian faith. The authors were Martin Prozesky, through his book, *A New Guide to the Debate about God* and Richard Dawkins through his book, *The God Delusion*. [Simphiwe at 26.40 minutes] As will be noted through the analysis of the interviews, the Richard Dawkins book, *The God Delusion*, was also strongly influential in directing other participants in their assessments of their respective affiliation to religion. For Simphiwe and these participants the Bible was being replaced by books such as *The God Delusion*.

A further interesting dimension to Simphiwe's developing reassessment of religion was the role of English literature in this process. He was an avid reader of the works of William Shakespeare, William Golding, and Charles Dickens, which led him to reading more literature. He notes [24.50 minutes] that before what was for him the golden age of television,

> *"Before that, like, I've always been into books. I was a reader all the time…..Like from the start, all the Harry Potter seven books. Then, I was into literature, reading stuff……I think since school, since I started Shakespeare, I was very much into reading novels by Charles Dickens, William Golding."*

This in turn caused him to encounter works such as Dan Brown's, *'The Da Vinci Code'*, which Simphiwe acknowledges to be fiction, but a book which advanced his questioning of the

Christian faith and discovering what was, *"the ultimate reality…..What is the ultimate truth, is there really a god?"* [29.30 minutes] This reached a head with the Martin Prozesky book, which allowed him to step back and understand the debate with which the book was concerned [30.40 minutes], and it was his resolution of the debate within himself which brought him in 2012, whilst he was 21 years old, to his conclusion on the improbability of the existence of god and this set him on his path to atheism. [37.33 minutes]

With the accounts by Ruby of her early childhood on the Cape Flats during the late 1970s and 1980s, this study is offered an insight into a life deeply rooted in the church (Baptist), but also one which was shaped by the socio-political circumstances of the time. Throughout her childhood, up until the age of 14 years, the church was also an institution which strongly influenced her life, to the extent that she claims that her life would not be the way it is at present had it not been for the positive influence of the church.

> *"I think that I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't have some sort of religious experience in that particular church. I think that all theories and ideologies come from religious backgrounds……I think, in terms of my moral values, my ethics, it's shaped it. It's shaped my conservatism as well."*
>
> Ruby [6.51 Minutes]

For Ruby, religion and her experiences in church, although admittedly inescapable as a social reality, did not amount to anything overtly harmful to her which she actively sought to distance herself from. There is no mistaking, however, that Ruby's views [20.06 minutes] on religion and the Christian faith have evolved significantly from those formative experiences.

> *"I think all ideologies are dangerous but you can't fight an ideology that says, if you don't live a particular way you will die and you will go to hell. No other ideology can battle with that. So, it's a very powerful thing. And irrespective of how your journey goes, from the moment that you have a sense of understanding the world you go into a religious background with the majority of people. So, there's no choice. So, to answer your question, I think it's like*

forced slavery. You don't really have a choice. By the time you understand you've already been shaped in a particular way. It's incredibly dangerous, because it's pushing the world in a particular direction…….[21.13 minutes] Most people don't think that there's an alternative to capitalism because they were born into a system. So, when you're born into a system it's very difficult to think about an alternative especially when you're stuck in a community where on every corner there's a different, three, four, five, different religions. So, yes, I would say religion is very much a part of people's lives but I don't think it's about a deity. It's about the only way of knowing how to be. It's a hard thing."

This essentially Marxist critique which Ruby makes indicates that she was not coerced or 'forced to be free' from religion, neither was she subjected to any literature or influence from any school of atheism. Her reassessment of religion was clearly drawn from her understanding of her reality and the role of religion within the formative years of any child, including herself. As opposed to Pierce and Hendrik who discussed, primarily, Christian normativity, Ruby more broadly critiques religious normativity.

Nithia was born into a Hindu household and lived his early childhood in the predominantly Indian township of Tongaat, north of Durban, although he does make the point [14.53 minutes] that he was born an atheist before becoming a Hindu. Nithia's account of his early childhood experiences, up to the age of 14, offers a valued insight into, firstly, the inner workings of the Hindu faith within a South African Indian Hindu family and secondly, the sociology of such families in coexistence with families of other faith traditions; in his case, amongst Muslim and Christian families who lived in a closely-knit community in Buffelsdale, Tongaat.

"Ok, so let me put this into context and maybe you can understand this……From zero, from the time I was born, to 14 years old, I was a Hindu, and from 14 years old, till I was about 35, I was an atheist, right. From 35 till about 45 I decided I was going to give religion a try and I tried Mormonism,

ok, and that's how I met my wife…….When I was 45 I realised, no, you know

what, I gave religion a chance, it's not working for me."

<div align="right">Nithia, [14.05 minutes]</div>

From the depth and breadth of Nithia's account, his insights into both, Hinduism and Mormonism, reflects a deep respect for many aspects within these respective traditions, whilst ultimately rejecting them as being, both, inadequate and counter-intuitive responses to many of life's questions which, for him, required answering. It is to his experiences within Hinduism to which this analysis returns, as it exhibits an enquiring mind which never stopped questioning the workings of religion, and one which ultimately brought him to the point of atheism. Nithia's interview also demonstrated the non-linear nature which could characterise a de-conversion process from religion. His was a move into Hinduism, then a switch to Mormonism and a 'return' to his primordial state of atheism.

"When I was 14 years old I asked my mother, Ma, why are you doing this

prayer? And she said to me, 'because my mother did it'. And for me that is for

me exactly how I feel about religion. They don't do it because they believe in

it, they do it because their parents did it."

<div align="right">Nithia [4.50 minutes]</div>

Nithia's protestations as to the nature and degree of his mother's understanding of her religion, Hinduism, may not account for the need amongst early Indian indentured labourers who were resettled in and around Durban, as well as their descendants, to preserve their cultural and religious traditions in the face of the Christian missionising efforts which was a part of the project of colonialism, as alluded to by Desai and Vahed (2010), below. The India Ministry of External Affairs (2002, para., 7.4.), *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, noted the following.

"If the vast majority of the indentured labourers were Hindus, less than 12%

were Muslims, while some 2% were Christians. Most of them were illiterate,

but they carried with them memories of their traditions, customs and rituals –

which they then strove to preserve as best they could."

Prominent South African sociologists, Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, in their 2010 publication, *Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story 1860-1914*, describe the religious experiences of Indian labourers who swopped one British colony, India, for another, South Africa.

"To whites in Natal, Hindu and Muslim migrants were 'heathens'. This was affirmed when they married, for example, as the certificate listed their religion as 'heathen'. But Hindus and Muslims proved much more resilient than the missionaries anticipated. As the Reverend Stott would exclaim in frustration, 'it [mission work] is still sowing and watering, but there are very few indications of any harvest'. By and large, indentured migrants resisted attempts to 'save' them from moral degeneration by becoming Christian, and instead made great sacrifices in creating conditions for the advancement of 'heathenism' that involved both song and dance as much as it involved the institutions of religious propagation"

Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed (2010:239)

To the question as to whether his family had any links with the Sathya Sai Baba Movement, a religious sect which has enjoyed significant growth within the South African Indian community, Nithia [6.10 minutes] noted the following.

"Parts of my family would follow Sai Baba. My brother-in-law would be a Sai devotee. And I wasn't very happy with the prestige they bestowed upon this man. I said, I will give him all credit for all the charitable work he does. I give him all credit for the good stuff he does, for the schools he builds, the hospitals he builds. But, please don't tell me, don't treat him as if he was a prophet of god. Don't tell me; he's a human being. And then my parent, my mother and others will tell me he performs miracles and it's like twenty years later, when I see in YouTube, YouTube shows what a conman he was."

This high degree of scepticism with regard to matters religion, however, which characterised Nithia's account, and indeed his lifelong engagement with religion, is not foreign to the

worldview of Hinduism and India and appears to be congruent with the questioning presented by Lawrence Babb (1983) on the issue. As to the supposed miraculous nature of the acts performed by one of the most prominent 21st Century gurus in India, Babb (1983:1) pronounced the following perplexing question.

> *"From what, exactly, do these miracles derive their convincingness, a plausibility so great that it seems to pull people into convictions ostensibly at odds with what their own sub-culture deems to be common sense and considered judgment? What is the source of the energy of Sathya Sai Baba's "magic," an energy that is apparently strong enough to have life-transforming effects on his devotees? Does it arise merely from cunning theatrics? Or is its true source something else?"*

The uniqueness of each interview reveals a set of personal journeys with real-life accounts which, collectively, represents a new resource worthy of a formal study, on its own. Each interview brought to this study the participants unique childhood history and experiences with religion and each interview, without exception, provided this study with its unique inspiration, which derives from encounters with participants who, possibly for the first time, are re-engaging their memories on matters deeply personal. Nithia's case exemplified these valued contributions which the participants have brought to this study.

Nithia's scepticism of religion, which revealed itself strongly during the interview, shaped his non-linear path towards atheism. Secondly, the interview presented this study with a special opportunity to delve deeper into understanding the intersectionality, if any, between Hinduism and atheism. It was, therefore, with great interest that the works of Jessica Frazier (2013) on the long and rich history of atheism within the Hindu tradition was briefly explored.

> *"the Indian intellectual landscape enabled atheist positions to maintain an organic place within Indian theological discourse. In India atheism was not one polemically defined countermovement that persevered despite the predominance of believers; rather it was a whole culture flourishing in the*

Indian religious world, exploring a nuanced range of meaningful ways of 'not-believing'.

The early history of India presents a picture of both theistic and non-theistic cultures, interweaving from an early period into diverse trends."

Jessica Frazier[87] (2013:293)

Nithia's questioning of the Hindu belief system extended to the religious movement of Sathya Sai Baba, which experienced significant growth during the 1970s and 1980s in South African Indian townships such as Chatsworth and Phoenix, which lay within the Durban metropole and which, together with established Indian communities in smaller towns such as Tongaat, constitutes the largest Indian diaspora outside of India.[88] The Sathya Sai Baba movement enjoys support largely from within the Hindu (Hindi, Tamil, and Telegu speaking) segment.

What Nithia describes in his interview as the harmonious relations which existed in his neighbourhood between persons of different religious traditions, may point to a grass-roots microcosm of how an unregulated secular community could function, and for his place therein, what secular rationalism[89] could look like. However, the idea of tolerance within a context of religious pluralism is also not foreign to the development of the sociology of religion within the Indian subcontinent. This history is traced through by none other than Amartya Sen[90] (2009) in his publication, *The Idea of Justice*.

Amartya Sen (2009:36-39) traces back the workings of the idea of religious toleration in a 17th century version of secularism, through an exploration of the life and work of Indian Emperor Akbar I (1542-1605), of the Mughal Empire, which ruled over the Indian

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[87] Jessica Frazier (PhD.) is a specialist in Hindu culture and is the founder and Managing Editor of the Journal of Hindu Studies, which is published by Oxford University Press.

[88] Further information on the national network and current status of the Sathya Sai Baba Movement in South Africa, reference could be made to the Sathya Sai International organisation South Africa [SSIOSA] website, http://www.srisathyasai.org.za/, and to the Saibaba.org site at, http://saibaba.org.za/south_africa/directory/centres&groups.html.

[89] The term is applied in the same sense by Jessica Frazier (2013:293) to describe the presence of such rational secularism which existed within the Hindu tradition, going back to the 6th Century BCE.

[90] Amartya Sen is a Nobel Prize (1998) winning economist and author, of Bangladeshi origins and serves as Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University.

subcontinent between 1526 and 1857. Sen (2009:37)[91] notes that, in a period of the 16th Century, when Western Europe, with the Catholic Church in central command, was occupied with the Inquisition and the persecution of non-believers, Emperor Akbar was actively involved in promoting the peaceful coexistence between persons of different religious backgrounds. Even if Nithia had known nothing of Emperor Akbar and his desire for religious tolerance, or of Armatya Sen's great articulations thereof, he knew of the community which motivated the values espoused by Emperor Akbar, because he lived it first-hand in a *high-density* religious environment of tolerance and accommodation, as expressed in his interview [7.45 minutes].

> *"Also, I think I need to add in, I lived next to Muslims, and I lived next to Christians, so I was exposed to everything......My neighbours were Hindu, but the neighbours directly opposite me where Muslim. The neighbours below them were Christian. So we had a real melting pot of religions, you know, and there was real respect for each other."*

The extent to which this scenario might or might not be the case presently has a direct influence on the emergence of atheism in South Africa. It could be argued that any reversal away from the generally secular-type dispensation under which religious life is transacted in a South Africa may disrupt the workings of a religiously plural society and accordingly, could count against the emergence of atheism in the country. In this sense, therefore, and to return to the work of the Mughal Emperor of India, Akbar I, the principle of *Sulh-i kul* could be one in need of recovery and re-interpretation for what it could contribute towards any discourse on religious tolerance. The origins of the idea of *Sulh-I Kul*, in its context of India, is

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[91] Amartya Sen (2009:37) notes,

> *"Akbar engaged in a far-reaching scrutiny of social and political values and legal and cultural practice. He paid particular attention to the challenges of inter-community relations and the abiding need for communal peace and fruitful collaboration in the already multicultural India of the sixteenth century. We have to recognize how unusual Akbar's policies were for the time. The Inquisitions were in full swing and Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake for heresy in Rome in 1600 even as Akbar was making his pronouncements on religious tolerance in India. Not only did Akbar insist that the duty of the state included making sure that 'no man should be interfered with on account of his religion, and any one was to be allowed to go over to any religion he pleased', he also arranged systematic dialogues in his capital city of Agra between Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Parsees, Jews and others, even including agnostics and atheists."*

attributed to Emperor Akbar I, and is an Arabic (Sufi) expression meaning, *"peace with all"*, *"universal peace"*, or *"absolute peace"*, according to Ramin Hajian Fard, of Teheran University, Iran. Fard (2016) also notes,

> *"The concept implies not just tolerance, but also the sorts of balance, civility, respect, and compromise required to maintain harmony among a diverse population."*

6.4. Participant's Understandings of Atheism in South Africa (Questions 4-8)

Prior to considering how participants came to self-pronouncing their atheism (Question 9), it was considered important to establish their understanding of how atheism was perceived in South Africa as well as what they considered to be the dominant issues on the phenomenon, internationally and in the country, as broached under questions (4-8). These questions also probed participant's interpretations on how the religious viewed atheism and atheists in South Africa. This in turn would offer insights into the favourable or unfavourable reception which atheists received within their respective communities and families, and collectively, as an emerging phenomenon nationally. The opening remarks of participant Reuben to question (4) [*What do you think are the general South African understandings of atheism in South Africa?*] was quite straight-forward and appears to be a view carried through in the interviews with other participants.

> *"I'm sure that South African atheists have a very good grasp of atheism and as far as I am aware, people who are not atheists in South Africa have a very poor understanding of it."*
>
> Reuben [10.33 minutes]

This points to a common theme expressed by participants that perceptions of atheism in South Africa are not founded on sound knowledge of atheism itself, resulting in atheism being considered as being devoid of morals and being aligned with the occult, or Satanism. The promotion of education on religion, which was free from propaganda and the aim of proselytisation, as well as education on non-religion, was regarded as being necessary to,

firstly, remedy these misconceptions and secondly, to foster a society more aligned with secular values. Anesh and Charles identify these challenges in their interviews. Charles [18.20 minutes] indicated that notwithstanding a context of religious normativity, the global shifts in religiosity and modern atheism are being underpinned by developing internet-based communications technologies.

"I think, for a lot of South Africans atheism is, kind of, unfathomable. I think a lot of people just carry the assumption that gods must exist, or greater supernatural forces must exist. I think a lot of them, a lot of people actually just fall out of favour with their gods, or their spirits or whatever their community worships. I don't think they understand that they can opt and leave it…….With the internet and mass communication, ideas like atheism are, kind of like, everywhere. It has just exploded with the internet. As people became more and more connected, so did the concept of atheism."

Furthermore, it could be argued that the absence of information or understanding of any phenomenon may not be sufficient in itself, although necessary, for the formation of unfounded perceptions of any phenomenon or its adherents, and that such absence generally works well in achieving such misperceptions when the need for credible and verifiable information is substituted by misinformation and innuendo.

"I think most people think that atheism is bad, it's immoral. Some people err thinking that it's Satanism, who don't have a clue. I think people who; some people don't even know what the term atheism means……Most people don't have a clue what atheism is, and for those people who are educated, etc., people are misinformed. So, to answer the question what do people think of atheism, if you are going to say that you're an atheist, some people will think that you have no morals, that you have no rules in your life. They will think that, why can't you believe in a god. You must be defiant, rebellious, naughty. Yeh, that's my experience of atheism."

Anesh [17.05 minutes]

The need to understand the misconceptions and ill-conceived views held about atheism (Eg. atheism being equated with Satanism) is a necessary step to further understanding the discrimination and prejudice which tends to follow in its wake. The seriousness of these misunderstandings was certainly not lost to the participants. Furthermore, these misconceptions of atheism, in the minds of the religious, do not stand alone but extend into being judgemental about a phenomenon and a growing sector of the populace of which little is understood, thereby strongly influencing the broader societal responses to atheists. The participants were also not unmindful of the very real risks and effects associated with what are perceived by them to be the general misconceptions of atheism, as was carried through in the following extracts from responses to Question (4).

"I'd say the average South African reaction to atheism might be one of a little bit of fear. A lot of religious South Africans might view atheists as being amoral and possibly dangerous. Dangerous, perhaps because they are amoral, or we are amoral, I don't know, and perhaps dangerous because they're a bad influence on the children of people who are traditionally religious."

Harold [13.38 minutes]

"There's a massive misconception about what being an atheist means……….The general sense that I get is that we are Satanists, or something. We don't believe in anything."

Thembiso [15.39 minutes]

"Oh, it's bad. It's a stigma. They think we're Satanists, to put it bluntly…..That's what I come across. It actually hits me every time. I can't believe that people are so uniformed. Or maybe the ones that don't think that just don't say anything. That could be it."

Janet [14.07 minutes]

In response to the question (4), participant Derek offers an account, albeit anecdotal, of a public meeting he had attended during either 2007/2008 [Unsure of the year] which was held in Pietermaritzburg, shortly after the publication of the key works of the main

proponents of the New Atheist Movement. At this meeting one of the three speakers from the religious community commented on atheism.

"One of the speakers had basically premised his, his contribution on saying that atheism was equivalent to Satanism, and wasn't laughed at either. People didn't think that, that was ridiculous. I think in quite a lot of people's minds maybe the thought is that it's a kind of a general nihilism. It's not just that atheists don't have religious beliefs, but that they don't think that anything at all is valuable and important."

Derek [12.07 minutes]

The views of Pierce on this question do not, in essence, detract from previous participant extracts documented above, but also offers a summary of how the misconceptions described above weave themselves into the discourse and perceptions on the intersections between religious belief and morality. It does not seem, however, that the question posed by Garcia and King (2009:15), *'Can atheists live fully admirable lives?'*, has been put to its eternal rest.

"Most people will think atheism; the first response will be, well it means that you believe in nothing. And then the sort of, I often, one gets a second response, that means if you believe in nothing, how can, isn't that a kind of belief in itself. So there's that argument of course being made. And then there's usually I find in, with some people for whom this is maybe a little bit strange or a bit disconcerting, people will ask, but how could you have a moral framework if you are not religious. So there's I think, there's often a bit of an association with non-belief with atheism, with not having a moral framework. So, morality and religion is often assumed, in the South African context by many people assumed to be one."

Pierce [12.16 minutes]

The fact that this study is being undertaken as a university project, within an environment which adheres to liberal values of freedom of thought, expression and association, and the

fact that participants engaged with are predominantly from urban centres and communities where such values are also generally respected, should not diminish the import of the discovery of misconceptions, biases and prejudices held about atheism, as discovered and as presented by the participants themselves.

On point of the mis-association between atheism and Satanism, on the African continent, to be associated with Satanism could result in the 'accused' also being aligned with witchcraft, the wages for which could mean being shackled and incarcerated or even being murdered. The work of African scholars such as Leo Igwe of Nigeria and South African, Yaseen Ally (2013), in her Doctoral studies entitled, *Witchcraft Accusations in South Africa: A Feminist Psychological Exploration*, highlight the African and South African realities of misconceptions which translate into real threats to life and limb to persons accused of the slightest association with witchcraft or Satanism.

Whilst these outcomes and the readiness of the religious to form an association between atheism and Satanism and the occult may appear to be an extreme manifestation of the prejudices held towards atheists, it is clear that the discrimination and social stigmatisation suffered by atheists does present in various forms. In the South African context, therefore, it may not be unreasonable to postulate that misconceptions and prejudices harboured towards atheists, as alluded to by the participants, gains further currency and multiplied social effect when accompanied by the privileging of religion, particularly the hegemonic tendencies of Christianity in South Africa.

From the increased stature afforded to religion in the national political discourse, to the anti-perjury requirement to swear an oath in courts of law with one hand placed over a religious text, to the promotion of religious instruction to children in schools, the cause against the discrimination shown towards atheists resembles much of the struggles internationally over time. Beaman and Tomlins (2015:39-40), in their publication, *'Atheist Identities: Spaces and Social Contexts'*, elucidate these struggles and how it results in the social alienation of atheists and the effects of social exclusion.

Stephen LeDrew (2015:53-68) also captures the stand by atheists which these struggles represent, amidst the dominance of religion in public life and against the real discrimination which results from atheism and atheists being equated with a worldview without, as Pierce termed it, *'a moral framework'*.

> *"In the atheist movement, the discourse on identity revolves around two issues: morality and minority status. In this view I am supported by the work of Cimino and Smith (2007). Atheist identity construction focuses on atheists as a minority, subject to stigma and discrimination, that is comprised of "moral" people; a phrase often heard in the movement is "good without God." This is effectively a challenge to the claim from conservative Christians that religion has a monopoly on ethics."*
>
> Stephen LeDrew (2015:59)

It is in this context, therefore, that the investment made in Chapter 7 in this study on the interface between religious affiliation, or non-affiliation, and the law will yield returns in further understandings of how discrimination based on religious affiliation and, in this case specifically, as metered out to atheists, could be addressed formally and legally. Cragan, et.al. (2012), in their publication, *On the receiving end: Discrimination toward the non-religious in the United States*, focus specifically on the discrimination suffered by atheists, particularly those who socially self-identify as such, and also alludes to the manner in which the law may be looked at in future to counter the real effects of religious hegemony and its accompanying discrimination towards atheists.

> *"Self-identifying as an atheist or agnostic significantly increases the likelihood of reporting discrimination socially, which further supports our hypotheses……..Reported discrimination is lowest in contexts where it is possible to file suit against those who discriminate. This seems to suggest that the American public is growing more sensitive to possible legal ramifications for discriminating in specific contexts. As a result, discrimination occurs outside those contexts and in contexts where lawsuits are substantially more difficult to pursue, like in everyday social interactions or in the family. It may*

also be the case that individuals are less likely to reveal their religious identities in these contexts."

Cragan, et.al. (2012:121)

In his responses to the question (4) participant Garth echoed the sentiments of Cragan, above. However, for the South African case, Garth [12.51 minutes] contextualises the discrimination and negative perceptions held about atheists within the wider historical marginalisation of any viewpoints which stood alternate to, even if not opposed to, the dominant religious worldview of Christianity.

"You see it [atheism] was coupled with so many things that were considered wicked by the old regime and by its associate NG Kerk [Nederduitse Reformeerde Kerk] hegemony. You know, they determined a lot of things on a moral spectrum. Communism, for example, was evil because there were so many more Black people than White people so that if communism came into effect it would be far more horrible than democracy, and democracy was considered a dangerous word in the 60s, 70s, and 80s in this country. But atheism was lumped into that; that if you were a non-believing pariah that you were dangerous. There were a lot of journalists who were atheists; there were a lot of members of the ANC [African National Congress] who were atheists. I don't know whether Nelson Mandela necessarily had a religion. I was raised to believe that he was probably not religious, and that that was a bad thing, not by my parents but that society told us this was a bad thing. Because, then, how could he be moral, and this is often something that you find, that people like to tie together the fact that someone who is religious is more moral, or ethical than someone who is not. So, the South African context for atheism is a profoundly negative one."

Garth [12.51 minutes]

In this excerpt from his interview, Garth highlights what South African atheists are up against, given the predominance of religion in society and the legacy of historical biases against non-religion. Furthermore, in the manufactured association between atheism and

communism, what Garth is alluding to is the dominant State (Apartheid State) narrative which actively promoted those perceptions; the lasting effects of which cannot be denied.

The decision to include question 5 [*What do you understand to be the dominant issues on Atheism internationally?*] in this section of the interview was aimed at learning the participant's understandings of issues impacting atheism internationally and which could influence the emergence of the phenomenon in South Africa. In the case of Garth, as well as others (Charles, Anesh, Hendrik, Martinus), participants reflected a very keen interest in matters religion and politics globally. Irrespective of whether one may hold alternate views to Garth on the subject discussed below or not, there can be no doubting the depth and breadth of his understanding of the nexus between religion and geo-political developments over time. The importance of this point is drawn from the simple reality that atheism and atheists do not exist in a sociological vacuum, immune from the effects of these global trends. In the context of discussions on atheism internationally, Garth [19.25 minutes] makes the following comments.

> *"Essentially, the difference between Islam and Christianity is just the four to six hundred years of the Reformation in Christianity. But the Reformation wasn't as important as the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment put Christianity in its place and said, if you expect us to take you seriously in Europe in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds, then you need to prove that you can be compatible with reason, with science, with the liberation of the human mind……..But, Islam has never had that arrangement. Islam is now in the heat of its self-confidence. It's a young religion by comparison. It believes it is the final and unalterable word of God, through the teachings of Muhammad in the Koran and then the Hadith and these are poured over by children and learnt by heart, by children all over the world. It's a growing religion and it needs to at some point meet with modernity, which it hasn't done yet. I think that is why Islam is distinctly different from Christianity. Christian*

fundamentalists pose their own risk and pose their own danger in other and sometimes in more subtle ways but they're just as destructive."[92]

This interest in the social dynamics of religion and the place of atheism therein, presented itself repeatedly throughout the interviews, with the atheists engaged with demonstrating a strong self-driven interest in acquiring new knowledge about the worldview with which they choose to identify, together with the local and internationally contexts which impinge on this worldview. Derek [13.25 minutes] picks up on the latter point and notes the variance in the manner in which atheism manifests itself in different countries and highlights the criminalisation of atheism in certain countries and the sanctions meted out for apostasy. Although it is acknowledged that atheists in South Africa are spared such extreme measures, Derek [15.01 minutes] notes that atheists enjoying acceptance in society is still problematic and that there is still a need for a shift away from negative perceptions about atheism in society.

For atheists, the direct significance of these realities of the South African socio-legal landscape, which extends into the halls of Parliament and public policy formation, is that the issue of freedom of religion for the religious cannot be completely extricated from the issue of the freedom of conscience which atheists are also guaranteed under the Constitution. The fact that the issue of freedom of conscience holds serious ramifications for the lived realities of atheists in South Africa was brought through strongly by participant Martinus in recounting his experiences and concerns on two particular issues. Before drawing out the detail of these issues it is material to the broader context of this study to note that Martinus [16.58 minutes] chose to frame his arguments within the context of his understandings of South Africa as being a secular democracy.

In recounting the first of these issues, Martinus opens up this study to what freedom of conscience means for an atheist serving in the South African National Defence Force [SANDF] in which he serves as a Captain. Martinus describes that his refusal to remove his head-dress and participate in 'Chaplain's periods' and prayer, in an environment in which

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[92] It is of significance that neither Garth nor any of the participants recorded any formal academic qualifications or studies in International Politics or the History of Religion.

religion (Christianity) was a key part of the regimented life in the army, was not well received. During the interview Martinus refers back to the difficulties he encountered with resisting the religious hegemony of Christianity which was present in the army and stating also that it was his view that this practice was unconstitutional.

"I'm in the military and the military has a very strong tradition of religion. Militaries of the world in time immemoria [sic] *have almost always drawn strength from their religion, from their beliefs and in some cases also motivated by the purpose, that would be from right or wrong, or that would be from holy texts and religious leaders and doctrine. So, in that regard it was difficult for me to say I'm an atheists; I don't want to take part in any rituals and practices. In the military there are a few; in ceremonial things where you would have to remove your head-dress and pray. I said I don't want to do that. And the argument would be, 'no, it's a military tradition', and a legal instruction and in the military instructions are so important that you disobey legal orders is a criminal offence. So, atheism became a legal issue for me when I refused to remove my head-dress or when I refused to attend what we call Chaplain's periods……..It's like a church run service during the week or whenever it is scheduled."*

Martinus [17.50 minutes]

This account offers a unique insight into the experiences of atheists within an institution in which religion, and the dominance of one particular brand, was structured and regimented into the lives of military personnel. This almost strikes as being a sequel to, or continuation of, the all-pervasive Christian National Education which Martinus would have also been subjected to as a young South African scholar. Although it falls outside of the scope of this study to delve further into the current dynamics of religion within the SANDF, the experiences of Martinus as an atheist within the military is significant and forms an important contribution to this study. To track further scholarly developments on the efforts of the SANDF to embrace diversity as guided by constitutional imperatives, reference could be made to the work of Lindy Heinecken (Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology,

University of Stellenbosch), in particular her paper, *A Diverse Society, A Representative Military? The complexity of managing diversity in the South African armed forces*. (2009)

The second issue raised by Martinus, within the frame of his understanding of South Africa being a secular democracy, is the importance of education of children which should be free from religious indoctrination.

> *"So, the first issue in South Africa is secularism, is the official separation between church and state, and that includes schools. Which brings me to my second point, the second biggest influence that it has on me and that is my children, that is education. That is the transference of ideas by people in authority, that influence that people in authority have over impressionable minds, on gullible impressionable minds. That is my, probably my biggest issue. That is probably, in my opinion, that is, the atheist movement, that is their most important issue, as far as I'm concerned. Because adults can defend themselves, but children cannot."*
>
> Martinus [22.16 minutes]

The inextricable link between the constitutionally enshrined freedom of conscience and the need not to have children in schools subjected to religious preachments and religious indoctrination did present as a distinct concern for atheists interviewed [Janet, Hendrik, Reuben, Pierce, Martinus, Justin] and developed as a theme through the set of interviews conducted. In response to question (6) Reuben [12.35 minutes] offered the following perspectives on the point.

> *"I think the concern will be the infiltration of religion into public life and particularly into areas supported by the State. In other words the infiltration of religion into schools, or let's not even call it infiltration, let's say that religion has remained in schools despite the fact that with democracy it was supposed to have become a private issue. And if one looks at the religious policy put out by the government for schools, it says very clearly that religion can be studied as a subject but not the practice of religion inculcated into*

students, that is a matter for the church and the home. And yet we find many
schools, probably a majority even, practice religion and a specific religion,
mostly Christianity, on school premises, in school time, using school resources,
and people who don't want this are, they're a minority that risks opprobrium
if they go against the flow. Which is why I think the OGOD court case is going
to be very interesting."

With regard to the OGOD Court Case referred to, it is of no minor significance that this case was effectively initiated by one of the more prominent atheists in South Africa, who went on to form the organisation OGOD (*Organisasie vir Godsdienste-Onderrig en Demokrasie*)[93] with the expressed objective of addressing what the organisation considers to be a breach of the boundaries between scholarly education and religious proselytising. It is important to note that although the founding director is a self-pronounced atheist, neither the organisation, nor the court case, is developed along lines which explicitly defines itself as being atheist in character.

As to the concerns of atheists in South Africa, Janet [20.48 minutes] continued with the theme of the risks to children of religious instruction in the school environment as her 'top-of-list' response.

"A big concern is the fact that people are worried about kids in schools. That's
the thing that Hans [The OGOD court case] is involved in, that's a big issue.
And then, mostly, it comes down to our Constitution in South Africa, it's a
secular one and is not being enforced in government or by government or by
the people in public positions. So that's a major concern for us. And then it's
basically the way we wanna change the viewpoint of how people see atheists,
and who they are and what they do, that's another one. So we just wanna
kind of slowly and surely wipe out that stigma. But, yah, I would say it's mostly
the issue of secularism. Because, not I mean, a lot of the people in the group
are not necessarily religion bashing. We're accepting of everyone. I'm just

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[93] Full details on the organisation and its policies can be viewed online at, http://www.ogod.org.za/

talking about my group now. I don't know if I can talk for all atheists in South Africa. Obviously I can't do that. I'm just talking about the ones that I know that are involved in my community."[94]

Once again, it becomes profoundly evident from the issues raised by Martinus, Reuben and Janet that freedom of conscience and the hand of the State in the *establishment* of religion in the public domain has significant implications for the lived realities of atheists in South Africa. Furthermore, at the core of these contestations broached is not only the right to freedom of religion and conscience, on either side of the religion/non-religion divide, but how such rights are held in tension and balance, and indeed **limited**[95], alongside other rights and obligations enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore, in any contested public space where atheists face up with the religious, issues of equity before the Constitution, discrimination, unfounded prejudices (such as the equating of atheism with Satanism) and the general public perception of atheists become vitally important and indispensible to this study.

This section of the interview also elicited what could be considered as a critique of the manner in which atheism has manifested itself in South Africa, through the lives, actions, attitudes and utterances of self-pronounced atheists. This critique is raised by participant

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[94] Janet (29 years) runs her own business in Johannesburg, RSA.

[95] A further aspect which appears to have entered the discourse on the freedom of religion in South Africa is the narrative of the 'persecution' of the Christian church, if not as a clear and present danger, then as a potential future threat to Christians. Such a view was expressed by Dr Reuben Van Rensburg, the Principal of the South African Theological Seminary [SATS] in a feature recorded for Freedom of Religion – South Africa (FOR-SA), entitled. *'Theological Seminary urges Christians to stand firm against challenges to our faith'*. Available Onlne at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMSXgSp_FEY. Accessed on 15th February 2016. At 00.12 minutes, Dr Van Rensburg notes,

> *"I am deeply concerned about the state of the church, and I believe that instead of the church influencing the State - society as a whole, society has influenced the church. We follow society instead of the other way around………[1.16 minutes] In order to remedy society we need to remedy what's being taught in the church. One of the things we need to celebrate about the twenty years of democracy that we've been through, is the fact that we still have the right to preach the Gospel, we still have the right to proclaim Christ as saviour, and I believe that the moment what we stand for comes under threat from the State, then the church is going to have to stand firm and to resist. The Scriptures teach us clearly that we can resist if what the State asks us to do is not what God has commanded us to do. So, we may face some form of persecution in the future. The church will have to stand strong and have to stand together."*

This statement, from no mean source but the head of one of the largest theological institutions in South Africa, once again highlights the preparedness of a sector of the Christian community to have the provisions of the Constitution trumped by that of their Holy Scriptures.

Justin as his concerns about atheists in the country at present. Justin is a prominent South African atheist, author and secular humanist. Justin [17.38 minutes] noted his concerns as follows.

> *"But the thing which, I'm sure you picked up from what I write, the thing I am almost in a sense more concerned with is the disservice atheists do themselves in terms of public understanding………most of the people that you can imagine who are in the public eye who are atheists are obnoxious. They're abrasive, they're aggressive, they are in a sense insulting towards religion and they think that religious people are stupid and deceived and whatever it might be. And as a secular humanist, even if it's true that people are confused or deceived or stupid or whatever it might be, our response should be sympathy and an attempt to help them rather than abuse them, right. That would seem to follow for me. And I think atheists do; so if you look at the, I mean if you haven't done it yet, look through the South African atheist groups on Facebook its quite instructive. That is just a succession of abusive memes demeaning and belittling people, right. So we don't do ourselves any favours."*

In response, it may be reasonable to note that atheists may wish to challenge this view which, it has to be acknowledged, comes from a person with a respected public profile within media and academic circles, locally and internationally, as a significant voice within the South African atheist and secular humanist community. It is, however, the subsequent opinion offered by Justin which opens up pathways for atheism beyond just being a contradistinction to, or a critique of, religion, into the realm of secular humanism where both worldviews can co-exist, or to offer a variation on the now popularised Stephen Jay Gould phrase, co-exist as *overlapping magisteria*.[96] Justin [21.23 minutes] notes,

> *"All the other groups that I am involved with and know intimately, like the CFI [Centre for Inquiry], the IHEU [International Humanist and Ethical Union], and*

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[96] The phrase non-overlapping magisteria has been popularised over the last decade through members of the New Atheist movement, particularly Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, taking issue with Stephen Jay Gould on his views. Further details on the idea are available online at, http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html, authored by Gould, himself.

the British Humanist Association [BHA]; all of those things are more about

scientific scepticism, about protecting people from harm, of quackery and that

sort of thing and making people less gullible, more understanding of science,

with an anti-religion charlatanry subtext, but not explicitly atheist agenda.

They're either that or humanist and secular. So there again, explicitly atheist

in character but the argument is one for secularity, saying, 'fine go ahead and

be religious but don't bring it in through my doors'. "

Irrespective of whether one may choose to agree or disagree with the views expressed by Justin, this is a valued contribution to this study in that it represents a position on a wide spectrum of opinions on atheism in South Africa, all of which must be aired and considered as the opportunities present themselves.

The Prevalence of Religion and Atheism in South Africa

Questions (7) and (8) in the interview were aimed at establishing the participant's understandings of the scale of the phenomenon of atheism in relation to the degree of religiosity present in South African society. The data obtained was not intended to serve as a formal statistical indicator of the degree to which these variables actually present in society, but to establish where *participants* placed their estimates in order that average indicators for this particular group be obtained. All but two of the participants chose to respond to Questions (7) and (8). The following average scores were obtained from 16 participants.

Table 7. Participant's Levels of Religiosity and Atheism

Questions	Degree of Prevalence
Q.7. What would you estimate to be the level of prevalence of Religion in South African Society.	85%
Q.8. What would you estimate to be the level of prevalence of Atheism in South African Society.	6,68%

It requires noting that, with regard to these indicators obtained, estimated prevalence of atheism cannot be deduced as being synonymous with non-religion. Besides it not being a declared objective of this study, the very complexity of establishing a statistically reliable score on the prevalence of atheism in society precludes this study from using these results

to draw any broader sociological extrapolations of the phenomenon in South Africa. Nonetheless, it does offer an indication on the perceptions of this particular sample group to the questions posed.

6.5. Journeys of Self-Discovery – Further Perspectives (Question 9)

The preceding two sections of the semi-structured interviews [Qs 1-3: Early historical experiences with religion, Qs 4-8: General understandings of atheism], whilst important in themselves, were necessary to foreground the understandings of how the point of publicly self-pronouncing as atheists was reached by participants. The theoretical apparatus offered by Julie Krueger, Armand Wauss and Jesse Smith, as discussed above, will continue to serve the interpretation of the data obtained, however, it is already recognised and noted that what may have revealed itself in the Krueger study as a sequential ordering of the five step de-conversion process [Detachment, Doubt, Disassociation, Transition, Declaration] may not necessarily reflect amongst the participants of this study, although approximations of the theory may be evident. In the attempt to understand what was for the majority of participants a process of de-conversion from religion, this study recognises that for those participants for whom religious affiliation was nothing more than nominal, such de-conversion experiences were not pronounced.

It may be said, though that the responses to Question (9) [*Please describe your journey to the point of non-belief.*] did reflect a general spirit of *born-againism*[97]; to repurpose a phrase used by Afe Adogame (2007:540) to describe the conversion and confessional processes within Christian Pentecostalism. For atheists, however, this born-againism represents a return to a state of original material existence at birth, free from any need for the supernatural or a divine entity; a *state of original atheism*. Participant Nithia [14.54 minutes] summarised the process for him as follows, *"I was an atheist, then I became a Hindu, and now I'm a re-born atheist"*. Implicit in any adoption of the idea of the return to a state of godless original atheism is also a rejection of the religious dogma and doctrines which were previously a part of such religious affiliation.

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[97] Adogame, A. 2007. Sub-Saharan Africa. *Religion, Globalization, and Culture* (pp. 527-548). Brill.

The responses to Question (9) continue to reflect the varying degrees of complexity and difficulty associated with socially self-pronouncing as an atheist, due largely to the varied religious histories represented within the sample of participants, and particularly the different familial relations which shaped the nature and extent of participants' experiences with religion.

For those participants whose childhood and adolescent years were spent within households which could be characterised as being either nominally Christian (Garth, Charles, Harold, Derek, and Peter), or nominally Muslim (Hameed)[98], the passage of de-conversion was less disruptive to family relations and relationships enjoyed within their respective religious communities. In the case of others who had amongst their histories a strong religious heritage within family and institutionalised religion the decision to self-pronounce as an atheist was accompanied by serious disruptions to valued personal relationships within family and church. Whereas not to denote the placement of participant's experiences along a strict spectrum of being nominally religious on the one hand, to being raised in a strictly religious background, on the other, it is simply observed that these variances did result in different processes towards self-identification as an atheist.

Whilst the cumulative socialising effects of family, church and institutionalised State policy, in their combined abilities to entrench participants within religion cannot be overemphasised, it is also noted that for some participants the de-conversion process was a fulfilment of a lifelong disinterest in religion. For participants Charles, Martinus and Peter, compliance with religious precepts and certain religious rites of passage flowed from the very socialisation into religion which was rooted in the religious lineage and heritage of their respective families. In his interview, Peter [8.42 minutes] traced through his family life after his father died, and described his association with the church as follows.

> *"I still went to church just because I felt I had to. I was told by my mother, look*
> *if you want to get confirmed, there was the whole thing about, if you, getting*

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[98] Hereinafter referred to as Group-*X* [Hameed, Garth, Charles, Harold, Derek, Peter]*.*

married one day and all that sort of thing, and so, at that age you don't know

any better, so you keep going………"

Peter [18.31 minutes],

"I went through the motions. I didn't want to be there. I hated it. I actually

hated it. I didn't like it. It wasn't fun. We had to learn things by heart…….I

really just went through the motions. I didn't want to be there."

For Martinus [8.95 minutes] it was a case of,

"I was forced to attend church. Something I instinctively didn't wanna do……As

a child I was just lazy on a Sunday morning."

However, Peter's strong disinterest in religion did not necessarily equate to a spontaneous or instinctive adoption of an atheistic worldview. For Peter, as with certain other participants [Group-*X*], the phases of detachment, doubt and disassociation were more readily traversed, and if the Krueger model had to be carried through, this served a precursory role for the transition and declaration phases to follow. Peter [19.05 minutes] notes of his experiences which would relate to these two latter phases.

"I definitely didn't want to be in the church anymore. So, it wasn't a matter of,

ok, now I'm going to be atheist. It wasn't swinging from one extreme to the

next. I just decided I don't need this. I'm going to give this a miss. I got

confirmed. I never ever went back to church, never, ever………[20.50 minutes]

It [atheism] *was a bit of a process. You know, to be, to actually denounce that*

there is a god, that was a long process…….Its only the last fifteen years that

I've come to the conclusion that there's definitely not a personal god."

In the case of Martinus, his disinterest in religion developed into a rebellion against religion and an intense dislike for it, resulting in him being very outspoken against religion. This he notes [30.05 minutes] became his 'label' or 'identity' [30.05 minutes], as he approached adulthood. Martinus [37.00 minutes] laments the restricted thinking imposed on him by his parents and his community during his upbringing and notes that when he entered the South African army he found the space to explore other worldviews through reading and it was in the army that he met other atheists for the first time in his life.

"As soon as you start to open your mind to other possibilities, other people, other ideas, it's like a light comes on and then that light can never be switched off again. Once you realise that something was wrong, you can never un-realise it again. You can never un-know that something was wrong. Or, if at that stage I couldn't positively explain that it was wrong, just that doubt, that seed of doubt can never be extinguished again."

The point alluded to earlier regarding the *cumulative socialising effects of family, church and institutionalised State policy* upon an individual's path to atheism does have a significant bearing on how the phenomenon may develop into the future, particularly if what appears to be a declining trend in religiosity (And a reciprocal increase in non-religion) is actually validated in South Africa through the passage of time. Without wishing to oversimplify any underlying cause-and-effect relationship it may be reasonable to deduce that the degree to which one is socialised into religion, particularly through the institution of family, has a bearing on an individual's decision to either pursue or abandon the religious tradition with which one was raised.

In an interview[99] with Harry Kreisler of the Institute of International Studies University of California, Berkeley, for the series, *Conversations with History*, Talal Asad captured the effect of this religious socialisation on his life and his own decision to disassociate from the Islamic tradition at the age of 14 years. Asad notes that although he was raised in the Islamic tradition by his mother who was very pious, it is important to also understand the nature of that piety and its effects upon one's religious upbringing to glimpse further into decisions to continue with or relinquish one's religious heritage. On his upbringing within the Islamic tradition, Asad responds [4.00 minutes];

"My mother being a very pious woman who was not at all an intellectual but who in some ways, looking back on it I can see that her approach to her religion in some ways unconsciously made me aware of different approaches,

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[99] Conversations with History: *Thinking about Religion, Secularism and Politics*, dated 2nd October 2008, with Professor Talal Asad, Professor of Anthropology, Graduate Centre of the University of New York. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfAGnxKfwOg. [Accessed on, 24th September 2016].

and that is of an unreflective, what have people call an embodied approach to religion, rather than a highly intellectualised one……..[7.43 minutes] Although I was brought up in a fairly conventional religious way [In Pakistan]………*I had to some extent revolted, I felt myself to be, to have lost my faith already at the age of about 14."*

The significance of these recollections of Talal Asad, as a pre-eminent scholar on the sociology of religion, particular within the areas of secularism and human rights, is almost self-evident for the current study, as it is not dissimilar to the early childhood histories articulated by participants who were, themselves *'embodied'* within socio-religious contexts which were pious but which were at the same time *'unreflective'*, at both a family and particularly a personal level. This, therefore, does go some way to explaining the onset of the disinterest in, and also the disdain for religion (Charles, Peter) which characterised the detachment, doubt and disassociation phases of the path to atheism of participants, especially those within Group-*X*.

A further aspect which characterised the de-conversion experiences of participants is that embarking on a path to atheism is essentially a singular and often very lonely experience. The experiences of the religious, on the other hand, is one of being institutionalised into religion whilst supported by a range of rites of passage, rituals and practices which are largely group experiences which start at birth and carry through to death. Atheism on the other hand, and as borne out by the responses of participants, is a journey one starts off alone, with the socialisation into groupings or formations of non-belief being a subsequent development to personal de-conversion. It is a significant outcome of this study that for participants this was a solitary effort unaided by any direct group or individual support. Put crudely, atheism did not appear with an invitation to join. As Peter had highlighted, his de-conversion did not result in a simultaneous and automatic alignment with atheism; thus alluding to a space of transition which allowed for the meaning of atheism to be understood before being embraced.

The case of participant, Simphiwe also illustrates what was for participants a solitary and deeply reflective period of questioning and active rejection of theism (Jesse Smith, 2010)

and disassociation (Julie Krueger, 2013) from religion, and the subsequent adoption of what Jesse Smith (2010, p.227) refers to as *'atheism as a rejection identity'*. Throughout this process, for Simphiwe, the role of literature on both theism and the rejection of the theistic worldview were indispensible. The emergence of New Atheism post-2004, with its accompanying set of bestselling books offered participants the philosophical tools with which to understand their de-conversion from religion and it also served as the intellectual and philosophical sustenance during the transition phase to publically declaring one's atheism. With reference to his encounter with the literature by Martin Prozesky ('*A New Guide to the Debate About God'*, 1992), which followed a very strong interest in English literature generally (Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, William Golding), Simphiwe [27.00 minutes] noted,

> *"I read the case for god and the case against god……This belief in god is a set of arguments that you put together and then come to the conclusion that you know this god is logically improbable…..Then the Dan Brown books, like DaVinci Code. I know most of it is fiction but some of the things had a factual background. Then, Angels and Demons…….[29.25 minutes] Before reading The God Delusion (Richard Dawkins) I was developing an interest, like, what's really like the ultimate reality. What happens? Is there really a god?......With the whole universe as a whole, what the real truth, like? Is there really a God or is there a different theory?......With the Martin Prozesky book I got a chance to step back and watch what's going on with the debate, the debate – the case for god, like, from biology and natural evils, the case of the resurrection of Jesus, the case of morality……I got a chance to step back and judge for myself. I don't need an extensive knowledge about the universe to tell you that no way around here that there are square circles or married bachelors. The whole idea is all absurd."*

In highlighting this excerpt from the interview, one of the central points being alluded to is that the absence of any group support structures is conspicuous; leaving the individual alone and fairly isolated to grapple with some of life's deepest philosophical questions. For Simphiwe his love for literature formed the bedrock of his de-conversion from religion. It

could be argued that it is precisely this deeply reflective and solitary experience that is required to arrive at a personal and meaningful understanding as to what, according to Simphiwe, is *'logically improbable'* and *'absurd'* about religion; descriptors, or variations thereof, which constitute the lexicon of atheists generally in the constructions of their respective *'atheism as a rejection identity'*. Despite it appearing obvious, it is important to note that it is not the lure of atheism as such to which participants were drawn, but it is their rejection of the logical improbability and absurdity of the propositions of religion which were central to their de-conversion from religion.

Simphiwe's eagerness to pursue inquiry through the exploration of literature, which appeared to be common practice amongst participants interviewed is, in more ways than one, reflective of the quest for knowledge and universal truths which shaped the empiricism of Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704); as captured by Kirk (2007:61).

> *"knowledge itself is derived by making a connection between ideas, and by understanding the reasons for agreement and disagreement between them. In this sense, Locke started from the rationalist assumption that the right place to begin the enquiry into the nature and extent of knowledge has to be the private contents of an individual's consciousness………Locke's empiricism was, in one way, derived from his ambition to demonstrate a proper distinction between truths that could be demonstrated and mere opinions. He wished to show that beliefs formed from experience have a validity that is lacking if they are derived from other provenances, which claim to be sources of knowledge, such as religious doctrine."*

Accordingly, it may be advanced that, as opposed to the adoption by faith of *revealed* wisdom and 'truths' of sacred religious texts, the de-conversion from religion is a journey of questioning, reasoning and understanding one's reality, resulting in knowledge formations which must constantly find validation in the mind of the individual. It may not be unreasonable, therefore, to posit that this longer and more reflective process of de-

conversion may go some way to accounting for the relatively lower prevalence of non-religiosity witnessed, when compared to religiosity.

Two further aspects emerge from the analysis of Question (9) of the interviews, particularly that of Simphiwe. Firstly, the interviews are certainly reflective of participants claiming their rights to freedom of conscience and freedom of expression under the new post-Apartheid constitutional dispensation; the freedom to hold the views that they wish and to publicly express their identities as atheists. To apply the metaphor used by Barbara Bompani (2006:1139) in her comparison of the role of the church in South Africa pre and post 1994, it could be said that what were once *'frozen identities'* of non-religion have, post the 1996 Constitution, begun to *'defrost'*, given the new statutory spaces now available.

Secondly, the deeply reflective and almost isolationist de-conversion experience of participants may explain, in part, the individualistic and the socially incoherent representation of the phenomenon in South Africa. Each individual arrives at their respective points of self-identification as an atheist through their unique epistemic pathways and their own validation of what constitutes their atheist worldview, notwithstanding their exposure to similar literature, as was evident amongst the sample of participants. Besides, and unlike the compulsion experienced by the religious to belong to defined religious formations, atheists are under no such obligation to be enjoined to any grouping of atheists or any similar social formation. Melton (2001:9), in his summary of the essential position which holds atheists on common ground, also recognised the uncertainty of the social cause which may need to follow, which questioned the need to move beyond just the realm of the personal.

> *"The contemporary unbelief community finds its unity in a mutually agreed upon atheism—a simple observation that having observed the universe (through various scientific lens) and thought about reality (in post-Enlightenment modes), no basis remains for affirming the existence of a deity. At the same time, the community is divided on a number of important issues. Is Unbelief simply a perspective to be affirmed, or a cause to be organized, promoted, and perpetuated?*

The points articulated by Melton (2001) find resonance in the account of participant Thembiso who, not unlike many other atheists interviewed, experienced a solitary journey to the point of self-pronouncing as an atheist, with paths to atheism lit primarily by literature and online resources. In many instances such resources were those which emerged over the past 12 years from within the New Atheist Movement.

"So, I've always been sceptical. But I think mid-2010 and eleven, in the midst of my scepticism that I started hearing about this guy called Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens and I bought a book, there it is, the God Delusion, okay. That was my trigger moment, because when the book starts, that's where Richard says, if you're not sure, but I'm just paraphrasing, it says, if you are in the middle and you don't know what you believe, this book is for you, like if you end up fence-sitting, like an agnostic. And then I read the book and I always say this is one book that changed my life. So, it's official that Richard Dawkins stole my faith because after I read the book, like, I get this from a lot of atheists, I don't know if you've experienced it, but when I finally, finally, accepted to myself that I'm an atheist I had this massive weight off my shoulder. I could literally feel weight coming off my shoulder because I had just realised I had burdened myself with things I do not understand, things that never made sense but I still believed."

Thembiso [31.35 minutes]

Two points which can be gleaned from Thembiso's account which could offer an explanation as to the steadfast nature of the stand adopted by atheists following their de-conversion from religion. Firstly, their journeys of self-discovery are deeply reflective, singular and carefully thought through, before any possible 'trigger-moment' and the search to join other groupings of like-minded people. Secondly, the unburdening of oneself from what could be considered as being the yoke of religion brings with it a profound sense of relief and liberation. These deeply personal recollections of Thembiso, articulated passionately, are not dissimilar to the experiences of Martinus [37.00 minutes], when he explained of his 'trigger-moment' as being, "*like a light comes on and then that light can never be switched*

off again. Once you realise that something was wrong, you can never un-realise it again. You can never un-know that something was wrong."

The first-hand discovery of these identity forming moments and processes amongst participants are key contributions to this study, as they offer a window into the lived experiences of atheists through their respective journeys, without religion.

To further develop the point made by Thembiso and even Simphiwe, above, on the logical improbability and absurdity of the propositions of religion and how this may lead to a commitment which advances the social cause of non-belief, the data from the interview with Janet once again demonstrates that, as opposed to the allure of the atheist worldview, it is the fundamental misgivings about religion in which the seeds of doubt, and hence de-conversion, are sown. In this regard, Janet's interview stands out for its three key empirical contributions to this study. Firstly, Janet acknowledges that her doubts about and resistance to the validity of religion were rooted in the very strict and literalist religious upbringing which she was subjected to by her parents. To the question as to what was the initial trigger which set off her journey to atheism, Janet responded [27.55 minutes],

> *"Well, its kinda my parent's fault though. Because it was so extreme and something that's tied in with everything, this religion that I, yes, my religious upbringing was extreme. I came to this point where, because it was never acceptable and that's the way we were brought up, you can't be a low Christian, you can't be luke-warm. It's all the way or nothing. And when I came to that point where I discovered, I actually I don't think I'm going all the way here with my religion, I then started to doubt everything."*

Secondly, her entry into post-graduate studies (Masters Degree in Science) and the application of critical thinking and scientific rigour to which she was called at university, or 'higher order thinking' as Janet refers to it [29.30 minutes], became inseparable from other areas of her life to which the same methods of analysis were applied.

"I couldn't kind of keep that separate because I can't do that compartmentalisation, that I think people who are scientists and Christians sometimes are good at doing. I couldn't do that. I couldn't like have this separate parts; this is scientific thinking, and have this part this is religious thinking. The two clashed highly with one another."

There were separate moments during the whole interview process in which the emotional gravitas of the personal accounts of participants was felt deeply. Janet's heart-wrenching recollection of how her decision to abandon her Christian religious heritage affected her relationship with her parents was one such moment. The third element of Janet's important contribution to this study was by way of her experiences of the impact that her stance had had on her parents, which was one of deep pain, made worse by the separation from her parents for a period of time, which resulted from her decision to announce her atheism. These experiences caused her to seek therapy for its effects. Janet [31.02 minutes] offers the following account of this experience.

"I remember kind of the thing that made me decide I'm gonna have to tell my parents now. And that was very difficult and I actually went to see a psychologist. It was so difficult for me to tell my parents. I didn't want to disappoint them and I knew the way they were and they were gonna be highly disappointed in me…….[35.27 minutes] I felt like I'd betrayed them also. It's all this guilt and stuff."

Although the distress experienced by all parties in this account could not be grasped fully under interview conditions, that this was a deeply painful experience for Janet is beyond doubt and does serve to heighten her ***self-integrity*** and identity as an atheist. It is in this third element, of acting out this self-integrity in the midst of deep anguish, that Janet makes some of her strongest contributions to this study. Having had the opportunity to journey with Janet through these recollections it was comforting to learn that relations with her parents have healed over time and have been restored.

6.6. Legal and Public Discourses on Atheism in South Africa (Questions 10-13)

This section of the interview aimed to draw out the participant's views on how the phenomenon of atheism is engaged with in the public domain on issues such as atheism and morality, secularism, and atheism in relation to the law. It was considered important that this study extracts some understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of atheists on these questions.

Question (10) [*What in your view is the association between religion, morality and non-belief?*] is a contestation to the dominant narrative of the religious, which attempts to form a positive correlation between religion and morality, whatever that morality may be constructed to mean. Certain participants acknowledged the positive role which religion had played over centuries in offering the religious and the world a moral compass of some sort by which people have lived their lives. As discussed above, Justin's critique of segments of the atheist community, locally and internationally, as being blind-sided to any contribution which religion is capable of making to society, fosters negative perceptions held towards atheists. On these issues, Peter [23.44 minutes] noted the following.

> *"This is a question that's been asked a lot. Religious people like to claim that morality comes from religion. I think to a certain extent, whether atheists like it or not, there is a bit of morality carried, like that sense of that community, it's there, it's been there for centuries……..And learning from the Bible even its written by whoever. There are a lot of moral things in the Bible. And whether we like it or not, historically, we've been taught this for centuries. We can't get away from it. So, I'll have to say religion has taught many people some morality, although atheists will say you need empathy to have morality. But I think that's a little bit of a myth as well."*

The points presented by Peter illustrate a disposition which recognises the positive contributions of religion in shaping the lives of the religious. This, however, cannot be taken as Peter or other atheists sharing a view of an overall positive correlation between religion and morality. This position finds concurrence with those held by Harold [59.59 minutes].

"A significant portion of our society uses religion to make decisions in their daily lives. It would be foolish to expect for it not to have a place. I'd like to see a complete separation of church and State, or religion and State. I'd like to see that happen but it's never going to."

This preparedness on the part of Harold to offer religion its credit as it is thought due is, however, preceded by the unequivocal rejection on his part of a positive association between religion and morality. What may appear contradictory in his separate viewpoints actually isn't for Harold. At the core of this highly contested issue is the question of whether the positive correlation drawn by the religious between religion and morality should hold as a universal truth applicable to all. If Harold asserts, as he correctly does, that it would be foolish to expect for religion to not have a place in society, the question does arise as to what that place is, in a society in which a plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews are expected to co-exist. In the context of this discourse, the short response would be that where such positive correlations between religion and morality are established, that its place is within the realm of the personal and the private and not for universal application in public policy and public institutions. Harold offers his perspectives as an atheist on why he feels that the negative association ascribed to atheism in relation to morality should be dispelled.

"I am strongly of the belief, and this is one of the few things I can be strongly evangelical about, is that there is no association with a lack of morality and a lack of belief in a deity of any kind. You don't need a belief in God to have a moral sense. We all, actually we have a inbuilt moral sense as part of our genes. This is what I think. It's based on a lot of evidence. [Inaudible for 3 seconds] *We have this moral sense and it's developed quite a lot and that moral sense is quite similar to most of the religions. Our religious moral sense developed out of a natural moral sense and they're quite simple fundamental rules about getting on with people in a society, which is what we are, we're a social animal. You find exactly the same rules in a troop of baboons, and that is where my own research comes in and that's one of the things that has, in a sense my atheism has developed in my adult life as a extension of my own*

studies and my recognition that many of our behavior patterns are very similar to the social animals that I study. And it would surprise me to learn that baboons have a religion but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that baboons have a moral sense."

Harold [47.01 minutes]

The responses offered by Harold are pertinent for the following reasons. It brings to this study a unique set of insights inspired by his academic research in the field of behavioural and social exchange systems in baboons, samangos and vervet monkeys, as his path to understanding what may be the first cause to humans having a moral sense. For Harold this moral sense is innate to humans and that religion gets its moral codes from the human condition and not the other way around where what is moral is considered to be derived from a supernatural deity. The views expressed by Harold represent a very firm contestation to the hegemonic narrative of the religious which aims to form a direct and almost singular correlation between morality and religion. Participant Alwyn [27.01 minutes] notes the following on this point.

"So now, in this stage it's very hard for me to even think of morality in any way that its tied to religion………[27.47 Minutes] Cause, as soon as you look at morality from a religious point of view it breaks down very fast."

It is also of interest to note that not unlike Janet [29.30 minutes], Harold's vocational calling within the Life Sciences in which evidence-based research and the application of the scientific method are foundational, had a direct bearing on shaping his identity and worldview as an atheist.

A detailed analysis of the full set of data on Question (10) of the interviews reveals that although some within the sample of atheists interviewed were respectful of the positive contributions made by religion towards shaping understandings of morality, all participants were of one voice in their renunciation of any direct correlation between an atheist or a non-religious worldview and a lack of any moral calculus; in essence, this represented an affirmation of the popularised understanding within the world of non-religion that one can

be *'good without god'*. In the world of religious apologetics, few have been more successful than theologian William Lane Craig[100] in promoting the dependency of a moral framework on religion and a supernatural deity. Even prior to the emergence of the New Atheist Movement this subject was brought under scrutiny in 2001 between prominent humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz, who is considered to be one of the founding voices in modern secular humanism[101], and William Lane Craig in a debate entitled, *Is goodness without God good enough?*.[102] The debate gave cause for editors Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (2009) to publish a book, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* on the debate, accompanied by contributions by other authors on the subject. In his revised published version (In, Garcia and King, (eds.) 2009:164) of his closing remarks to the debate William Lane Craig laid down the following basic contentions on the religion-morality dependency.

> *"I . If theism is true, we have a sound foundation for morality.*
> *II . If theism is false, we do not have a sound foundation for morality"*

Moving away from the glare of deeply intellectual debates on the international stage between prominent philosophers, this study can make the claim, albeit modestly, that there are new emergent voices from the furthest southern tip of the African continent who are now also prepared to raise their hands and enter this all important debate, with a set of cogent and meaningful renunciations to the assertion that atheism, or secular humanism for that matter, is devoid of any moral sense.[103] It became apparent through the interviews

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[100] For further background on the work of Dr William Lane Craig, in addition to his extensive interactions and debates with members of the New Atheist Movement (Christopher Hitchens, Lawrence Krauss) which are available online [YouTube], reference could also be made to his website, www.reasonablefaith.org.

[101] This acknowledgement is made in a discussion between Paul Kurtz and Nathan Bupp of the Centre for Inquiry (USA). The discussion, Paul Kurtz – Reflections at 80, is available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDBLY7y2FxM. [Accessed on, 3rd December 2016].
The late Professor Paul Kurtz (1925-2012) of State University of New York was the founder and chair of the Council for Secular Humanism in America, as well as the founder of Prometheus Books, which strongly influenced the publication of books on secular humanism and the critique of religion.

[102] The full debate can be viewed online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr_RzS-579o. [Accessed on, 3rd December 2016].

[103] For further more recent debates on the subject and my interrogation of the issues under debate, particularly post 2006 with the emergence of the New Atheists Movement, reference could be made to my Masters dissertation (2013), *A Post-Structural Theological Critique of the Perspectives of Christopher Hitchens on Vicarious Redemption*, Chapter 5.1., which brings into dialogue the works of Christopher Hitchens and other thinkers such as Slavoj Zizek and Professor Elizabeth Anderson on the subject.

and the analyses thereof that participants had moved beyond the two basic contentions set by William Lane Craig, above, and were disinclined to the confines of such theistic analysis. What was also evident from every interview was the very absence of participants polemicising against religion in that most inappropriate of descriptions of being *militant* or *combative* against religion.[104] Although the subject of secular humanism was not actively broached within this study, as it was not a defined objective of this project, it was as though this is what participants were alluding to, in search of a term to give their worldviews a broader home, beyond just being confined to atheism as a contradistinction to religion and being confined to an identity of what one is not.

It would be appropriate to also note that participants demonstrated an ability to engage with the wide range of life circumstances with which they were confronted, which tested their respective moral codifications. Whilst it cannot be the purpose of this study to determine the correctness or otherwise of these codifications, it is the preparedness on their part to questioning inherited codes of morality and to be open to seeking new and more meaningful responses to their realities, which must be recognised. Charles Taylor alluded to the importance of this approach in his discussion, *'Re-Imagining the Role of Religion in Public Life'*[105]. [1.09.48 minutes]

> *"I also think another thing that's wrong with a purely codified system of rules,*
> *is that life is full of dilemmas and if you think the very idea that I have a*
> *complete code is the idea that there can't be a dilemma,……...The sense that*
> *we very often are faced with, all the time, with deep dilemmas and we have to*
> *somehow navigate between them, means that I can't say this always trumps*
> *that. The trump word is the word of codifiers."*

For participant Simphiwe, and in reference to the Bible in particular, it was more than a case of the Bible being inadequate as a moral code, but that its prescripts were anti-moral for the

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[104] It did come as a surprise to learn of Kerry S. Walters' (2010:12) reference to physicist and atheist, Professor Steven Weinberg as one from amongst 'militant atheists'; a misnomer which does little to advance the de-stigmatisation of atheism.

[105] Taylor. C. 2014. *Charles Taylor – Reimagining the Role of Religions in Public Life.* Published by The Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke University. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YChPGzELqMU. [Accessed on, 21st December 2015].

current day and age. He was not accepting of a book which he viewed as containing Biblical warrants for the subjugation of women, slavery and the proliferation of religious wars as being a credible set teachings on morality.

> *"I think, like, religion as it is, is not, especially the Bible as it says moral codes for humans as a whole, because people look up to the Bible for moral guides and things, but then, the Bible doesn't set a good moral code for people."*
>
> Simphiwe [49.41 minutes]

It will be fitting to bring the discussion on Question (10) to summary with the following comments from participant Derek [30.18 minutes].

> *"I often come back to the, this was in the context of the slavery debate and someone called Carlisle had written, whether it was a sermon or a pamphlet or something I don't remember the details but Carlisle had written a defense of slavery, including an argument that it was effectively the will of God. And John Stuart Mill wrote a response to it that's easy to find, and when it came to directly addressing that specific point of the argument, this again isn't an exact quotation, what Mill said I think is one of the best thing anyone has ever said about the relationship between religion-morality. He just said, if there are such Gods it is the first duty of civilized men to resist them. Mill said actually, the Gods want us to do terrible stuff then we just mustn't listen. So yes, I would say morality is perhaps best done independent of religion. It doesn't necessarily mean having to be atheist about it, but yes, if the Gods will that then we just mustn't listen to them."*

With regard to Question (11), other than the accounts already offered by participants on the impact of their respective declarations on atheism amongst family members, participants did not report of any specific experiences of discrimination or of being ostracised, although they did acknowledge that a serious and more general problem did exist in society's marginalisation and stigmatisation of persons who declare their atheism. One of the reasons for participants not having experienced such discrimination could be that they work and

socialise in environments which, and amongst people who, are not hostile to alternate religious belief systems or to non-religion.

Questions (12) and (13) which brought the interviews to a close, dealt specifically with discovering participant's views on the influence of religion in the shaping of public life and public policy, as well as eliciting their opinions on whether current South African law offered them sufficient support and protection as self-pronounced atheists. Although it was not a declared academic objective to investigate the idea of secularism (Question 12) amongst participants, it had become clear as this study had progressed that the project to understand the lived realities of atheists in South Africa could not be conducted at a distance from some discovery on how atheists viewed the separation between religion and the shaping of public policy.

For participant Hameed, as with most participants, the responses to Question (13) were generally one of being comfortable that the South Africa Constitution and the justice system offered atheists sufficient protection. There were, however, a set of concerns expressed on Question (13), by Hameed, Simphiwe and Justin, which are worth noting. Hameed [56.06 minutes] noted the following concern.

> *"I think that we are completely safe in terms of the Constitution. My concern is what happens, as we saw in the Nkandla affair, my concern is that the Constitution is not the only thing that's; we can always have recourse, we can always go to the Constitutional Court and I think we'll be safe there."* [106]

Hameed alludes to the fact that the Constitution and the Constitutional Court may be the arbiter of final resort. However, this does not diminish any discrimination or prejudice which atheists may suffer until an issue is resolved through the oft very long and expensive passage of the legal system. A further concern was raised by Simphiwe [56.10 minutes] in response to this question, to the effect that although the Constitution may offer sufficient

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[106] The Nkandla Affair to which Hameed refers is the much publicised story of the use of public funds (R260 Million/$18,7 Million/£14,8 Million) for the development of South African President Jacob Zuma's private residence, a matter which took many years to resolve legally, until the Constitutional Court judgement of 31st March 2016 which found Mr Zuma liable for a portion of the costs.

legal cover for atheists, ultimately, this cannot mask the status of invisibility which atheism is forced into within the public space, in which only the major religions are considered for engagement on matters of public policy. Perhaps this has something to do with the important issue for further consideration beyond this academic project, of South African atheists not having organised themselves as yet into a coherent and visible public force who wish to find representation in public life and as contributors to the formulation of public policy.

The concerns expressed by Justin [40.20 minutes] to Question (13) involved a brief discussion of the Constitutional Court Case (South Africa) of gay Methodist priest Ecclesia de Lange who was dismissed from the Methodist Church for declaring her intentions to enter into a same-sex marriage; *De Lange v Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and Another [2015] ZACC 35*.[107] Justin felt that the decision of the Constitutional Court to rule against De Lange on the basis that, in his view, it [The Constitutional Court] could not get involved in the internal policy and doctrinal rulings of the Methodist Church was an incorrect one and one which brought the provisions and protections on sexual orientation under the Bill of Rights in the Constitution in direct conflict with the rulings of the church. He raised the further question of, what would have been the court's position had the church been racist instead of being homophobic. Not unlike the views expressed by Hameed on this point, and although Justin does feel that the supreme law in the Constitution contains sufficient provision for the protection of atheists, there still remains many other issues which may still need to be tested through the courts.

On the place of religion in the shaping of public policy (Question 12), Derek echoed the majority opinion of the atheists interviewed, when he noted [39.44 minutes],

> *"I think in the shaping of policy, I'm pretty French, right, which means, no place. And I think that partly because, even if there were no atheists I think that would be a good rule for a country, because history has taught us in*

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[107] The Constitutional Court judgement handed down is available online at, http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2015/35.pdf. [Accessed on, 4th December 2016].

terrible detail how fantastically destructive it can be to try to let one religion

have too close a connection with the State."

Introducing an entirely alternate approach to deconstructing the place of religion in public policy, Charles [1.09.12 minutes] unseats religion from the centre of the narrative and notes that it is one set of ideas amongst many others. He goes on to explain, almost in a Phil Zuckerman[108] manner, that many countries have, in the past and even currently, experienced this shift away from religion being the central driving social force. Charles urges for a more wide-angled approach to the question, to see all ideas and stories as possible contributors to the shaping of public life.

"We've existed in societies where religion hasn't been at the forefront of

everything. We've lived in societies that religion has been at the forefront,

these theocracies. Look at Britain. Britain started rising up, at the same time

has come the Enlightenment, and started the empiricism and building their

own empire. They had their own mythology, they built their own mythos, their

own stories and that spread throughout the world as well. It wasn't just

Christianity……..Religion isn't that central to most societies and as we now

also entering a meta-society where our pop media, our entertainment media,

is taking over the role of the stories that used to be supplied by myth and

folklore."

Charles [1.07.58 minutes]

Similarly, Charles Taylor (2007:209), in his book, *The Secular Age*, called for a transformation in the way we view ourselves as societies, in which we displace ourselves and any sacred belief systems from the centre and adopt an un-situated or decentered view without any *"privileged nodal points"*.

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[108] Zuckerman, P. 2008. *Society without God: What the least religious nations can tell us about contentment*. NYU Press. Reference could also be made to Phil Zuckerman's (2014) presentation to the Sunday Assembly, Los Angeles, *Phil Zuckerman: Why Secular Societies "Live Better"*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ-WbsalX0Q&t=54s. [Accessed on, 20th October 2016]. In both these resources Zuckerman explores the effects of the diminishing role of religion in public policy and the positive effects this has had on various social variables [Crime, health, peace].

If harmony amongst a diverse community of the religious and the non-religious is a social objective, then, the acquisition of knowledge about the material universe and knowledge about the broader landscape of religion, outside of one's own position within a particular religious, or non-religious, position must count in favour of such an objective. One of the common elements which contributed towards the 'de-conversion' of the participants discussed was their pursuit of knowledge, either through entry into a tertiary education institution (eg., Pierce, Charles, Janet), or the reading of works of general literature (eg., Simphiwe), or the exploration of literature on atheism and rationalism (eg., Thembiso, Anesh), or a combination of any of these knowledge pathways. A further common theme was the desire to understand the doctrinal workings of different religious belief systems (eg. Garth, Nithia), which meant reading the sacred texts (eg., The Koran, The Bible, The Bhagavad-Gita) of the different faiths.[109] In this regard Garth [7.27 minutes] noted the following.

> *"I've always been interested in religion. I spent quite a lot of my spare time*
> *reading about Judaism, about Islam, about Buddhism, Shintoism. I tried to*
> *learn as much as I can if only to use that information to criticize the principles*
> *of these religions when they mix (partially audible) discord with reason."*[110]

The outcome of the interviews support the view that the pursuit of new knowledge was key to the identity transformation which participants experienced in reaching the point at which they were entirely comfortable with publicly self-pronouncing as atheists. It was in their pursuit of understandings and knowledge of theism that the participants reflected the view

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[109] This point could be considered as a recognition of the critique of secularists, of whom atheists could be considered a sub-grouping, which runs through much of the book by Jacques Berlinerblau (2005:4), entitled, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers must take religion seriously*, in which he notes,

> *"To construct one's self against something that one does not understand, or care much about,*
> *does not make for a very coherent, compelling, or durable self."*

[110] Given the impact which Richard Dawkins has had on the resurgence in atheism internationally, on the point of understanding that which one is critiquing, it is hard to forget his public (Twitter) faux pas in which he admitted to not having read the Koran as he had read the Bible.

> *"Haven't read Koran so couldn't quote chapter & verse like I can for Bible"*

Taylor, J. 2013. Atheists Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris face Islamophobia backlash: Dawkins surprised his fans and critics when he admitted he had not read the Koran. *The Independent*, 12th April. Available online at, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/homenews/ atheists-richard-dawkins-christopher-hitchens-and-sam-harris-face-islamophobiabacklash- 8570580.html. [Accessed on, 1st August 2016].

expressed by David Ramsay Steele (2008:269) that, *"Today's atheists are atheists because they care far more about the God issue than most nominal theists do."*

For those participants whose early childhood experiences could not be regarded as resembling a strong religious categorisation and who could be regarded as being 'nominally Christian' (Harold, Garth, and Derek) and being 'nominally Muslim' (Hameed), it is evident that the onset of the inquiry into other non-religious explanations of their respective realities occurred during early adolescence and was not protracted to the point of entry into tertiary education, as was the case for others, as indicated above. Furthermore, their pursuits of inquiries ontological became life defining, and in certain cases, career defining (Derek – Professor of Philosophy, Harold – Biologist (MSc.), Hameed – Professor of Physics/Physicist). On the other hand, Alwyn [14.32 minutes] alludes to the support he felt from just being able to speak in an open-minded manner with his parents, who were religious, but who understood, *"where he was coming from"* as an atheist.

6.7. Further Issues Emerging out of the Interviews

Beyond the declared research plan to answer the set of pre-determined questions, the interviews gave rise to a further set of important issues which participants had raised directly themselves, as well as other issues which the discussions gave rise to and which related to experiences of atheists elsewhere in the world but which has significance for the South African context. The following issues are presented, for their significance in themselves, as well as subject matter for further academic research.

6.7.1. Secular Celebrants

The availability of the services of Secular Celebrants is an established practice in countries which are constituted along secular principles. It is clear that this practice is now off the ground in South Africa. The subject was raised by four participants [Garth, Janet, Reuben and Justin], during the interviews. Two participants had already officiated at ceremonies in that capacity. Of the atheists interviewed, one is a Secular Celebrant [Justin] registered with the RSA Department of Home Affairs. Two administrators from the South African Secular

Society (SASS) who were interviewed noted their intentions to register with the Department of Home Affairs as Secular Celebrants, in order for them to officiate formally at weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies for children. Reuben [23.55 minutes] noted during his interview that the SASS receives frequent enquiries for the services of Secular Celebrants.

Although the idea of a strictly secular and non-religious approach to officiating at public events such as a wedding is a developing social phenomenon, the offering of the services for such events by officiates who did not adhere to any specific religious tradition is now established in South Africa, albeit to a very limited extent.[111]

One of the more contemporary and admittedly fascinating accounts of secular, or non-religious, rites of passage events is the German experience of *Jugendweihe*, which is a secular coming of age ceremony for youth of approximately 14 years to welcome them into adulthood. *Jugendweihe* is a strictly non-religious ceremony which gained resurgence after World War II[112] According to the Religion News Service source referenced (2016) the number of young adults currently going through this course (20 weeks) run by secular humanist organisations, culminating in a formal ceremony, is estimated at 50 000 per year in Germany. By any standard, this is a significant number for any such programme of a secular humanist nature completely unhinged from religion. Whilst the Secular Humanist community of South Africa may be nowhere close to the German experience in terms of the co-ordination necessary to manage such a programme, the *Jugendweihe* programme and ceremony points to the workable ideas which may still form part of the future of atheism in South Africa.

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[111] South African websites which could be visited in this regard are,
http://www.celebration.co.za/wedding/ministers-and-officiants/
www.fsi.org.za
http://www.renaissancegem.co.za/
[112] Dore, B. 2016. In Germany, secular 'confirmation' thrives again. *Religion News Service*. 22nd July. Available online at, http://religionnews.com/2016/07/22/in-germany-secular-confirmation-thrives-again/. [Accessed on, 14th November 2016].

6.7.2. The Quest for a Non-Religious Spirituality

The inquiry into how widespread the phenomenon of Secular Celebrants was in South Africa brought into the purview of this study, the *Renaissance Spirituele Gemeenskap* (RSG)[113] [Renaissance Spiritual Community], based in Pretoria. The RSG was founded by theologians and academics who were past members of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). One of the key directors and founding members of RSG is Abel J. Pienaar who is a self-pronounced agnostic and also the founder (2009) of the *Sentrum vir Eietydse Spiritualiteit* (SES)[114] [Centre for Contemporary Spirituality].

Both RSG and SES embrace a secular ethos, and are welcoming of anyone interested in a quest for a spiritual journey which is not inclusive of traditionally held religious dogma and traditions. Although neither the Renaissance Spirituele Gemeenskap, or the Sentrum vir Eietydse Spiritualiteit are distinctly atheist in character, their very existence and the issues with which they are prepared to engage also represents a brave contestation to the hegemony of the Christian religion, and in particular, a challenge to the NGK in which many of their RSG and SES founders spent their formative years. These formations and the trends they reflect may have some common ground with networks such as The Sea of Faith (www.sofn.org.uk) in England which was founded by Don Cupitt. The Sea of Faith Network is an association of predominantly Anglican clergy, many of whom are still members of the church but who do not subscribe to its fundamental doctrinal positions, they see religion as a human creation.[115] As to whether organisations such as RSG and SES may represent a *'transition'* station (Julie Krueger 2013) for a later emergence of atheism does constitute an interesting area for future study; alongside other organisations which reflect the character of non-religious spirituality.

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[113] RSG Website: http://www.renaissancegem.co.za/
[114] SES Website: http://www.spiritualiteit.co.za/
[115] The Sea of Faith Network website www.sofn.org.uk has the following extract as their creed.
  "The Network...Explores the implications of accepting religion as a human creation;
  Promotes the validity of creative, human-centred religion;
  Affirms the continuing importance of religious thought
  and practice as expressions of awe and wonder and
  celebrations of spiritual and social values."

6.7.3. Atheism and the South African Communist Party

Participant Hameed raised an interesting set of points during his interview [26.16 minutes] regarding the place of atheism and religion within the history and current standing of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and certain of its key members. The significance of this issue becomes immediately evident when one considers the important role which the SACP still plays within South African politics, even though it has chosen not to stand for direct parliamentary representation as a party and instead choosing to support the efforts of the ruling party, the African National Congress. Once one has worked through the controversy regarding President Nelson Mandela's membership[116] of the SACP, the number of South African presidents who were members of the South African Communist Party would total to three out of three since the democratic dispensation in 1994; Presidents, Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. What does this mean for the history and current status of atheism in South Africa? Hameed [26.14 minutes] offers an historical context on the matter.

> *"One of the things that does interest me a lot is, how is it that we have, you know, such a vibrant Communist Party in South Africa but which doesn't represent itself in the organization of atheism in South Africa? So, it's an interesting phenomenon because one of the huge clashes that happened in the 20s and 30s in South Africa was between White and Black members of the Communist Party and it was around this issue of belief and that you could be a believer in God and the same time be a communist……There's absolutely nothing stopping you from saying that, actually I believe in Communism as an economic system, and that's fine. But, you know, Marxism is much more than communism is an economic system."*

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[116] Whilst this study will not be drawn into resolving this oft debated issue, reliance is place on the research undertaken by British historian, Professor Stephen Ellis whose research uncovered documentary evidence of President Mandela's membership in the SACP. In this regard reference could be made to, Colin Freeman, and Jane Flanagan (2012), 'Nelson Mandela 'proven' to be a member of the Communist Party after decades of denial'. Published in The Telegraph. Available online at, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/9731522/Nelson-Mandela-proven-to-be-a-member-of-the-Communist-Party-after-decades-of-denial.html. [Accessed on, 4th December 2016].

To the critique raised by African National Congress stalwarts such as Moses Lotoane as to why the Communist Party was so 'White' in the 30s, Hameed responds [28.50 minutes],

> *"And partly the reason the Communist Party is so White is because it excludes people of belief…….I can't for the hell of me imagine that Thabo Mbeki is religious. I don't know the answer to this, right."*

Although this discussion could be drawn into various interesting facets of the place of atheism and religion in the history of South Africa, the key issue being raised with these excerpts from Hameed's interview is that South Africa does have an important history on the role of atheism in the shaping of political thinking within the resistance movement. Recovering this history is not just important for the historical record itself, but also to investigate how the atheist worldview may have shaped political thinking within the resistance movement pre-1994, as well as to examine the extent to which such thinking has dissipated or may still be present within the collective Tri-Partite Alliance between the SACP, the ANC and COSATU (The Congress of South African Trade Unions). That atheism was a factor in the shaping of the South African Communist Party pre and post 1994 is beyond doubt. This point and the impact of, both, atheism and religion within the party necessitated the following comments by the SACP itself to its official Declaration at its 10th Congress in July 1998.

> *"In practice, in the SACP, there have always been comrades of religious persuasion (including many religious ministers), but their involvement has tended to be seen as an anomaly. The truth, however, is that these comrades were attracted to our Party not despite their religious beliefs and values – but because of them. And it is because of their religious views that many were, and are, outstanding communists. Sadly, many thousands of other South Africans have been attracted by the moral and political message of communism, only to feel excluded by the "atheism" of our Party."*[117]

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[117] South African Communist Party, Declaration of 10th Congress , dated 5th July 1998. (1998:68). Available online at, http://www.sacp.org.za/10thcongress/marxism.pdf. [Accessed on, 7th May 2016].

The need for a constructive, formal and ongoing academic engagement with atheists in South Africa is once again proven in this new vista for research opened up during Hameed's interview. Such an academic enterprise will also contribute towards breaking the barriers to entry for atheism into the academy and thereby also reverse the marginalisation of atheism within formal scholarship and more broadly within society.

6.7.4. Sunday Assembly

The need for atheists to meet regularly and to discuss issues of common concern and to support one another was identified during the interviews. This is already a feature of the South African atheist landscape, but not on a widespread scale. Meetings which are known of are in the form of weekday evening meet-up groups over drinks and a meal, during which discussions are held on issues of interest. From discussions during the interviews and the networks established during the course of this study, four such meet-up groups were identified. They were, Durban Critical Thinker (DCT) (Durban – Monthly meetings), Free Society Institute (FSI) (Cape Town – Monthly 'Skeptics in the pub' meetings), Durban Skeptics (DS) (Durban – Frequency unknown), and South African Secular Society (SASS) (Johannesburg – Frequency unknown).

As to whether a format for larger meetings, such as the Sunday Assembly format as practiced in England[118], Australia and America would take hold in South Africa is difficult to predict, but could very well materialise given the interest expressed in the idea during the interviews. If the substantial growth[119] in the Sunday Assembly in England is anything to go by, then there is a strong likelihood that the idea could resonate positively with atheists in South Africa as well.

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[118] The Sunday Assembly was founded by Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans in 2013. Website, http://www.sundayassembly.com/
[119] The Guardian. 2014. *The godless church and the atheists taking the US by storm*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1t-WEk0DOk. [Accessed on, 4th December 2016].

6.7.5. Secular Humanist Chaplains

The analysis of the data to Question (10) of the interviews [*What in your view is the association between religion, morality and non-belief?*] led to re-readings of literature and the examination of online video resources acquired on what it entails to develop a moral sense without reliance on religious directives; being *good without god*. From amidst these resources, the work of Greg M. Epstein stood out, not just for his publication (2007), *'Good without God: What a billion nonreligious people do believe'*, but also for his vocation as the Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University.

The idea of a humanist chaplaincy did relate to the interview outcomes in two key respects. Firstly, it was evident that for many participants (Janet, Pierce, Simphiwe) the entry into tertiary education is where they found or confirmed their identities as atheists. Secondly, the insights offered by Martinus on the institutionalisation of religion within the South African Military also identified the bias existent within a State entity, in favour of one particular religion, Christianity. In both sets of circumstance, on university campuses and in the military, it was apparent that the counselling services of a chaplain who had no religious affiliation would have been greatly valued by the community of non-religious persons within these institutions, and perhaps the religious as well. This point is raised, as a direct outcome of the interviews, to highlight a possible future prospect for the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

6.8. Chapter Conclusion

The justifiable trepidation with which this study was inaugurated at Research Proposal phase, particularly the ambition of undertaking interviews around the country, was rewarded 18-fold in ways which exceed even the academic research objectives of this study. Without any known and established South African body of formal academic research to work from on the areas engaged with in this project there was no knowing what the outcome of the interviews could look like, and correctly so for a study of this nature. The outcomes had to follow where the data led.

The fact that the interviews, as a key pillar of this study were able to address the central research question with which this study set out, as well as the supporting research objectives, is attributable in large measure to the gracious, frank, insightful and often emotionally gripping manner in which the eighteen participants embraced this project. One of the striking aspects of the interviews which became patently clear during the first three interviews (Hameed, Anesh, Derek) and which was confirmed through the rest of the interviews, was how well versed atheists were on the subject of atheism, as well as religion. The deeply insightful responses received in every one of the 18 interviews, without exception, was reflective of a group of people who were very well read on matters of general knowledge, world affairs, history, media, philosophy, law, current affairs, and politics, amongst various other subjects which surfaced during discussions. In most instances participants were able to lead the discussions into areas relevant to the questions posed, in which they had no formal academic education but in which they were self-taught. It was this preparedness to go in search of new ideas, new literature, and new knowledge which, in many cases, formed the bedrock of their de-conversion from religion.

Although this study was commissioned with what was thought to be a well-considered literature review on the subject, it became apparent during the interviews as well as during the analysis of the interview data that due to the depth and breadth of the discussions, the literature resources had to be appropriately augmented, as guided by the critical issues raised during the interviews. As is evident from the analysis of the interview and as documented in this chapter, this brought the participants in dialogue with a wider range of literature, inclusive of online video and media resources which proved to be invaluable in reaching a more meaningful understanding of the lived realities of atheists, as well as their perceptions of the phenomenon of atheism in relation to their local, national and global contexts.

The body of existing and developing literature at an international level, dealing specifically with researching atheism and non-religion, by engaging with atheists themselves presented theories which served to foreground the analysis of the interview data. In this regard the works by Jesse Smith, Julie Krueger, Lois Lee, as well as the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (London) as a whole, contribute significantly to structuring the analysis

and the reporting of the interview outcomes. It is also noted that my Master dissertation on the work of Christopher Hitchens, and the accompanying research which explored the development and phenomenon of the New Atheist Movement, supported constructive dialogue with participants who were very well versed with the leading personalities of this movement, as well as their works.

It was, however, in the interviews themselves that the real metal of this study was revealed through two essential blocks of data; the personal biographies and journeys to the point of de-conversion from religion, and the perceptions of participants of their atheism in relation to the social environments in which they live. The personal biographies which explored participant's early histories within religious institutions and the practice of religion at home also pointed to the importance of understanding the broader socio-political context of South Africa during the period between the onset of Apartheid (1948) and its official political demise in 1994. This period witnessed the entrenchment and institutionalisation of religion within South African society and organs of State. Every participant interviewed was born into and grew out of this period in South Africa's history. Recounting these personal biographies and the journeys to de-conversion from religion also helped explain why participants were so well-founded in their respective identities as atheists; having journeyed the path to atheism as a solitary and deeply self-reflective experience.

The participant's perspectives on the social dimensions of the phenomenon, as guided by the questions (10-13), tended to gravitate towards the ideas of, firstly, secularism and secondly, a strong resistance to any suggested positive correlation, on the one hand, between either atheism and a lack of morality, or on the other, between religion and morality. Where participants did report a positive correlation between religion and morality, in recognition of the claim by many who do attribute the development of their moral sense to religious prescripts, the mantra of rigorous sociological analysis would need to be repeated here, that *correlation is not causation.*[120] On the aspect of secularism, the general view amongst participants was that no religion should dictate the course of public policy

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[120] Green, N. 2012. Correlation is not causation. *The Guardian*, 6th January. Available online at, https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2012/jan/06/correlation-causation. [Accessed on, 5th December 2016].

formation. This was not to be taken as participants advocating for the freedom of religion to be curtailed in any way, but that in the context of a plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews religion should not have a direct influence on the shaping of public policy. A matter which stood out for special comment by participants was that of the place of religion within schools. Whilst there was no opposition to the teaching of religion as a *subject* in schools, the general consensus was that religious instruction and the proselytising of religion had no place in the schooling system. The interviews revealed that the ever-present challenge which is one for atheists and the religious to bear is the call to *give up the centre* on the basis that it belongs to no one particular worldview, neither the non-religious nor the religious, but to all. It is in this regard that the principles of secularism could start to take hold, i.e. that of the **separation** between religion and State, and the **neutrality** of the public realm and public policy in relation to the direct influence of religion, or non-religion for that matter.[121]

The impact of the interviews and the participants on this academic project cannot be overstated. From a researcher's perspective, the interview outcomes surpassed the research objectives and expectations set out for this study by also opening up new and exciting vistas for future academic research within the area of atheism and more generally within the broader field of non-religion. From a personal perspective and in the interest of maintaining the necessary critical research distance, it is difficult to articulate the immense impact that the whole set of experiences relating to the interviews has had on me. It has been an absolute and treasured privilege to undertake this set of interviews with the participants. It will be fitting, therefore, to conclude this chapter with a story about one of the interviews conducted.

It was a Sunday morning and arrangements were made to meet Simphiwe, a 25 year old student, who suggested that we meet on Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, just outside Standard Bank, because he felt that it was too dangerous for me to meet with him closer to where he lived in central Johannesburg. Simphiwe's safety was clearly a concern to me as a researcher, however, he did assure me that he was comfortable with the meeting

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[121] Taylor, C. 2009. *The Religious-Secular Divide*. [40.15 minutes] Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd6ad7jCCFA. [Accessed on 20th December 2015].

arrangements made. After Simphiwe arrived we had to decide on a venue for the interview, one which was conducive to an audible recording being obtained. After an unsuccessful search, a coffee shop at Newtown Precinct in downtown Johannesburg was thought reasonable. To our frustration no venues were open on a Sunday morning. In a split-second decision we decided to conduct the interview in my car in the basement parking lot at Newtown Precinct. Parked in a basement parking lot on a quiet winter Sunday morning, with two recorders on the car dashboard in what was almost a recording studio setting, I began to discover why and how a young lad from a rural upbringing in central KwaZulu Natal, would choose to turn away from his family's religious heritage within African Traditional Religion and Christianity. As with every other interview conducted, which reflected its own uniqueness, Simphiwe's account was also one of deep personal struggle in trying to answer some of life's most testing questions. His was an identity which was clearly atheist in character, but one which was still reaching beyond being just a *non-something*; his was an identity still in search of a conceptual framework. In this case, the fact that Simphiwe might not have known fully what secular humanism actually meant as a philosophical worldview was of less consequence than the fact that he understood its make up as a lived reality for himself and the world around him. This central chapter of this study is fittingly brought to a close with Simphiwe's closing remarks [57.12 minutes] to his interview.

"My belief is that the natural universe is the only reality……….I take full responsibility for my actions. I don't have an imaginary God to blame or Satan. If I do a bad thing it's on me. If I do a good thing, I say being good without God organisation, I don't do it because I want to get to heaven or anything. If I want to do something, no matter how small, it's from my heart. I want to do good to humanity, help where I can, not because of fear of going to hell or because I want to get rewarded by going to heaven after death. I know that death is the final stage. After death there is nothing. But if I feel like I want to do good to another human being, something that I do for me, I want to feel good about it, not because I want to get rewarded, or I feel going to heaven because there's someone ticking boxes there up in heaven. I think my life has become better."

Chapter 7:
The Law, Religion and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa

7.1. Chapter Introduction

Understanding the legal relationships between South African law and the realm of atheism and non-religion will necessitate a survey of the current and historical transactions between religion and South African law and how such history and legal outcomes have shaped South African legal jurisprudence and the post-1994 constitutional dispensation in relation to religion generally and atheism in particular. In effect, the focus will be the evolution of the South African political and legal/constitutional frameworks between 1948 to1996 and to the present. It is acknowledged at the outset, though, that whilst South African case law may not as yet reflect any specific legal test to which positions of atheism and non-religion may have been subjected, a scrutiny of proceedings and judgments involving the subject of religion does offer fair insights as to the civic and legal rights, duties and obligations which accrue to persons who do not hold to any faith-based religious belief system.

Also pertinent to this study is whether or not the current legal dispensation and jurisprudence reflects a greater measure of rights and/or duties accorded to persons and groupings that hold to a particular faith-based belief system, even where such privileging may sit contrary to any constitutional provisions. It is declared, also, that although this analysis will enter the ambit of 'freedom of religion', this subject is not the focus of this study, whilst it does offer a significant legal context to probe the relationship between the law and the realm of non-religion. Towards this end, entry into the areas of the secular, secularity and secularism become indispensible in framing this discussion.

7.2. The Secular, Secularity, Secularism: *The Age of the Secular*

> *'Amid all this newness of conception it must be obvious that many old terms of theological controversy are obsolete. The idea of an "Atheist" as one warring against moral restraints – of an "Infidel" as one treacherous to the truth – of a "Freethinker" as a "loose thinker," arose in the darkness of past*

times, when men fought by the flickering light of their hatreds – times which
tradition has peopled with monsters of divinity as well as of nature………The
more sober spirit of modern controversy has, therefore, need of new terms,
and if the term "Secularism" was merely a neutral substitute for
"Freethinking," there would be reason for its adoption.'

George Jacob Holyoake (1871:9),
The Principles of Secularism[122]

The need to interrogate the ideas of the secular and secularism is occasioned by the significance of these constructs for the post-1994 South African context, as well as for the direct bearings which they brought to bear upon the constitutional formations which comprise the country's social, legal and political dispensations, which in turn impinge on the rights, entitlements and obligations of atheists as well as of the religious. Any consideration of the constitutional underpinnings of the rights of atheists to exercise their freedom of conscience not to subscribe to any religious faith-based belief system would have been incomplete without a response to the vexed questions as to whether South Africa is a *secular* state or not, and the degree to which its constitutional and legal framework, and more importantly South African society, may or may not represent *secularism*. To reaching an understanding of these concepts the discussion will need to traverse secularisation theory.

One of central questions which secularisation theory attempts to address is whether any correlation can be established between degrees of religiosity and the social transitions witnessed over recent centuries, from the agrarian society to the modern industrialised nation state, and into the present information age. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2003:3), in their publication, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide,* whilst attempting to address this question acknowledged that even the greatest thinkers of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, may not have been entirely on-point in postulating that this social progression through time would also witness a decline in the significance of religion. In

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[122] George J. Holyoake's pioneering work, *The Principles of Secularism,* published in 1871 is regarded as having initiated the term 'secularism' into the lexicon of non-religion.

elucidating the spectrum of the historical debate on the controversies around secularisation theory, Norris and Inglehart (2003:3-4) draw on the work of renowned sociologists Charles Wright Mills and Peter L. Berger. On one end of the debate, C. Wright Mills' opinion is noted,

> *"Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm."*

The controversy on the subject is almost plain to see, that whilst the position advanced by C. Wright Mills may appear plausible, the theory is not borne out by the historical realities as they have unfolded, particularly over the past 50 years, as argued by Peter L. Berger.

> *"The world today, with some exceptions . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken."*

The polarity of opinions which Mills and Berger represents need not necessarily point to a theory whose usefulness has past, but one which may still equip scholarship in the field with the constructs and ideas with which to understand the present and future place of religion in the public sphere (as opposed to the free exercise of religion within the private realm).[123] Whilst there can be no doubt that there cannot be any uniform and universal (One size fits all) application[124] and validation of any theory of secularisation, the issues which constitute the sacred-secular debate remain as pertinent today, as they were over recent centuries

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[123] The distinction between what is regarded as the public sphere, as opposed to what is considered to be one's private reserve, can be developed in greater detail with reference to the work of Jurgen Habermas (1989) in this area, entitled, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.*

[124] Frank Lechner (2003:3) notes that due to secularisation being the outcome of a number of factors in a particular context, *'no one country shows the way'* as to how the process of secularisation finds expression.

and they remain relevant to the South African context as they do to every point in the world.

Given this broader span of the debate on secularisation theory, of immediate relevance to this study in the South African context is to examine how developments and revisions to the theory may inform understandings of, firstly, the prevalence and trends of, both, non-religion and religiosity against a set of social variables in transition and secondly, the *influence* which the sacred-secular debate does bring to bear on public life in South Africa.

For the purposes of understanding the significance of secularisation for the emergence of atheism in South Africa, the summary of its essential tenets and meaning, as proffered by Frank Lechner (2003:1) serve this discussion well.

> *"Secularization refers to the historical process in which religion loses social and cultural significance. As a result of secularization the role of religion in modern societies becomes restricted. In secularized societies faith lacks cultural authority, religious organizations have little social power, and public life proceeds without reference to the supernatural. Secularization captures a long-term societal change, but it has consequences for religion itself."*

Lechner (2003:3) proceeds to expounds on the variables which need to be factored into any analysis of the degree of secularisation present within any country; factors which are pertinent also for considering the South African case and the degree to which it may, or may not, have developed as a secular state. Amongst these variables are included, the dominant religious traditions within the country, the nature of its theology, the economic character of the country and its degree of economic disparity, the extent to which freedom of expression is protected or suppressed, the role of religion in the country's historical conflicts and wars, and the extent to which the country's political dispensation and legal framework embraces religious pluralism.

Neil Ormerod (2010:2) highlights the following meanings associated with the term secularisation, meanings which are pertinent to this discussion.

> 1. *"The withdrawal of God from "public spaces", for example through the separation of Church and state.*
> 2. *A decline in religious practice.*
> 3. *A move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."*[125]

A recognition of the pluralism of worldviews, religious and non-religious, will of necessity introduce the key element of secularism, that of the separation of religion and the state, or as commonly referred to as the 'separation of church and State'. According to Charles Taylor (2011:34)[126], this separation will mean that,

> *"The state can't be officially linked to some religious confession; except in a vestigial and largely symbolic sense, as in England or Scandinavia. But secularism requires more than this. The pluralism of society requires that there be some kind of neutrality, or "principled distance".*

The emancipatory politics which shaped post-Apartheid South Africa was clearly accommodating of all religious traditions; within the acceptance of the broader principle of embracing the diverse cultural fabric of South African society.

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[125] Neil Ormond draws strongly on the work of Charles Taylor in his articulations of the meanings associated with secularism, in particular the third meaning derived.
It is this third meaning of secularisation which Charles Taylor goes in search of throughout his research, an issue which, in many respects goes to the core of this section of this study and the quest to understand the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

> *"the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others............Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith."*
> Charles Taylor (2007:3), *The Secular Age*

[126] Mendieta, E., & Vanantwerpen, J. 2011. *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere: Judith Butler, Jürgen , Charles Taylor, Cornel West.*

South Africa could be said to be a country which transitioned from a culture of **religious dominance**, pre-1994, given the primacy of Christianity in institutionalised public policy, to a dispensation of **religious diversity**, post-1994, with the objective that the expectations and claims of all religious traditions be accommodated with impartiality. When one considers the reality of diversity which characterises South African society, it needs to be recognised that whatever one's sense or notion of that diversity may be, it is firstly, itself an evolving reality, and secondly, a diversity inclusive of non-religion also. In a presentation in 2009 entitled, *'The Religious – Secular Divide'*, Charles Taylor captures this point. The significance of this extract, particularly in the context of South Africa's post-1994 grapplings with these sensitive issues, compels the quotation of the extract in its entirety.

> *"Its become urgent to adopt this way of thinking because all of our societies are diversified at a tremendous pace and if you like, the original, the original sort of forces that were meeting, the original spiritual or non-spiritual views that were on the scene, the original religions or non-religions which were there are now joined by many other. I mean, there are many religions that weren't familiar in the western world that are now here. But, there are also many, if you like, non-religions, modes of non-religiosity and spirituality and so on, which have not come in by immigration very often, but have come because there has been this tremendous diversification of people's opinions, spiritual searching and so on. So we have a very very different, if you like, cast of characters in our societies that our secularist regime has to find a way of bringing together in some kind of comity, amity, justice, equality, and so on. That means that, I think what the important thing that it means is that there has been a shift from the searching for a proper secularist formula in a society where one very powerful religion was threatening, to a situation where we are searching for a solution in a society where there isn't any dominant philosophy, religion, and so on, but where there are a great number of different ones which are very strongly held and have to be given their space. In other words, the issue of diversity, rather than the issue of fighting off domination has become our primary issue."*

Charles Taylor [2009, 41.40 minutes][127]

The transition from a narrative of just freedom of religion to one which is inclusive of non-religion is clearly evident in the position articulated by Taylor. On the South African front, two scholars/authors are in agreement with the views expressed by Taylor. Martin Prozesky (2009) takes issue with prominent cleric, Pastor Ray McCauley, who attributed the moral decay which he had witnessed in South Africa to the country becoming a secular state post-1994. In the process of refuting the claims made by McCauley, Prozesky differentiates between the secular and secularism and defines each for the South African context.

> *"'Secular' means independent of religious control of any kind; it means fairness and neutrality of stance towards them, but the neutrality is enabling or facilitative neutrality because it provides freedom of belief and operation for all. By contrast, 'secularism' is a philosophy or ideology which opposes religion, deeming it to be a bad thing, at best confused and at worst deeply damaging to humanity."*

Martin Prozesky (2009:242)

Of further significance is the fact highlighted by Prozesky (2009:244) that at the time of the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, as a party to the South African Law Commission Report on matters of religion and the State, he was instrumental in advocating for a secular state as the best constitutional model for the country. In this regard he finds himself in agreement with Stellenbosch University scholar, Dion Forster (2012:86) who argues from the perspective of a Christian theologian, that the church must advocate for the establishment of a secular state, in a manner not dissimilar to that advanced by Charles Taylor, as it will best support the principles of equality, freedom and social justice in South Africa.[128]

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[127] Taylor, C. 2009. *The Religious-Secular Divide*. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd6ad7jCCFA. [Accessed on 20th December 2015].
[128] Bentley, W., & Forster, D. A. (Eds.). 2012. *Between Capital and Cathedral: Essays on Church-State relationships*. Research Institute for Theology and Religion, Unisa.

Despite the difficult constitutional choices which had to be made to birth the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the oft painful path endued by many towards this achievement, when it comes to respecting the secular nature of the Constitution and the respect for all religious traditions embodied therein, there appears to be no limits to the use of direct representations from religion, or what journalist Gareth Van Onselen[129] regards as an *'intense level of religiosity'* on the part of the President and members of the ruling party (2016), in advancing party political interests.

> *'"One thing I believe history has done is to bring down the morality of people, to remove respect. People were made to have no fear; not to fear God, the Lord, and I have a view about the role religion must play…. God says that those in authority must be blessed by those who are religious, so they can govern (the) people of God accordingly. However, both in Africa and the rest of the world, very little was done by the people of God. Yes, we pray but what we do not do is participate in influencing them (governments) to make the laws that are keeping with the values of God." — Zuma, in an off-the-cuff speech to the African Diaspora Foundation in Los Angeles, the US, December 11 2007.'*[130]

The article by Gareth Van Onselen entitled, *'Jacob Zuma actually believes God wants him to rule'*, references 41 such extracts from the speeches and public pronouncements of Mr Zuma, which reflects that the extract just quoted is not an isolated instance, but that this public display of religiosity, of the Christian variety, is endemic to the character of tenure which Mr Zuma has brought to the Office of the Presidency of South Africa. Despite every good effort toward adopting and maintaining a Constitution with secular values this, surely, cannot count in favour of the emergence of atheism in South Africa. This is the **establishment** of religion in the public realm, writ large, by organs of State of no lesser

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[129] Notwithstanding any controversy surrounding Gareth Van Onselen's writings, which has come under criticism as he is a senior strategist within the opposition Democratic Party (RSA), the concern of this study is in his recount of the religious invocations by Mr Zuma to serve party political interests.

[130] Van Onselen, G. 2016. Jacob Zuma actually believes God wants him to rule: ANC mocks democracy's key pillar of secularism — 41 quotes from Zuma and ANC on God that you'd expect from a caliphate. *The Rand Daily Mail.* 25th July. Available online at, http://www.rdm.co.za/politics/2016/07/25/jacob-zuma-actually-believes-god-wants-him-to-rule#. [Accessed on 10 September 2016].

office than the country's President himself, as illustrated by the following extract from during Mr Zuma's tenure.

> '"When you vote for the ANC, you are also choosing to go to heaven. When you don't vote for the ANC you should know that you are choosing that man who carries a fork … who cooks people. When you are carrying an ANC membership card, you are blessed. When you get up there, there are different cards used but when you have an ANC card, you will be let through to go to heaven." — Zuma, said at an impromptu rally at Mthatha City Hall, Eastern Cape, February 6 2011.'[131]

The article by Gareth Van Onselen demonstrates that the religious symbolism so overtly deployed by Mr Jacob Zuma and members of the ruling party go beyond just the need for electioneering or political posturing, it is ineradicable and inseparable from their character of public life. Furthermore, this disposition on the part of the President and members of the ruling party also contributes towards entrenching the Christian normativity which characterised the socio-religious landscape of Apartheid South Africa.

7.3. A History of Religious Normativity and the South African Constitution

> "The Enlightenment dethroned God; but Afrikanerdom crowned Him as the sovereign of their Republic."
>
> Charles Bloomberg (1990:xxviii)

This section of the study aims to correlate the religious normativity alluded to in the extract from Charles Bloomberg, with the evolution of the South African Constitution post-1994 and its implications for the emergence of atheism in South Africa. The work of Johan Van der Vyver[132] (2007:77) in his paper, *The Contours of Religious Liberty in South Africa*, introduces

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[131] Gareth Van Onselen (2016). ibid.
[132] Johan Van der Vyver is a graduate of University of Pretoria (1974) and is currently Professor of International Law and Human Rights at Emory University, USA.

this discussion to his views on what the current Constitution represents in relation to religion.

> "The current South African Constitution can be described, as far as religion and religious diversity are concerned, as one of profound toleration and accommodation."

For Van der Vyver the discourse remains focused on the rights of the religious, without any consideration for the constitutional rights of those who chose not to affiliate with any religious faith-based belief system at all. This point is also evident in the works of Stellenbosch University academic Pieter Coertzen[133] on the subject, in his articles, *Freedom of religion in South Africa: then and now 1652-2008* (2008) and *Constitution, Charter and religions in South Africa* (2014). In the latter publication, and in relation to the legal and social standing of religion, Coertzen (2014:141) further explains that critical timeline in South Africa's history, 1996, which closed the door, at least officially, on the pre-1996 privileged status of religion and Christianity in particular and ushered in an era in which all religions will be equal before the law.

> "South Africa has never officially had an established religion, although it can be said that for many centuries Christianity was a privileged religion in the country. This changed in 1994 when freedom of religion became the privilege of all religions in the country. We must not move back to a situation of a privileged religion or a theocratic control by one religion over the whole of society."

Before proceeding to consider the exact constitutional provisions which are aimed at regulating the social and legal spheres involving religion, the issue of the 'absence' of a body of case law and specific legal provisions relating to non-religion and atheism needs to be considered. If atheism is **not a belief** that there is no god or divine being, but is rather premised on the position that a god or divine being does not exist, it may be a plausible

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[133] As at the time of print, Pieter Coertzen (Ph.D) was a member of the Unit for the Study of Law and Religion, University of Stellenbosch, RSA.

deduction that the rights and obligations of atheists cannot be negotiated within a 'freedom of religion' paradigm. It is in this regard, therefore that the work of Charles Taylor (Mendieta, E., & Vanantwerpen, J., 2011:48) in calling for a shift in the narrative within a secular social framework, from that of freedom of religion to freedom of conscience becomes imperative.

Outside of the universal rights to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion it may be valid to pose the question; what exactly is there to protect within atheism, per se, to warrant special legal consideration? Ironically, answering this question is made more difficult by the very spirit and letter of the constitutional provisions passed in 1996, given the spirit of accommodation with which it was drafted and completed, as alluded to above. However, the historical record of the era pre-1994, and indeed the ever-present potential for any resurgence in the privileging of religion does have a direct bearing on the legal and social rights of those who hold to and advocate a position of atheism.

As a basis from which to respond to these issues and to develop the discussions on the relationship between the law and religion, on the one hand, and the law and atheism and non-religion on the other, the actual provisions in the Constitution and related legislation will be considered. It is noted, however, that this study is not aimed at offering a comprehensive legal analysis of the South African Constitution as it may relate to the relationship between the law and non-religion/religion, but rather, it is intent on drawing out the relevant provisions which relate to the subjects of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience alongside an analysis of developments in related jurisprudence. Although a single provision cannot stand alone to achieve full legal effect and must usually be consistent with, or limited by, other related pieces of legislature, for the purposes of this study, the following key sections[134] of the Constitution serve as the pillars around which this inquiry is further developed.

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[134] The full text of Section 15 is cited below as reference will be made to the detail therein throughout this engagement with the Constitution.
    Section 15.
    "15. Freedom of religion, belief and opinion. – (1) Everyone has the right to freedom on conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.
    (2) Religious observances may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions, provided that-
    (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authority;

*"**9**. Equality.-(1) Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.*

(2) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.......

(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth."

*"**15**. Freedom of religion, belief and opinion. – (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion."*

The extent to which the rights and obligations of the religious and atheists are protected and advanced, particularly in a country with a relatively new constitutional dispensation and in the absence of a yet well-resourced jurisprudential record, requires that the values and principles which undergird this area of law, and indeed the Constitution as a whole, be considered. Furthermore, given that the application of these values and principles remains largely untested through the legal system, this study is also obliged to examine the 'court of public opinion' in this regard, inclusive of responses from the academy, politics and media, generally.

The religious invocation in the Preamble does appear to reflect an all-embracing assumption of the complete prevalence of religiosity in South Africa which extends beyond appealing to a majority religious constituency to, in effect, alienating persons of non-belief. Whilst its wording does represent a shift from that within the Preamble of previous constitutional provisions (1983 and 1961), the 1996 text continues and reaffirms, both, the assumption of complete religiosity within South Africa, as well as a spirit of accommodation of religion

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(b) that are conducted on an equitable basis; and
(c) attendance at them is free and voluntary.
(3)(a) This section does not prevent legislation recognising-
Marriages concluded under any tradition, or system of religious, personal or family law; or
Systems of personal and family law under any tradition, or adhered to by persons professing a particular religion.
(b) Recognition in terms of paragraph (a) must be consistent with this section and the other provisions of the Constitution."

which runs through the Constitution, in what is clearly an unbroken trend stretching back to at least the two previous dispensations, 1961 and 1983.

In testing the validity of the claim that South Africa is a secular state, UNISA scholar Paul Prinsloo (2009:41) raises the pertinent question as to why the closing statement of the Preamble to the Constitution, *'May God protect our people'*, issued in seven languages, will be necessary for a secular state in the first place.

The significance of this unbroken entrenchment of religion is derived not just from the fact that it is emboldened by the highest law and document of the land, its Constitution, but also from the fact that what may be perceived as being a neutral and harmless invocation in the Preamble, actually isn't. This represents support for the continuing hegemony of religion, generally, and Christianity in particular in South Africa. Although this study cannot be drawn into the legal merits of whether the Preamble to the Constitution (1996) is consistent with the set of values and principles which uphold the Constitution, particularly the equality of all persons before the law, it may not be said that the stated invocations to a divine entity are inconsequential to South Africans who chose not to subscribe to any faith-based religious position.

A brief examination of the pronouncements on religion, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience within the 1961 and 1983 Constitutions will require consideration, for two reasons. Firstly, to investigate the constitutional antecedents to the current laws governing the areas of religion and non-belief and secondly, to understand how these provisions might have served to advance, or perhaps retard, the privileging of religion in South Africa.

Act No.32 of 1961: To Constitute the Republic of South Africa

The proem to the 1961 Constitution sets the pace and tone for the rest of the Act. More importantly, though, the manner in which this stated predisposition to forces of religion have influenced public policy and the entrenchment of religion, and/or the suppression of contestations to religion, would have had implications for the emergence of atheism in the country. The following sections of the Act (1961) are relevant.

The opening to the Preamble reads,

"IN HUMBLE SUBMISSION to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of nations and

the history of peoples;

Who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own;

Who has guided them from generation to generation;

Who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them;

> *We who are here in Parliament assembled, DECLARE that whereas we*
>
> *Are conscious of our responsibility towards God and man;"*
>
> Part 1.2

"The people of the Republic of South Africa acknowledge the sovereignty and

guidance of Almighty God."

As self-revelatory as the text of the Preamble is on the entrenchment of religion in the Constitution (1961), the far reaching implications of the text for society and other areas of law demand further explanation, particularly in the light of the post-colonial and human rights paradigms within which this study is undertaken. The striking aspect of this extract is the acknowledged belief in the providence of a divine being, with the hard to ignore resemblance to the biblical exodus narrative of the Israelites to a land promised by, presumably, the same divine entity. Equally significant is that the act of enshrining divine warrant over the gathering of the *"forebears from many lands and gave them this their own"*, in a single statement, negates the rights of people indigenous to South Africa, who were present on the land prior to the said gathering, for which actions responsibility shifts to the hand of a divine authority who, *"has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them."*

In his seminal work, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa 1918-1948*, journalist and author Charles Bloomberg (1990:xxiii) establishes the pivotal role of religion within the post-Republic Constitution (1961) and its material support for the ideology of Christian Nationalism, and notes the following,

> *"One of the striking facts of the South African Republic is that it rests on an explicitly religious foundation. This is laid down in the Constitution's preamble which makes all governments subordinate to 'the sovereignty and providence of God in guiding the affairs of nations'. Unlike other Protestant states with similar constitutional conventions (that is, which politely recognise the traditionally established church, although religion plays little part in determining governmental policy), this is no ornamental hangover from the Reformation. On the contrary, it expresses the dynamic Calvinist spirit of the ruling NP* [National Party].*"*

Charles Bloomberg's work[135] is replete with references to the religiously inspired public policy framework of the National Party government in which Christianity was not just privileged, but was foundational to the establishment of the Republic and every manner of government within. The invocation to a divine authority, as reflected in the Preamble to the 1961 Constitution, therefore, was a reflection of the ideological underpinnings of Christian Nationalism which permeated National Party politics and policy. To illustrate this point, Bloomberg (1990:xxiv) draws a quotation from the key figure in the National Party and one of the founders of the policy of Apartheid[136], Dr Hendrik Verwoerd's 1958 victory statement.

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[135] The book, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa 1918-1948,* was published posthumously, following Charles Bloomberg's death in 1985. As to the stature and relevance of Charles Bloomberg's work in current literature, reference could be made to the publication by John Matisson (2015), *'God, Lies and Spies'*, which draws strongly on the work of Bloomberg. The Daily Maverick article by Marianne Thamm, dated 29 November 2015, served as an introduction to the work of Charles Bloomberg, which has been invaluable to this study; as covered in her review of John Matisson's publication. Available online at, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-11-29-god-spies-and-lies-how-journalists-spooks-and-politicians-shaped-south-africa/#.V5HlSri7iko. [Accessed on, 22nd July 2016].

[136] Bloomberg (1990:xxiii) notes that the idea of Apartheid was a part of the constitution of the National Party itself as way back as 1934 and that this policy position was seen as being based upon divine instruction.

> *"The NP of D.F. Malan, established in 1934, formally embraced Christian-Nationalism. Article 1 of its Constitution states: The Party acknowledges the sovereignty and guidance of God in the destiny of countries and seeks the development of our nation's life along Christian-National lines.'² in education (according to Article 24), 'the Christian-National basis of the*

"It must be stated at the outset that we, as believing rulers of a religious country, will seek our strength and guidance in the future, as in the past, from Him who controls the destinies of nations ... In accordance with His will, it was determined who should assume the leadership of the Government in this new period of the life of the people of South Africa."

On this extract, and on a point which exceeds just the privileging of religion, Bloomberg concludes that for South Africa, Christian Nationalism pre-1994 did indeed undo the Enlightenment project and reinstated God as sovereign of the republic.[137]

"In these utterances Verwoerd was not expressing megalomania but merely acknowledging the role of divine providence."

Charles Bloomberg (1990:xxiv)

Where the Constitution (1961) lacked specific reference to the Christian faith, the 1983 Constitution of The Tricameral Parliament[138] as it is often referred to, is explicit and leaves no doubt as to the entrenchment of Christianity as the religion of the State. The Constitution (1983) does, however, introduce the principle of freedom of religion, explicitly. The text of the Preamble and Part 1, Section 2, represents a continuation of the 1961 pronouncements on religion, and an expansion thereon.

The Preamble (1983) reads,

"IN HUMBLE SUBMISSION to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of peoples and nations,

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state should be taken fully into account'. Furthermore, all black people must be kept 'under the Christian trusteeship of the European race."

[137] Charles Bloomberg (1990:2) notes the case of Afrikaner Dr P.J. Meyer who was chairman of the board of the South African Broadcasting Services from 1958-1976, who considered Afrikaners as 'Africa's "first Calvinist nation", tasked with resisting any 'de-christianising' and 'de-nationalising' doctrines such as rationalism and materialism. Bloomberg notes that,

"Meyer rejected the intellectual fathers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (like Kant, Freud, Darwin, Marx, Hegel, Comte and Bergson), who paved the way for the de-Christianising of Western thought."

[138] The Tricameral Parliament system ushered in under The Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1983, saw the addition of two separate new Houses of Parliament, which were to operate alongside the main House of Assembly (For 'Whites' only). The new Houses of Parliament were the House of Representatives (For 'Coloureds' only) and the House of Delegates (For 'Indians' only).

Who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own,

Who has guided them from generation to generation,

Who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them,

We declare that we

Are conscious of our responsibility towards God and man;

Are convinced of the necessity of standing united and of pursuing the following national goals:

To uphold Christian values and civilized norms, with recognition and protection of freedom of faith and worship,"

Part1, Section 2, reads,

> *"The people of the Republic of South Africa acknowledge the sovereignty and guidance of Almighty God."*

In effect, the Christian Nationalism of the National Party conceptualised and enforced a system of government which permeated all spheres of life, political, social and economic, in what Bloomberg (1990:74) refers to as a *"Christocracy: a Christian government controlling a Christian political-economic-cultural system and ruling over a Christian nation"; t*his being the essence of Christian Nationalism. In his paper, *Recognising Religion: Emerging Jurisprudence in South Africa*, Mtendeweka Mhango[139] (2012:25) notes that the pre-1994 South Africa constitutional framework was characterised by a predominance of 'parliamentary sovereignty'; a system of governance in which the judicial system was rendered subservient to parliament and in effect the wishes of the ruling party. Given this fundamental theocratic approach to all matters public policy, atheists were grouped alongside communists[140] and would have been viewed as being opposed to the State,

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[139] Mtendeweka Mhango is Associate Professor of Law at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and Deputy Head of the Law Department.

[140] Charles Bloomberg (1990:40), *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa 1918-1948.*

> *"Faithful to the ultra-orthodox Calvinist position, the Broederbond combats Catholicism, communism, liberalism, atheism and agnosticism wherever these tendencies manifest themselves. It espouses and subscribes to a variant of Calvinism which glorifies the nation, race and culture, upholds apartheid, regards the colour bar as sacred, and extols Nationalism."*

resulting in a suppression of views not aligned with Christian Nationalism, an environment described by Bloomberg (1990:100) in which,

> *"The Afrikaners are a Christian nation in a more profound sense than the nineteenth- or twentieth-century Hollanders, and more so than any other twentieth-century Protestant people. Irreligion, atheism, liberalism and humanism were virtually nonexistent."*

Whilst it may be so that the post-1994 Constitutional dispensation left behind Christian Nationalism and the manifest privileging of Christianity in the statutes and in official public policy, the lasting effects of this social order cannot be denied and cannot be undone in one sweep of a new Constitution (1996). Of relevance to this study is the impact of this history on the evolution of the religion-law relationship and its impact on the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

Not unlike the fluid and still evolving discourse on race relations in the country, it is evident that the enactment of a new Constitution (1996) does not guarantee the instantaneous eradication of prejudices, distorted stereotyping, privileging and inequities which characterised the previous dispensation. As this chapter will demonstrate, the courts of law still have their work cut out for them in resolving the tests in the areas of religion and freedom of conscience. In this regard, the less than conspicuous hand of atheism in current South African case law will be consider following an account of relevant jurisprudence which has developed since 1994.

7.4. Religion and South African Jurisprudence Post-1994

Having briefly recounted the history to the current constitutional dispensation, two articles by Pierre deVos (University of Cape Town) are considered which offer an opinion on where the subject currently stands and what the impediments are to a full realisation of the spirit (toleration and accommodation) and letter of current statutes. The question as to what freedom ***of*** religion actually means outside of constitutional provisions still hangs over the

brief review of these articles and related case law. Furthermore, this review must also be tempered by the inclusion of the idea of freedom _**from**_ religion within this discourse.

In the first place, the need for courts of law to preside over matters of religion in society signifies a terrain which represents a contestation of *ideas* which compete in the free market of religious freedom, amongst themselves and always with the Constitution itself and related statutes. In the latter regard the Constitution is clearly designed to advance the values of liberty and equality, whilst at the same time reserving the right to the State, primarily but not exclusively, through the apparatus of the judicial system and institutions such as The Human Rights Commission and The Commission for Gender Equality, to limit such freedoms; in this instance freedom of religion, where it is considered harmful to others and inconsistent with other articles of the Constitution and related statutes. In his article, *Recognising Religion: Emerging Jurisprudence in South Africa,* Mtendeweka Mhango (2012) discusses the current judicial interpretations on freedom of religion under the South African Constitution, against the Christian normative backdrop of the Apartheid legal history and relevant case law since the 1996 Constitution[141].

In a matter which related directly to atheism in South Africa and which was not processed through the courts or any of the Chapter 9 institutions, was decided upon by the South African Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The matter followed a complaint being brought against The Rivers Christian Church in Sandton, Johannesburg by an atheist, Mr Eugene Gerber who protested the usage of the Francis Thompson quotation, *"An atheist is a man who believes himself to be an accident"*, on church's roadside signboard which Gerber

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[141] The subject of the validity of judicial rulings and their impact on altering the course of law in the country, against what is enshrined in the Constitution is pertinent to this study, as will be gathered from the reflections on the articles by Professor Pierre deVos, however, for a fuller discussion on the subject, the work of Professor Marius Pieterse of the University of the Witwatersrand, will serve as an enlightening reference; including the article, *Coming to Terms with Judicial Enforcements of Socio-Economic Rights*, South African Journal on Human Rights 383(2004). The following comment made by Professor Mhango (2012:25) regarding the environment in which the judiciary operated pre-1994 is significant,

> *"Therefore, parliament had considerable autonomy to pass legislation without concern that*
> *any other organ of state could invalidate or test such legislation against human rights*
> *standards."*

In this regard, the post-1994 constitutional dispensation represents a radical departure from the past, at least in the letter of the law.

found offensive.[142] The ASA ruled against the church which was instructed to take down the sign and was prohibited from reusing it.

The following summaries of the relevant cases are noted, whilst examining the principles and values embodied in the Constitution and related statutes which informed these judgments.

The first of the cases was that of *Garreth Anver Prince Vs The President of The Law Society of The Cape of Good Hope* (Prince)[143], which was heard in the Constitutional Court in May 2001, with judgment handed down on 25 January 2002 by Judge Albie Sachs. Gareth Prince had satisfied all academic requirements for registration as an attorney for community service. His application for such was declined by the Law Society, firstly, on account of him having two existing convictions for the possession of cannabis and secondly, for declaring that he would continue to use cannabis. On both accounts, Prince based his case on the use of cannabis being religiously inspired; that of Rastafarianism. The Law Society on the other hand rejected Prince's application for registration on the basis that his convictions and his declaration to continue the use of a legally prohibited substance rendered him not fit and proper to be admitted as an attorney. The Constitutional Court ruled that Prince was not entitled to an exception from the laws prohibiting the use of cannabis, thereby effectively limiting his rights to freedom of religion.

How does the matter of a scholar's nose ring become an issue of national legal significance? The nexus btween religion and the law was once again tested in the case, *Member of the*

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[142] New Humanist Magazine (2012). '*Thursday, 19 January 2012. South African church billboard banned following atheist complaint*'. Published on 19th January 2012. Available online at, http://blog.newhumanist.org.uk/2012/01/south-african-church-billboard-banned.html. [Accessed on, 14th December 2016].
For a critique of Eugene Gerber's decision to lodge a complaint with the Advertising Standards Authority, reference could be made to the blog, Synapses, of fellow South African atheist, Jacques Rousseau who considered Gerber's actions as undermining the cause of free speech.
Synapses (2012). 'The privilege in not finding things offensive'. Available online at, http://synapses.co.za/tag/advertising-standards/. [Accessed on, 14th December 2016].
[143] The transcript of the Constitutional Court judgment is available online at,
Prince v President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope (CCT36/00) [2002] ZACC 1; 2002 (2) SA 794; 2002 (3) BCLR 231 (25 January 2002).
http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2002/1.pdf. [Accessed on, 23rd July 2016].

Executive Council for Education: Kwazulu-Natal and Others v Pillay[144] (Pillay), in which judgment was decided on 5th October 1997 in the Constitutional Court and handed down by Chief Justice Pius Langa. The court ruled that a scholar was entitled to exemption from her school's governing body rules which prohibited the use of a nose ring, a practice which was said to be a part of her religious and cultural tradition.

How does the matter of a "Rasta Man's"[145] hairstyle become a matter of national legal significance? The case of *Department of Correctional Services and another v POPCRU and others* (Popcru)[146], could be viewed as being similar to that of the Pillay case. On 23 March 2013 the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) handed down judgment in the case, which upheld an earlier Labour Appeal Court's ruling in favour of trade union Popcru and five other respondents, on the basis that the respondents should be granted exemption from the dress code, in relation to the style of their hair and the resultant instructions received to cut off their dreadlocks, as such dress code was viewed as being restrictive of their religious and cultural practices.[147]

How does the issue of the sale of liquor on a Sunday become a matter of national legal significance? Such was the case in *Lawrence v State, Negal v State, and Solberg v State*[148] (Lawrence), which were taken on appeal to the Constitutional Court in May 1997, and

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[144] The transcript of the Constitutional Court judgment is available online at,
MEC for Education: Kwazulu-Natal and Others v Pillay (CCT 51/06) [2007] ZACC 21; 2008 (1) SA 474 (CC); 2008 (2) BCLR 99 (CC) (5 October 2007).
http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2007/21.pdf. [Accessed on, 24th July 2016].
[145] It is of significance in analysing this case to note that three of the five respondents [Messrs Lebatlang, Jacobs and Khubheka] claimed to practice Rastafarianism and that the instruction to cut their dreadlocks was an infringement of the rights to freedom of religion. The other two respondents [Messrs Ngqula and Kamlana] claimed to having received instructions from their ancestors which they wished to respect and that the instruction to cut their hair was an infringement of their rights to their cultural practices.
[146] The transcript of the Supreme Court of Appeal judgement is available online at,
Department of Correctional Services & another and Another v Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) and Others (107/12) [2013] ZASCA 40; (2013) 34 ILJ 1375 (SCA); 2013 (4) SA 176 (SCA); [2013] 7 BLLR 639 (SCA); 2013 (7) BCLR 809 (SCA); [2013] 3 All SA 1 (SCA) (28 March 2013)
http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZASCA/2013/40.pdf. [Accessed on, 24th July 2016].
[147] The exact text of the SCA judgment reads, *"A policy is not justified if it restricts a practice of religious belief – and by necessary extension, a cultural belief – that does not affect an employee's ability to perform his duties, nor jeopardise the safety of the public or other employees, nor cause undue hardship to the employer in a practical sense."*
[148] The transcript of the judgment on the Lawrence case is available online at,
S v Lawrence , S v Negal ; S v Solberg (CCT38/96, CCT39/96, CCT40/96) [1997] ZACC 11; 1997 (10) BCLR 1348; 1997 (4) SA 1176 (6 October 1997)
http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/1997/11.pdf. [Accessed on 24 July 2016].

decided upon on 6 October 1997, Justice Arthur Chaskalson presiding. The three separate cases were brought into convergence at the Constitutional Court as they were considered to be dealing with the same principle, i.e. the restriction on the sale of liquor outside of the prescripts of The Liquor Act 27 of 1987, which the defense team considered to be inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution (The Interim Constitution, Act 100 of 1993). Whilst the court deliberated on the inherent pro-Christian bias of pre-1994 legislation and the need to reverse this inequity, it did not consider the trade restrictions embodied within the Liquor Act to represent a sufficient breach of the provisions of Articles 14[149] and 26[150] of the Constitution (The Interim Constitution[151]). (Mhango 2012:26-27) On Article 26, the court was unanimous, with 8 judges concurring that The Liquor Act did not breach the constitutional provisions of free economic trade. On the provisions at Article 14, however, the majority position was that the Liquor Act did not constitute a violation of the right to freedom of religion. Although the majority opinion was ultimately carried, in the context of this study, the recognition of the dissenting views is significant as it deals with the issue of freedom of religion and the privileging of one particular brand, in this instance Christianity, which requires further consideration.

The Lawrence case is one of the few places in current jurisprudence where the position of persons who choose not to hold to the majority religious position of Christianity, is specifically addressed. Furthermore, the judgments (majority and dissenting) handed down in this case offers in-depth interpretations of Article 15 (previously 14, under the interim Constitution) relating to freedom of religion. Judge Chaskalson, in advancing the majority opinion, found that any causal link between the restrictions imposed by The Liquor Act prohibiting the sale of liquor on a Sunday and the promotion (establishment) of the

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[149] At the time of the ruling the court applied the provisions of the Interim Constitution, within which the freedom of religion clause was listed as Article 14; now listed under Article 15 of the 1996 Constitution.
[150] Article 26 is noted as follows,
  "*26 Economic activity*
  (1) Every person shall have the right freely to engage in economic activity and to pursue a livelihood anywhere in the national territory.
  (2) Subsection (1) shall not preclude measures designed to promote the protection or the improvement of the quality of life, economic growth, human development, social justice, basic conditions of employment, fair labour practices or equal opportunity for all, provided such measures are justifiable in an open and democratic society based on freedom and equality."
[151] The text of the Interim Constitution, Act 100 of 1993 is available online at, http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-act-200-1993. [Accessed 24 July 2016].

Christian religion to be tenuous and concluded that such restrictions did not constitute an infringement to Article 14 of the interim Constitution.[152]

Judge Catherin O'Regan, in her dissention opinion, found that there was sufficient ground to form a causal link between the restrictions imposed by The Liquor Act and the historical privileging of the Christian religion, made effective through the statutory endorsement of Christianity over and above other religions. Judge O'Regan notes the following crucial point regarding the judiciary's post-1994 stance on the right to freedom of religion, which also introduces the principle of *equity* to the application of the rights on freedom of religion, that the privileging of one religion effectively constitutes a breach of the constitutional provisions in this regard; a principle which sits at the heart of the human rights paradigm applied in this study. Judge Goldstone and Judge Madala concurred with this opinion.

> *"The requirement of equity in the conception of freedom of religion as expressed in the interim Constitution is a rejection of our history, in which Christianity was given favoured status by government in many areas of life regardless of the wide range of religions observed in our society…………The explicit endorsement of one religion over others would not be permitted in our new constitutional order."*[153]

Judge Albie Sachs concurred with Judge O'Regan that the trade restrictions embodied within The Liquor Act, particularly the fact that the key days in question, Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas day are days of Christian significance and thereby effectively breached the provisions on freedom of religion. Judge Albie Sachs (2007:119) summarised his opinion on the case in relation to Article 14 as follow,

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[152] The extract from Justice Chaskalson's judgment (1997:68) reads,
> *"Whatever connection there may be between the Christian religion and the restriction against grocers selling wine on Sundays at a time when their shops are open for other business, it is in my view too tenuous for the restriction to be characterised as an infringement of religious freedom. In the circumstances I hold that the appellant has failed to establish that section 90 of the Liquor Act is inconsistent with section 14 of the interim Constitution."*

[153] This extract is drawn from Judge O'Regan's judgment (1997:79) in the Lawrence case.

"My view then is that the identification of Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day as closed days for purposes of selling liquor, does involve an endorsement by the state of the Christian religion in a manner that is problematic in terms of section 14. The functional impact of the law may be marginal, and its symbolic effect muted, yet the communication it makes cannot be disregarded…………. One of the functions of the Constitution is precisely to protect the fundamental rights of non-majoritarian groups, who might well be tiny in number and hold beliefs considered bizarre by the ordinary faithful."

In concluding his judgment, Judge Sachs, offered the following decision,

"The result is that I agree with O'Regan J that the provisions relating to closed days involve a breach of section 14. Since, however, I am of the opinion that such infringement is sanctioned by section 33 [The Limitations Clause]*, I concur with Chaskalson P in his conclusion that the provisions in question are not unconstitutional."*

7.5. The Significance of Post-1994 Case Law for the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa.

The significance of the *Lawrence* case in relation to non-belief, amidst a relatively under-developed body of jurisprudence in South Africa, is far reaching. To a lesser degree, the *Prince*, *Pillay* and *Popcru* cases also have a significant cumulative impact on the development of law in relation to religion. Given the brief recount of the pre-1994 constitutional and socio-legal environment undertaken thus far, there are two central questions which still require consideration.

Firstly, does the combined effect of the current 1996-Constitution together with the body of case law which has developed thus far represent a real shift away from the privileging of religion and towards a more equitable legal dispensation? Secondly, and although the interests of atheists and/or the position of non-religion have to date not been tested specifically in the courts of law, whether the rights of atheists are offered protection, in no

greater measure and might than that afforded to every other South African? Stated alternatively, and to invoke the principle[154] of equality which was raised by Judge Catherine O'Regan in the *Lawrence* case, can the state and the judiciary act in an even-handed manner in a religiously plural social environment, in which there is also now a significant constituency of non-religion present and potentially growing? It should now become apparent from this question and the path negotiated through post-1994 jurisprudence, that the shift in the narrative on the subject from the more restrictive one of freedom of religion, to freedom of conscience, now becomes imperative to understanding the legal rights of atheists in South Africa.

It is noted, though, that the right to freedom of religion and/or the right to freedom of conscience, cannot be considered as being absolute rights. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates the conditions and circumstance which should be present and satisfied for the limitation of any right enshrined in the Bill of Rights to be considered. This was the case in *Prince*, where the limitation of Garreth Prince's right to freedom of religion was considered reasonable and justifiable in terms of Article 36 of the Constitution. (Mhango 2012:30)

In considering the questions posed as to the protection of the rights of atheists in South Africa, one of the founding constitutional principles must also be considered, that of accommodation in a religiously plural society in which the right to religious belief and freedom of conscience is respected. In the *Lawrence* case and in an attempt to explain the full import of the open and inclusive society intended for South Africa, Judge Albie Sachs explains, with specific reference to the rights of 'non-believers'.

> "South Africa is an open and democratic society with a non-sectarian state that guarantees freedom of worship; is respectful of and accommodatory towards, rather than hostile to or walled-off from, religion; acknowledges the multi-faith and multi-belief nature of the country; does not favour one religious creed or doctrinal truth above another; accepts the intensely personal nature of individual conscience and affirms the intrinsically voluntary

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[154] Mhango (2012:28)

and non-coerced character of belief; respects the rights of non-believers; and does not impose orthodoxies of thought or require conformity of conduct in terms of any particular world-view. The Constitution, then, is very much about the acknowledgement by the state of different belief systems and their accommodation within a non-hierarchical framework of equality and non-discrimination."[155]

Unlike the Constitution of the United States of America (USA), which is often referred to in matters relating to religion and the law[156], which effectively calls for a *'wall of separation'*[157] between religion and the State (Church and State), the South African Constitution recognises religion[158] as an important social variable that could engender the constitutional objective of an open society reflective of equality and human dignity by embracing its religious and cultural diversity. This point is also advanced by Marius Smit (2011:518)[159].

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[155] Judge Albie Sachs' (1997:101-102) judgment in the *Lawrence* case.

[156] Mhango (2012:28), notes the reference to the idea of a separation of 'church and state' in Judge O' Regan reaching her determination in the *Lawrence* case.

[157] The idea of a 'wall of separation' which gave rise to what is the 'Establishment Clause' in the USA Constitution is attributed to Thomas Jefferson, whilst sitting as the third president of the USA, drawn from a letter he penned to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut in 1802. This letter, in modern intersections between religion, politics and the law, is regarded as the pioneering document which crystallised the idea of the separation of powers which influenced the shaping of the USA Constitution and much of public policy internationally since. Given its relevance to the present, as already demonstrated, it is necessary that the pertinent extract from Jefferson's letter be noted.

> *"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."*

The exact texts of the letter by the Baptist Association of Danbury as well as the letter in reply by Thomas Jefferson was obtained online at, https://www.au.org/files/images/page_photos/jeffersons-letter-to-the.pdf. [Accessed on, 25th July 2015].

[158] For a detailed comparison between the South African and USA Constitution, reference could also be made to the paper by Stellenbosch University's (RSA) Professor Pieter Fourie (2003) entitled, *The SA Constitution and Religious Freedom: Perverter or Preserver of Religion's Contribution to the Public Debate on Morality?* The paper is available online at, http://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/article/download/901/863. [Accessed on, 26th July 2016].

[159] Marius Smit is Professor of Law at North West University, RSA. The extract is from his article entitled, *Underneath the Radar: The Impact of Same-Sex Sexuality and Secularism on Education in South Africa.* Available online at, http://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1298&context=elj. [Accessed on, 25th July 2016].

"In contrast to the position of the United States, which attempts to completely divorce the religious and secular spheres of society, South Africa follows the co-operative model towards religion and the state. In the co-operative model, both the principle of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction between the law and religion are affirmed. In an open and democratic society contemplated by the Constitution, there must be mutual respect and co-existence between the secular and the sacred."

These almost 'post-secular' sentiments expressed by Sachs and Smit, above, are also consistent with the objectives of The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (The Equality Act), as stipulated in its preamble, to redress the systemic inequalities and unfair discrimination of the past, in an effort to achieve a united South Africa based on values of human dignity, equality, freedom and social justice. In line with these objectives, The Equality Act, amongst its categories of 'prohibited grounds' under which discrimination could be experienced, is inclusive of, religion, conscience, belief and culture.

In summarising South Africa's constitutional developments on freedom of religion and conscience, Fourie (2003:103) refers to Ackerman (2001) to note that,

"The Constitution is only "secular" to the extent that it accords equal respect and protection to non-believers and believers alike and to the different religious denominations, but it does not erect a wall of separation between church and state"

It is evident from the review undertaken of the development in the Constitution of South Africa and supporting statutes that the basis does exist for a shift away from previous dispensations which were characterised by a distinct privileging of Christianity in all spheres of public life, towards a more equitable embracing of all positions of conscience and religious beliefs. This, combined with the judgments handed down in related cases, as examined thus far, points to an environment in which atheists and persons who choose not to affiliate with any position of religious faith can reasonably expect to have their rights and

their human dignity protected. The extent to which the provisions in the Constitution, combined with post-1994 jurisprudence, actually finds expression and are interpreted in South African public life is considered.

Counter-posed to the idea of freedom *of* religion, which cannot immediately equate to freedom *from* religion, from the perspective of an atheist, it could also be argued that the limitation clause (Article 36) adds to the protection of the rights of atheists from the dominance of any majority religious position; along the lines noted by Denise Meyerson, *"The decisive test for any limitation is: Does it do justice to human dignity, equality and freedom, to those values which characterise an open and democratic society".*[160] In the South African case, what can be reasonably deduced is that the jurisprudence developed thus far will continue to influence the outcome of future cases which tests aspects within the relationship between religion and the law.

The extent to which such well-intended statutes and jurisprudence are actually made manifest in South African society is, however, a vexed question. In responding to this question and as alluded to earlier, a set of media articles published by Pierre deVos[161] stand out for their useful insights on the subject. The articles were carried in the online media[162] publication, The Daily Maverick. The critique of the developing jurisprudence by a pre-eminent South African Professor of Constitutional Law, whilst reflecting on the constitutional provisions on freedom of religion and conscience, serves as a valued resource for this study on the subject, particularly within its human rights framing.

In the first deVos article, dated 11 September 2012 entitled, *Freedom of religion: not so free after all*, the sacred texts and practices of the major religions are brought under direct scrutiny by the constitutional provision which embrace two sets of contesting rights; that of freedom of religion on the one hand and the constitutional objective of ensuring and

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[160] The extract is quoted by Fourie (2003:104), in reference to the works by Professor Denise Meyerson (2007) entitled, *Reading the Constitution through the Lens of Philosophy* and, *Rights limited. Freedom of expression, religion and the South African constitution.*

[161] Pierre DeVos teaches Constitutional Law at the University of Cape Town. He also serves as Deputy Dean of the Law Faculty and as the Claude Leon Foundation Chair in Constitutional Governance.

[162] Chapter 8 on, *Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa,* will further develop the broad impact which social media through mobile electronic channels has had on the representations of atheism in South Africa.

engendering the right to non-discrimination and the protection of human dignity, on the other; rights to which every individual is entitled, Muslim women included. This article was penned in response to a matter heard before the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) and The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), in which a complainant registered that certain texts of the Koran advocated the beating of women and as such were an affront to the human dignity of Muslim women and the South African Constitution and asked for the offending verses to be redacted from the body of the Koran or be banned. Both the CGE and the SAHRC concurred in their opinions on the matter and dismissed the complaint on the basis that no causal link could be established between what they considered to be a literal interpretation of the text (Q4.34) in question and the beating of Muslim women by their husbands. The press statement[163] issued by the SAHRC on the matter extended the reasoning for their determination by citing that the majority of Muslims found the literal approach [beating of women] abhorrent to basic principles of respect for human rights.

The two key points argued by deVos in response to this determination by the GCE and the SAHRC are considered. He notes, firstly, that these institutions 'skirted' the real issue at the core of this matter, i.e. whether or not the extract in question from the Koran incites violence against women. Texts from the Christian Bible [Leviticus 18:22, Exodus 35:2, Leviticus 25:44] are also noted by deVos as standing in conflict with the spirit and provisions of the South African Constitution. The second important observation from this article is deVos's introduction of the idea of *'the politics of religion'*; an idea which he considers to be at play within the arena of freedom of religion.

> *"But the politics of religion invariably plays a role in making decisions about where to draw the line between accommodating obnoxious or harmful religious beliefs or practices, on the one hand, and endorsing a ban on those beliefs or practices, on the other.*

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[163] The full statement issued by the South African Human Rights Commission, dated 10 September 2012, is available online at, http://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/news/item/39-clarity-article-in-the-sunday-times-of-the-9th-of-september-headlined-light-beating-of-wives-condoned-refers. [Accessed on, 26th July 2016].

The more powerful and influential a religion, the less likely it is that a court would dare to endorse fundamental restrictions on the major tenets of the religious beliefs, teachings and practices of its adherents."

As to the question of the relevance of recounting this case for this study on the emergence of atheism in South Africa, the response may have to be framed as a question, as to whether the post-1994 development of South Africa's jurisprudence is not a reflection of a shift away from the privileging of one brand of religion, Christianity, towards a privileging of the set of the more powerful and more influential religions; Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism, as referred to in the article under review. Using a metaphor drawn from religion itself, a further critical question which arises from this analysis, is whether there exists a real risk to the constitutional rights of Muslim women, minority religions, the unprotected child, and atheists, being sacrificed on the altar of *'the politics of religion'*.[164]

It is evident that in the world of law and matters constitutional, opinions and views held on the rights to freedom of religion and conscience can change over time. Also, what may once have been considered timeless principles or positions on religious doctrine could change over time. From the perspective of the emerging phenomenon of atheism, we have witnessed a pre-1994 privileging of Christianity, to what now appears to be the general privileging of religion, in particular the more influential brands, as already mentioned.

The second article of Pierre deVos, published on 30 July 2015 entitled, *Discrimination: SA's courts give religious beliefs and practices a free pass*, expands on the balancing of different rights within the Constitution and advances the opinion that religious beliefs and practices

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[164] To expand on this important point, Professor deVos refers to the opinion expressed by Judge Albie Sachs in the *Prince* case, which explicitly lays out the real issues at play within *'the politics of religion'* referred to.

> *"One cannot imagine in South Africa today any legislative authority passing or sustaining laws which suppressed central beliefs and practices of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism. These are well-organised religions, capable of mounting strong lobbies and in a position materially to affect the outcome of elections. They are not driven to seek constitutional protection from the courts. A threat to the freedom of one would be seen as a threat to the freedom of all. The Rastafari, on the other hand, are not only in conflict with the public authorities, they are isolated from mainstream religious groups… Indeed, the Rastafari might receive more tolerance from non-believers to whom all religions are equally strange, than from members of well-established confessions, who might have difficulty in taking the Rastafari belief system seriously as a religion at all."*

are not subjected to the same tests and evaluations to the same degree as all other beliefs and practices in establishing whether they represent a breach of the Constitution or are an affront to the rights of others. One of the reasons offered by de Vos for this is,

> *"It is not possible to disentangle religious beliefs and practices from the political and cultural beliefs and practices dominant in the larger society. Religion and the activities associated with it remain a cultural phenomenon and are entangled with the broader societal culture."*
>
> Pierre deVos (2015)

The shift in the theological and socio-political stand of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, post-1994 is cited by deVos to illustrate the point above. After 1994 the biblical justification previously considered by the DRC as being foundational for all manner of public policy derived from the ideology of Apartheid was found to be unsustainable under the new dispensation. In this instance the church could not remain 'disentangled' from the changed societal and constitutional circumstances in which it found itself. Equally so, deVos argues, the balancing of other rights against the right to freedom of religion cannot escape the influences of culture, politics and the power dynamics between religion and society. There is no reason for atheists to expect to be excluded from the 'politics of religion' in which the dominant religions still hold significant sway in these domains and appear unlikely to relinquish or share power and influence, notwithstanding the unconstitutionality of certain of its key doctrinal positions as well as many of its sacred texts which are not in good standing in relation to the provisions of the Constitution and related statutes, such as The Equality Act.

The third article in this set of reflections was published on 26th August 2015 entitled, *Rights and wrongs of regulating religion.* This article will be considered in dialogue with The South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACRRF)[165]. Whilst it must be noted that a detailed analysis of the SACRRF will overrun the limits of this thesis, the idea to bring the

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[165] The full text of the SACRRF is available online at, http://www.crlcommission.org.za/docs/sacrrf.pdf, accompanied by a document detailing the history of the founding organisation which produced the SACRRF, The South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACPPRRF). [Accessed on, 25th July 2016].

essence of these two publications into dialogue with one another will bring to the fore the two key issues broached briefly thus far. Firstly, the further entrenchment of religion as a social force intent on influencing all areas of life, public and private and secondly, the extremely challenging task of balancing the right to freedom of religion with other rights within the constitution aimed at the attainment of the values of human dignity and equality before the law for every South African. With regard to the SACRRF the question which almost automatically occupies the mind is; is a charter on the protection of religious rights and freedoms surplus to the constitutional provisions and all extensions of the judicial arm of the State? After all, beyond being a charter to lobby the interests of religion, it is of no formal legal effect, despite the original intention of its authors within The South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACPPRRF)[166] to present the Charter to Parliament for formal endorsement. This latter objective remains unfulfilled.

It could be argued that the establishment of the SACPPRRF and its drafting of The South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACRRF) demonstrates a lack of confidence on the part of the SACPPRRF in the ability of the State and the judiciary to regulate the rights to freedom of religion. In this regard, also, the role and efficacy of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Commission) is brought under question, as indicated by Pierre deVos in his article under review. These uncertainties and perceived failures on the part of the State, as well as the deep contestations which permeate this area of public and private life, appears to have been the strong motivating factors leading to the writing of the charter in the first place, as noted by Pieter Coertzen[167] (2014:140) in his paper entitled, *Constitution, Charter and religions in South Africa*.

> *"The existence of a South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms*
> *compels every religious person and organisation to take note of the content*

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[166] Another organisation which has gained prominence in the courts in recent years is FOR SA, Freedom of Religion South Africa.
[167] Professor Coertzen is the Chairperson of Chairperson SA Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms and was a key person in the formulation of The South African Charter on Religious Rights and Freedoms.

and to make sure that they take possession of the rights and freedoms. Failing to do that will result in the government of the country determining religious rights and freedoms and their scope for religious persons and bodies through legislation and the courts of the land deciding what freedoms the religions of the land can claim in terms of the laws of the country."

The real challenge with dealing with a document such as the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, or the council under which it was formulated, is that they present only the appearance of a unified singular voice. The reality is that the very discrepant approaches to the constitutional objectives of human dignity, justice and equality, not just _between_ religions, but _within_ the respective religions themselves, mitigates against the idea of a charter of a constituency acting in unison. Nonetheless, this constituency is undoubtedly influential and significant enough to have some bearing on the emergence of atheism in South Africa. If the counterpoint to the notion of freedom of religion, at least as embodied within the SACRRF, is the interpretation and exercising of the limitations clause [s36], then the question raised by deVos (September 2015) is a very probing and insightful one.

"Until now the court has only sanctioned limitations on the religious beliefs and practices deemed harmful of small, relatively powerless, religious groups. Will the day arrive when our courts rely on the harm principle to sanction the protection of marginalised and vulnerable people from the harm caused by some of the religious beliefs and practices of the more powerful and socially dominant religions in our society?"[168]

It does appear that the time has arrived when the beliefs and practices of the religious and their dominance over the public space in South Africa will be put to the test through the courts. A review of a set of cases passing through the courts currently, relating to the subject, will be considered.

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[168] deVos (2015), *'Rights and wrongs of regulating religion'.*

7.6. Religion in Current South African Case Law and the Emergence of Atheism

There can be no doubt that the emergence of atheism in South Africa is already reflective of a preparedness on the part of atheists to engage the battleground of the courts to take on the two-pronged challenge of the discrimination experienced by the non-religious on the one hand, and on the other, the privileging of religion in the public sphere. In relation to the post-1994 case law the South African context has also witnessed the emergence of well-resourced religion-based activist groups, such as FOR-SA (Freedom of Religion South Africa) and Watchmen on the Wall, who are also prepared to take up the challenge to what they perceive as a growing trend which signifies the restriction of their freedom of religion. In relation to this point, it is of no minor significance that Frank B. Cross (2015, p.69) in his book, *'Constitutions and Religious Freedoms'*, reported on his findings using the Religion and State (RAS): Religious Regulation category, that South Africa ranked amongst the three best countries in the world, based on a composite set of religious freedom indicators.

A review of the declared objectives of groupings such as Freedom of Religion – South Africa and Watchmen on the Wall does, however, highlight the need to assess whether such objectives are aimed at securing their freedom of religion, or the preserving of the privileging of religion, as was previously enjoyed, pre-1994.

Further to what may present via the courts, as well as through parliamentary Sub-Committee proceedings, the public pronouncements of such religious-based advocacy groupings are well articulated in electronic resources available on online platforms such as YouTube. An understanding of these forces is also necessary to grasp the make-up of the South African socio-legal landscape, which will, in turn, determine how atheists shape their resistance to any discrimination or inequity encountered. The core contestation which motivates a grouping such as FOR-SA, for instance, is that the right to freedom of religion, in their case particularly the rights of the Christian church, should not be interfered with by the State, based on their argument that the rights of the religious to practice their faith along the lines dictated to in their respective religious texts is a right enshrined in the Constitution of the country.

This view is carried strongly by the founder of Freedom of Religion-South Africa, Pastor Andrew Selly and FOR-SA's legal counsel, Advocate Nadene Badenhorst in a special feature on FOR-SA aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC2)[169].

In the SABC2 recording, Pastor Andrew Selly of FOR-SA [1.33 minutes], articulated that,

> *"People need to read the Bible and make up their own decisions on how to raise up their children. We were concerned that the Government or the Human Rights Commission was wanting to come across the boundaries of the doctrines of the church and dictate what we can and can't teach……[7.04 minutes] South Africa needs to have a free church, free to preach and express her faith without Government interference."*

Advocate Nadene Badenhorst, recounts the responses of FOR-SA to the case of the Joshua Generation Church [Founder - Pastor Andrew Selly] whose teachings on the spanking of children as a form of discipline was challenged by the South African Human Rights Commission. Advocate Badenhorst's views [1.05 minutes], as expressed in the same SABC2 feature, support those of Pastor Selly, as noted above.

> *"JoshGen sent an answer back saying we are preaching, we are teaching what the Bible says, nothing more, nothing less. And there's no command in our Constitution, and on the contrary, in article 15 of the Constitution allows Christians, Churches, everybody has the freedom of worship, and that is included and therefore declared"*
>
> Advocate Nadine Badenhorst (2016)

Whilst there may be no need to delve further into the constitutional provisions of Article 15, it is crucial to note that the expressed positions of FOR-SA which are argued for, firstly, the rights of the religious to do as they interpret their sacred texts as instructing them to do and

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[169] FOR-SA featured on SABC2. 2016. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDFjPwTaJxY. [Accessed on, 10th April 2016].

secondly, that the Government should not 'interfere' with such interpretations and any resultant doctrines, teachings and practices.

Case: OGOD Vs 6 Public Schools and 2 Ministers of Education

Freedom can be a messy business, and the passage of cases through the courts relating to freedom of religion is a reflection of this expression. The significance in reviewing these cases for this study is two-fold. Firstly, it offers a purview of the battleground of religion in the public sphere; and how these battles resolve themself will have a bearing on the persons of faith, as well as on atheists. Secondly, the cases considered, although not driven by an overt and expressed atheistic cause, do reflect a significant representation of atheism in South Africa. The alternate view, of there being a distinct hand of atheism in these cases is shared by advocates of freedom of religion from the Christian faith, such as Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR-SA).[170]

In what could be considered the 'Scopes Trial of South Africa', the independent organization, Organisasie vir Godsdienste-Onderrig en Demokrasie [OGOD] (Organisation for Religion Education and Democracy), in August 2014 filed papers in the Johannesburg High Court formally charging six public schools and two government ministers on the grounds that the actions of some public schools were in breach of the National Policy on Religion and Education, and/or were unconstitutional for such public schools. More specifically, the schools and the ministers were being charged for, *"allowing the suppression of scientific and cultural knowledge, religious coercion and abuse of learners' rights in public schools".*[171] From the inception of proceedings, OGOD were specific about their commitment to upholding the principle of freedom of religion, as a constitutional right; *"OGOD defends the constitutional rights of learners to freedom of religion and conscience, and their right of access to knowledge."* (OGOD, 2014:7)

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[170] Gateway News. 2014. *Court asked to remove Christianity from schools*. 5th September. Gateway News is a Christian online news portal. Article available at, http://gatewaynews.co.za/atheist-group-wants-court-to-remove-christianity-from-schools/. [Accessed on 28th July 2016].
[171] OGOD Press Statement (20th August 2014:1). Available online at, http://www.ogod.org.za/press-releases/ogod-litigation-press-release-aug2014.pdf. [Accessed on, 31st December 2016].

Having traced the trajectory of State-Religion relations and the development of the principle of freedom of religion and conscience to its present constitutional settings, the importance of the OGOD-Schools case is almost self-evident. As indicated by the founder and director of OGOD, Mr Hans Pietersen, *"This will be South Africa's watershed case for religion in public schools."* (OGOD, 2014:9) Other than the fact that this will be a precedent setting judgment when eventually decided upon by the courts, its significance is also derived from its framing within the provisions of the Constitution (1996) and related statutes. The stated objectives of OGOD illustrate the thrust of the case. (OGOD, 2014:1)

> *"In support of the South African Constitution, OGOD endeavours to:*
> - *Promote in-depth, fact-based education about religions of the world;*
> - *Eradicate religious indoctrination in public schools;*
> - *Identify and expose religious counter-knowledge and magical thinking;*
> - *Shield children from the psychological dangers of religious damnation;*
> - *Promote a democratic, secular and human rights based South African society, and*
> - *Eradicate religious elitism."*

Further to the founding affidavit filed by OGOD in August 2014, there has been a slow but steady flow of legal correspondence between the defendants and the plaintiff via their respective legal councils. One of the reasons for the delay in this case not having reached court as yet is that a group of *amici curiae* (Friends of the Court) have developed, who themselves had to lodge applications for such recognition by the court. Interestingly, one of the prominent *amici curiae* in this matter is The South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms.[172]

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[172] Badenhorst, N. 2016. Religious Freedom in the firing line in 2016. *Gateway News*. Available online at, http://gatewaynews.co.za/religious-freedom-in-the-firing-line-in-2016/. [Accessed on, 29th July 2016].

In discussing the OGOD case Mr Andrew Selley, the founder & director of Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR-SA)[173] summarises the contesting position held by FOR-SA to the case.

> *"This case could potentially have severe ramifications for religious freedom and ultimately for the spreading of the Gospel, in South Africa.*
> *Should OGOD be successful, the effect will be that teachers and learners will be silenced from speaking or testifying about God in a school context. They will not be allowed to read the Bible or pray (either individually, or together with other Christians) at school. Creationism, as a biblical teaching, will be banned from schools. Learners will not be allowed to participate in VCSV or other Christian activities at school. And doors will be shut to pastors and Christian ministries working into schools. In a nutshell, our schools will become sterile environments to the seed of the Gospel – this, when statistics have shown, that between 80 – 85% of people make a commitment to Jesus Christ before the age of 18!"*[174]

It is significant to note that the Gateway News article from which this extract is drawn specifically notes, *"atheist group wants court to remove Christianity from schools."* Neither the founding affidavit of OGOD or the statements issued by the organisation declares themselves as an atheist group or organisation, nor that it is their aim to *"remove Christianity from schools"*.

Throughout the engagement with the legal cases already decided upon as well as those current, the need to understand the central place of the Constitution on matters of religious belief and freedom of conscience becomes clear. The preamble to the Constitution highlights the following two new critical *constitutional* realities which emerged post-1996, and which applies in equal measure to both persons who subscribe to a religious faith as well as those who choose not to. Firstly, that the Constitution *is* the supreme authority of

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[173] Further to the Badenhorst (2016) article, the motivations for FOR-SA can be viewed directly from Mr Andrew Selley's online video statement, available at, http://forsa.org.za/is-our-freedom-of-religion-under-threat/. [Accessed 29th July 2016].
[174] Gateway News. 2014. *Court asked to remove Christianity from schools.*

South Africa. Secondly, _all_ citizens are equal before the law. Whilst the latter constitutional reality has received adequate treatment thus far, the import and implications for the establishment of a constitutional dispensation in which, for the first time in modern South African history, the Constitution is the _supreme authority_, cannot be lost.

> _"We therefore, through our duly elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the republic …….."_

It is this central principle that will cut across the current cases being contested in the courts, and it will remain the central principle which will undergird the emergence of atheism in South Africa, in establishing the full extent of the rights, and its limitations, of persons who may choose not to affiliate to any religious faith.

If there was any uncertainty as to what the counter-arguments may represent on the principle of the supreme authority of the Constitution, the statement above by Mr Andrew Selley does offer some clarity. Furthermore, the statement reveals and elucidates the motivations at the heart of the cause for freedom of religion which FOR-SA represents; i.e. to preserve previously enjoyed practices such as the _"speaking or testifying about God"_ and the teaching of a specific type of religious philosophy, such as, _"Creationism, as a biblical teaching"_ within public spaces such as schools. It may be valid to deduce, therefore, that what is being fought for on the part of FOR-SA is the right to **preach** religion in schools _("And doors will be shut to pastors and Christian ministries working into schools.")_, rather than just teach it.

In his online statement referenced above, which is posted on the FOR-SA website (www.FORSA.org.za), Andrew Selley lays bare the battle and the alleged attack on Christianity as he sees it, which needs to be defended.

> _"Increasingly, the government is crossing the line of religious freedom and dictating what we can and can't teach from the Bible.(1.24 minutes)………So, if we can't define sin properly, how can we lead people to Christ? How can we_

lead them to repentance? So, whole portions of our society will be lost to Christianity if we don't defend these freedoms.(3.11 minutes)"[175]

With regard to the discoveries on the emergence of atheism with which this study is tasked, it is of no minor significance that schools, according to FOR-SA and the constituency which they represent, remain fertile ground for *"the seed of the gospel"*, which in effect equates to children being made subjects of religious preachments in a school environment. The impact of this, as opposed to the *teaching* of various religious worldviews, on the future emergence and prevalence of atheism in South Africa becomes self-revealing. The extract from the FOR-SA video, quoted above, as well as the video in its totality illustrates a clear subordination of the supremacy of the Constitution to what Mr Selley considers to be divine warrant and instruction embodied in the Bible. This scenario does harken back to the ideology of Christian Nationalism which was foundational within the pre-1994 Apartheid dispensation; characterised by the privileging of Christianity within the school system.

7.7. Religious Trauma Syndrome: Why the OGOD and Mostert Cases matters

A further consideration in the matter of religious instruction in schools is the developing branch of psychology aimed at investigating what is now known as Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS). The direct relevance of this emerging field of research for this study is that the causal link established between early childhood religious instruction and trauma which results from both the content of religious instruction itself as well as the challenges which accompany a decision to abandon religion, has a direct bearing on how the terrain of atheism in South Africa will shape itself.

A leading international authority on Religion Trauma Syndrome is Marlene Winell, who has published extensively on the subject. Most notably, her set of three articles (undated), *Religious Trauma Syndrome*, published on the British Association for Behavioural and

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[175] Extracts from Mr Selley's video statement, *Is our Religious Freedom under Threat*. Available online at, available at, http://forsa.org.za/is-our-freedom-of-religion-under-threat/. [Accessed on, 29th July 2016].

Cognitive Psychotherapies online website makes for compulsive reading on the subject.[176] Her book, *Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others leaving their Religion*, published in 1993, offers a comprehensive account of her research and experiences as a consulting psychologist on Religious Trauma Syndrome, dedicating a chapter (7), *The Damaged Inner Child*, in her book to Religious Trauma Syndrome suffered by children. Similar to the cause of Marlene Winell is the work of Caleb Lack[177] at the Recovering from Religion Project which deals with secular non-religious therapy to support persons exiting religion.

In the context of the case law reviewed in this study which is currently finding passage through the South Africa courts, the following extract from Dr Winell's article (1) remains relevant.

> *"At present, raising questions about toxic beliefs and abusive practices in religion seems to be violating a taboo. In society, we treasure our freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. Our laws and mores reflect the general principle that if we are not harming others, we can do as we like. Forcing children to go to church hardly seems like a crime. Real damage is assumed to be done by extreme fringe groups we call "cults" and people have heard of ritual abuse. Moreover, religious institutions have a vested interest in promoting an uncritical view.*
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> *But mind-control and emotional abuse is actually the norm for many large, authoritarian, mainline religious groups. The sanitization of religion makes it all the more insidious. When the communities are so large and the practices normalized, victims are silenced."*

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[176] Dr Marlene Winell holds her PhD in Human Development and Family Studies from Pennsylvania State University. The set of articles is available online at, http://www.babcp.com/Review/RTS-Its-Time-to-Recognize-it.aspx. [Accessed 30th July 2016].
Dr Winell also runs a website with resources and programmes to support persons leaving religion, www.journeyfree.org.
[177] D Caleb Lack co-authored a book in 2016 with South African atheist, Jacques Rousseau entitled, *Critical Thinking, Science and Pseudoscience: Why we can't trust our brains*.
Recovering from Religion Project (http://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/#home)

One of the few South African responses to the condition identified by Winell as Religious Trauma Syndrome was found in an article by South African journalist, Mandy De Waal (2012) entitled, *The lives less lived: Sons & daughters of perdition*.[178] In discussing an extract from the work of Winell, De Waal highlights the impact of subjecting children to religious doctrine, with specific focus on the Christian belief system.

> *'"Human babies are born long before their brains are fully developed and (religious) indoctrination starts at such an early age," says Winell, who adds that the theist imagery of hell, the devil and Jesus bloodied on the cross, is extremely powerful and is often stored in the amygdala (along with emotions) as a pre-verbal language. "This basically constitutes a kind of child abuse and trauma that is very difficult to undo. That's why when people want to undo this emotional damage, they often don't understand the disconnect they experience between their intellect and emotions."*
> *Religions like Christianity are "coded" for early indoctrination.'*

The latter point by Mandy De Waal is a recognition of the tacit advocacy sought by Mr Andrew Selley, as quoted above, for *'the seeds of the Gospel'* to be sown at an early age so that children and adolescents could "*make a commitment to Jesus Christ before the age of 18*".[179]

On the impact of the OGOD case for the future of religious instruction in schools, and indeed in the public square, the summary offered by Mr Selley as to the origins of this case, although inaccurate, is telling.

> *"There can also be no doubt that the aim is to remove one belief system (Christianity) and replace it with another (atheism). This is evident from the*

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[178] De Waal, M. 2012. The lives less lived: Sons & daughters of perdition. *The Daily Maverick*, 11th March. Available online at, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-03-11-the-lives-less-lived-sons-daughters-of-perdition/#.V52t4rh97IV. [Accessed on, 30th July 2016].

[179] This, on the part of Andrew Selley represents a direct invocation of the Scriptural texts, Proverbs 22 verse 6,
   "Train up a child in the way he should go,
    And when he is old he will not depart from it." (New King James Version).

court order that OGOD is asking, namely a prohibition on any form of Christianity in the schools."[180]

There can be no doubt that the outcome of the OGOD case will have far reaching implications for religious instruction in schools, thereby impacting directly on the lives of children, and consequently on the emergence of atheism in the long term in South Africa.

Case: Adrian Mostert, Hannah Mostert, Sonke Gender Justice and Carol Bower (Complainants) and Joshua Generation Church (Respondent)

The second case of relevance is that of, *A Mostert and three others Vs The Joshua Generation Church,* which was lodged in 2013 and heard before the South African Human rights Commission [Western Cape]. The findings of the SAHRC [WP/1213/0887] were handed down in January 2016. The case dealt with the position held by the leadership of the Joshua Generation Church that the right is reserved to Christians, as what they determined to be their rights to freedom of religion, to spank their children if they considered it an appropriate measure to correct the child. Furthermore, the Joshua Generation Church considered it their right to hold to their religious beliefs and practices as follows, *"The Church does however believe, teach and preach (the whole of) the Bible, as it has every right to do, including therefore the Scriptures* [Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13-14] *on child correction."*[181]

The findings of the SAHRC were clear and unambiguous. In summary, the following decision (*para. 9.6*) was dispensed.

> *"The Commission finds that corporal punishment of a child by his or her parent or caregiver violates the right of the child to dignity and that the state's failure to address legal reform relating to corporal punishment in the domestic sphere enables this violation and amounts to a failure to respect, protect,*

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[180] Gateway News. 2014. *Court asked to remove Christianity from schools*. 5th September.
[181] Gateway News. 2016. *Religious Freedom in the firing line in 2016*. 12th February.

promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights as well as international obligations"[182]

The Joshua Generation Church, on 30 March 2016, filed an application for leave to appeal the SAHRC findings.[183] With the appeal pending, the findings of 21ˢᵗ January 2016 by the SAHRC remain pertinent as they effectively issue an indictment on the church to desist from advocating corporal punishment as a means of disciplining children (*para. 10.1*). The SAHRC ruling in this case is not out of legal character from the precedent setting judgment handed down in 2000 on the issue of the use of corporal punishment in Christian schools. In a matter which could also apply to the subject of Religious Trauma Syndrome in relation to the rights of the unprotected child, the South African Constitutional Court pronounced on the use of corporal punishment on children in schools. In a case brought against the Minister of Education by Christian Education South Africa[184], a body representing 196 independent Christian schools with approximately 14 500 students, Christian Education SA sought to have Section 10[185] of the South African Schools Act (1996), declared unconstitutional and invalid on the basis that the prohibition of corporal correction (which could be considered as a euphemism for corporal punishment) was an invasion of their individual, parental and community rights to freely practice their religion. The precedent setting import of this case, not just for the regulation of schools constituted under a religious ethos, but also for the realisation of principles of secularity within a secular state and by implication the levelling of the socio-legal ground for the emergence of atheism and non-religion, become evident in the following extract from the judgment handed down by Chief Justice Albie Sachs in the *Case: Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education (CCT4/00) [2000]*.

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[182] South African Human Rights Commission Report [Case WP/1213/0887], issued 21 March 2016. Available online at, https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/Western%20Cape%20-%20Investigative%20Report%20-%20Joshua%20Church%20-%2021%20January%202016.pdf. [Accessed 25ᵗʰ July 2016].
[183] Gateway News, 31ˢᵗ March 2016.
[184] Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education (CCT4/00) [2000] ZACC 11; 2000 (4) SA 757; 2000 (10) BCLR 1051 (18 August 2000)
Available online at, http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2000/11.html. [Accessed on, 17ᵗʰ May 2014].
[185] *South African Schools Act (1996), Section 10 provides:*
"Prohibition of corporal punishment
(1)   No person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner.
(2)   Any person who contravenes subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a sentence which could be imposed for assault."

"[51] I do not wish to be understood as underestimating in any way the very special meaning that corporal correction in school has for the self-definition and ethos of the religious community in question. Yet their schools of necessity function in the public domain so as to prepare their learners for life in the broader society. Just as it is not unduly burdensome to oblige them to accommodate themselves as schools to secular norms regarding health and safety, payment of rates and taxes, planning permissions and fair labour practices, and just as they are obliged to respect national examination standards, so is it not unreasonable to expect them to make suitable adaptations to non-discriminatory laws that impact on their codes of discipline. The parents are not being obliged to make an absolute and strenuous choice between obeying a law of the land or following their conscience. They can do both simultaneously. What they are prevented from doing is to authorise teachers, acting in their name and on school premises, to fulfill what they regard as their conscientious and biblically-ordained responsibilities for the guidance of their children."

In the light of this judgment, which does render the 2016 appeal by the Joshua Generation Church somewhat superfluous, should the appeals process not overturn the SAHRC finding of January 2016 and the accompanying decisions in the SAHRC report, both these cases on the prohibition of the use of corporal punishment on children will stand as significant legal hallmarks in South African jurisprudence in which the right to freedom of religion was tested and found not to be an absolute right, but one which is limited and balanced by other rights within the Constitution and the overarching principles and objectives of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The importance of these legal rulings for the emergence of atheism within a more legally defined and socially equitable context cannot be overestimated.

7.8. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter set out to offer an overview of South African case law relating to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in the context of the constitutional transitions witnessed with the demise of Apartheid and the onset of the new post-1994 democratic constitutional dispensation. Consideration was also given to the role of other 'Chapter 9' institutions such as, The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) in shaping the place of religion in the public realm. The ruling of the South African Advertising Standards Authority on a sign board outside a South African church which an atheist complainant considered to be offensive was also considered as being a significant contribution towards the assertion of the constitutional rights to which atheists and persons of non-religion are entitled.

This chapter also demonstrated that even in law, the rights to which atheists are entitled and the obligations to which they are held to account can be understood through a relational discourse, in dialogue with the rights and obligations which apply to the religious. The equity before the law for the non-religious and for the religious was mediated with meaning in the context of South Africa being a secular democracy which was constitutionally designed to accommodate a plurality of religious traditions, as well as those who choose not to affiliate to any faith-based religion.

Whilst it is recognised that the cases highlighted (OGOD Case, Mostert Case) which are currently finding passage through the South Africa court are not about advocating atheism, although this is alleged by religious rights advocacy groups, these cases are being spearheaded by persons who self-pronounce as atheists who wish to right the wrongs of religious hegemony in the public realm, particularly where the rights of the child are concerned. In fact, every one of the cases dealt with in this chapter which related to the subject of freedom of religion, represented a contestation to the view that the right to freedom of religion is an absolute and unalterable right to which every religious person and institution is entitled. The post-1994 record of jurisprudence discussed has clearly indicated otherwise; that the right to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are rights which

are held in tension with and are limited by other provisions in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. The implications of this leveling of the legal ground for both the religious and non-religious and for the emergence of atheism in South Africa are significant and far reaching.

Chapter 8:
Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa

"The medium is the message."

Marshall McLuhan (1964)

8.1. Chapter Introduction

No amount of futuristic thinking within his frame of the advanced industrial age could have prepared Marshall McLuhan or even futurist Alvin Toffler and their generation for the present. Toffler's (1970) then ground-breaking, *Future Shock* paradigm is only from 46 years ago, from an era when desktop electronic calculators weren't even heard of.

Enter the age of online digital media and communications of the present and the reconfiguration, formatting, storage and accessibility of information places the individual back at the centre of mass media; a new world of connectivity and content distribution which has already had an impact on the emergence of atheism in South Africa and internationally. Beyond being just consumers of content, new media and social media platforms have made it possible for anyone with a mobile smartphone to become creators of new content. The relevance of this chapter is also supported by the fact that online digital platforms represent the new battlegrounds on which ideas on religion and non-religion will be contested. This is a present and active reality and is not just prescient of a possible future scenario.

In reflecting on the two epochs which represented seismic shifts in matters of communications and media, David Batstone, as far back as 2001, drew a comparison between the significance of the printing press within the Reformation of the 16th Century and the current advances post-2001 in technology which gave rise to the world of new media and social media.

> *"What the printing press did for Europe in the sixteenth century, the convergence of telecommunications media is doing in our own time."*

This chapter attends to this technological transition in relation to the emergent sociology of non-religion in South Africa and what it may mean for the future proliferation of atheism, or indeed religion, in the country. Alongside a brief exploration of the trends within new media and social media which have impacted on the phenomenon of atheism the two core issues which require attention are, firstly, the manner in which the collective electronic platforms under these media categories have contributed towards the construction of the identities of atheists, and the reflection of such identities within society. Secondly, understanding new social formations which have resulted directly from engagements on such electronic platforms and what this means for current and, potentially, future representations of atheism in the country.

8.2. The Democratisation of Media: *'The Medium is the Message'*

A critical reality of new media and social media is that the departure from media platforms of the past, predominantly print and analogue (television and radio), is characterised by a shift away from, and therefore a direct challenge to, conventional structures of media power and domination. Whilst the idea of the *democratisation of information* may still be problematic in a world in which the poor and economically marginalised remain structurally alienated from access to the internet and the free flow of information, there can be no doubt that in almost every respect, new media and social media have *crossed the Rubicon*, beyond the point of no return, into an age in which religion and non-religion would now need to compete more freely with other ideas and philosophies in a networked and globalised world.

In a work which is said to have introduced the terms 'media' and 'global village', Marshall McLuhan (1964) coined the phrase, *"the medium is the message"* to emphasise that what an individual or a collective engaged with a medium gave it its message.

> *"Many people would be disposed to say that it was not the machine, but what one did with the machine, that was its meaning or message. In terms of the*

ways in which the machine altered our relations to one another and to
ourselves, it mattered not in the least whether it turned out cornflakes or
Cadillacs."

Marshall McLuhan (1964:7)

Following Marshall McLuhan's death the area of study called *Medium Theory* developed, inspired particularly by his work on *"the medium is the message"*. Knut Lundby acknowledges the contributions of McLuhan (1964) in this regard and offers the following account of Medium Theory, which is relevant to the purposes of this chapter.

"Medium theory observes influences of communication technologies in
addition to, and also separately from, the content they deliver. Medium theory
focuses on the distinct characteristics and influences of each type of medium,
for example, how print and television encourage different modes of thinking
and different value systems"

Knut Lundby (2012:227)

It is in this sense that the socialisation of atheism will be examined on new media and social media platforms, to establish the extent and nature of understandings of self and the re-ordering of social relations, and consequently the power relations, which characterise the world of atheism and non-religion. With regard to the present intersectionalities between atheism and new media and social media in South Africa, the pronouncements of David Batstone (2001:235) could be regarded as being deeply insightful, if not prophetic.

"It's hard to imagine how fixed theologies like those of most organized
religions will survive intact the on-line scrutiny given to ideas, opinions and
proclamations. The network is a natural leveller of established institutions.
Once individuals get their hands on the machinery of communications, they
make and disseminate their own personal theologies."

Whilst it cannot be said that the advent of the growth of the internet, alongside the rapid development in related technology, has completely subordinated the power of conventional

channels of media, particularly television, it can be posited that it has relocated the individual, the *'Citizen X'*, back to the centre of media, thereby challenging the hegemony of conventional media enterprise.

In their article, '*Atheisms Unbound: The Role of the New Media in the Formation of a Secularist Identity*', Christopher Smith and Richard Cimino, (2012:27) discuss the responses to a question posted in 2009 on the blog 'Friendly Atheist'[186]. The question read, *"Would you be an atheist without the internet?"* The respondents noted that whilst they would remain atheists, they would be unaware that there were others who shared the same views as themselves, they would be less informed and as a result, less active as atheists. The two striking issues which emerge from these responses are, firstly, the issue of access to information and secondly, the need to belong to a community of like-minded people.

With regard to the latter aspect, and within the context of new media and social media, the decentralised nature and global spread of atheism undergoes a paradigmatic shift, into the internet becoming a *common place* for atheists. Although it is electronically reproduced, it represents a significant *'common public space'* (Smith and Cimino, 2012:27) where new social formations around non-religion are given birth to and are nurtured. The very nature of the medium, the internet, denotes a common public space which transcends the boundaries of national identities and moves beyond such confinements, to exploring, understanding and reconstructing new understandings of self, as an atheist in communion with others who may not necessarily share the same national badge, and often don't.

Although it is accepted that the phenomenon of atheism globally, or within South Africa, is by no means a homogeneous common space, it is a place of significant convergence of divergent histories, opinions, interests, and responses to atheism and non-religion. As such, the internet and particularly social media extends the idea of a common space into the non-geographic, into being a space where the private and the public interact and merge, to reconstruct new personal and group identities. For an atheist, as indeed for anyone, engagement on social media and new media platforms allows for the constant critique and

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[186] The Friendly Atheist was founded by Hermant Mehta and is accessible via its popular Facebook page, currently followed by 329 546 people.

re-assessment of the posts, texts and personal recordings resulting in on-going self-auditing, and the actual editing of posts, to reconstruct representations of self, reflective of the development one is undergoing; in this instance, as an atheist in a public setting. (Löveheim, 2012:44)

With regard to the access to information, be it on the subject of atheism, religion, or emerging opinions, or research on the sociology of atheism, it is important to note that South Africans, generally, do not suffer restrictions on the flow of information or the filtering of content. Furthermore, South Africa does not have any specific blasphemy laws on its statutes books which could potentially restrict the availability of content, although it is noted that limitations on the right to freedom of expression are provided for in the Constitution within the Freedom of Expression Clause (16) itself and within the general spirit and letter of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2).

8.3. Social Media and New Media: *Channelling Atheism*

The common themes which carry through most understandings of social media, as opposed to new media are interaction, user-generated content, sharing, and social networks. Andreas Kaplan defines social media as,

> *"Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."*
>
> Andreas Kaplan (2010)

In her online explanation of the differences between the two media strands, Jane Southern (2013), a practicing attorney who works within the field of media and business development noted the significance of the 'mobility' dimension of social media and the fact that internet users spend more time on social media than any other site. As will be gathered from the survey to follow of online atheist networks linking South African atheists with one another, as well as with atheists in the rest of Africa and globally, an understanding of the very nature of these sets of media platforms is necessary to anticipate how the phenomenon of atheism

will manifest itself in future. For the purposes of this study, the key social media platform which will be surveyed will be Facebook. It is noted that no names or personal profile information gathered from personal Facebook accounts are disclosed in this aspect of the study, the purpose of which is not to investigate and reveal the personal positions or pronouncements of atheists, but to establish the general trend of the phenomenon of atheism in relation to the instrument of electronic social media.

New media, on the other hand, focuses on the availability of, and accessibility to, content online. Southern (2013) offers the following summary of new media.

> *"New media refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation. Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new, unregulated content. Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, compressible, and interactive."*

From this category, YouTube is considered as a primary platform for this study given its value as a resource to atheists.

8.4. Online Atheist Networks – South Africa

Whilst there may be lines blurred as to which are distinctly South African generated and populated sites and pages on Facebook those which can be identified as having originated in South Africa and/or with predominantly South African members will be focused on. Facebook is considered due to its relative popularity, efficacy and the ease with which it has networked atheists in the country. From amongst the spectrum of sites surveyed, the following set stood out as being active and effective in networking atheists in the country as well as in capturing the worldview of atheism through the presentation of engaging content. Regarding accessibility to these sites and the important aspect of research ethics in relation to the dissemination of content, it is noted that this inquiry took the form of an overall survey of atheist and related Facebook sites. Closed groups were simply identified and

listed. Where Public groups were discussed, care was exercised not to disclose any names or personal profile information of members.

Atheist Network[187] [Closed Group – Members 638]
Atheist and Humanist South Africa [Closed Group – Members 4867]
Black South African Atheists[188] [Closed Group – Members 1291]
Ex-Christians of Africa[189] [Public Group – Members 215] Group name changed during October 2016 to 'Musings of Africans'.
Secular Alliance of South Africa[190] [Public Group – Members 287]
South African Atheists[191] [Closed Group – Members 1858]
South African Atheist Movement[192] [Public Group - Members 745]
South African Humanist Association[193] [Public Group - Liked by 190 people]
South African Secular Humanists and Atheists[194] [Public Group – Liked by 1106 people]
South African Secular Society[195] [Public Group - Liked by 868 People]
South African Skeptics[196] [Closed Group – Members 2379]
Ultimate Christian and Atheist Debate Group[197] [Closed Group – Members 4526]

An organisation which does require separate mention is the Free Society Institute (FSI) which is not explicitly defined by declaring a position on atheism. As reflected in the support enjoyed on its Facebook page[198], however, the FSI is considered by many atheists as an important institution in the South African atheism landscape and as one not opposed to the broader cause of atheism. The ethos of the FSI is reflected in the opening statement on its Webpage, "*The FSI is a South African non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting free speech, free thought and scientific reasoning. We are advocates for the values of secular humanism.*"[199]

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[187] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1550330091853524/
[188] https://www.facebook.com/groups/blsaa/
[189] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1701641650070601/
[190] https://www.facebook.com/groups/SecularAllianceSA/
[191] https://www.facebook.com/groups/2422614432/
[192] https://www.facebook.com/groups/SAAM1/
[193] https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=south%20african%20humanist%20association
[194] https://www.facebook.com/South-African-Secular-Humanists-and-Atheists-112808328845255/?fref=ts
[195] https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=south%20african%20secular%20society%20%20sass
[196] https://www.facebook.com/groups/25920789463/
[197] https://www.facebook.com/groups/534788106622337/
[198] https://www.facebook.com/Free.Society.Institute/home
[199] http://fsi.org.za/

Other smaller and groups of a secular, humanist and atheist nature are,

Parent-Hood Religion Free, South Africa[200] [Closed Group – Members 112]

Secular Parenting in KZN[201] [Closed Group – Members 50]

The emergence of these groups indicates the formation of smaller online communities, focusing on specific issues, which exist alongside the more mainstream atheist communities.

Not unlike research completed on the subject in the United States of America[202] (Marcus Mann (2015), Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith (2010)) it could be proffered that the categories for dialogue under which the engagement of atheists with online media can be assessed are, stigma, identity and community. (Mann, 2015) It is evident though, that of these three themes, and gauging from just the online representations within the atheist groups on Facebook, although stigma may be experienced when self-pronouncing as an atheist, this is not a significant inhibiting factor to 'coming out' as an atheist, at least on social media. Two key reasons are advanced in support of this latter point.

Firstly, South Africa is now 22 years into its democracy, with one of the most liberal constitutional dispensations in the world, with regard to the rights of freedom of religion and conscience, on the one hand, and freedom of expression, on the other; a Constitution which respects, encourages and protects diversity with regard to matters of religious belief and conscience. Although South Africa legislation in this regard is not cast within the paradigm of a 'wall of separation between church and state', the Constitution itself, together with other supporting statutes, such as The Equality Act, does engender freedom of expression, without fear of undue reprisal; the limitations to such rights inherent within the Constitution, still pertaining. This point was also borne out, without exception, in the opinions expressed by participants in the interviews undertaken in this study, who expressed satisfaction that the Constitution offered them adequate protection and support for their open articulation of their atheism. However, this does not negate the reality of the social stigma which may be experienced, as also expressed during the interviews undertaken. It is noted, however, that the social stigma to which atheists are subjected is

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[200] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1208095819202136/
[201] https://www.facebook.com/groups/SecularParentingKZN/
[202] In the absence of formal research in South Africa on the sociology of atheism, the studies from USA are considered in dialogue with the specific online manifestations of the phenomenon by South Africans.

not lost to the community of atheists. An entry reflecting this point was shared on the South African Atheist Movement (Public Group) Facebook page on 29 July 2016, and read as follows,

> *"I am here for the atheists[.] For the atheists who are told they are not discriminated against[.] For the atheists that get bullied for not believing in fairy tales[.] For the atheists whose parents say they need to be 'fixed' and come back to Jesus[.] For the atheists whose parents disown them, whose friends reject them and leave[.] I am here for the atheists who are 'in the closet'[.] Know that you are not alone and we are working on it[.]"*

The second key reason advanced in support of the readiness of atheists 'coming out' and self-pronouncing their stance on religion online can be attributable to the successes of the 'New Atheist' movement in lifting the profile of atheism internationally. The leadership of the movement of New Atheism being attributed to Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris is due largely to the combined effect of their books on atheism being published within a few years of one another [2004-2007][203], as well as their increasing online presence and multi-channelled engagement with atheists. The span of contributors to atheism has, however, increased significantly in recent years with a growing presence on social media and new media platforms by the likes of physicist Lawrence Krauss, author Ayaan Hirsi Ali, astrophysicist Neil deGrass Tyson, and philosopher Anthony C. Grayling, to name a few.

These developments, particularly over the past 10 years, have altered the discourse on atheism globally. The fact that the rise of the New Atheist Movement coincided with the unprecedented advances in digital online communications and media technology should not be lost sight of also. Whilst the era which preceded the advent of New Atheism onto the global stage may have reflected a greater restraint in the articulation of atheism, New Atheism is characterised by a more vociferous and strident articulation for the application of reasoned inquiry in trying to understand reality, as opposed to faith in a divine entity or

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[203] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (2004) and *Letters to a Christian Nation* (2006). Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006). Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* (2006). Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great* (2007).

reliance on precepts from Scriptural texts to make sense of reality. R. Albert Mohler (2008:63) has no reservation in referring to the impact of New Atheism as that of a *'revolution'*. The wording on a church signboard posted on 1st August 2016 on the South African Atheist Movement [SAAM] Facebook page captures the essence of the point, *'REASON IS THE GREATEST ENEMY THAT FAITH HAS!'* to which a caption was added, *'This should tell you something'*.

As pedestrian or even as unimaginative as these captions may appear at first glance, the clarion call to reason and to *think through reality* traces beyond the New Atheist movement, beyond even the Enlightenment period of Europe, to as far back as Greek Antiquity and some of the foundational thinking on non-belief. More importantly though, it is the conscious disposition on the part of atheists and the extent to which they are successful in developing their faculty to reason, question, critique and think through reality which is foundational to the construction of their identity, as opposed to the counterpoint of unquestioning submission to any religious authority. In the case of the Free Society Institute – South Africa, the capacity to reason and question is its very *raison d'être*, as captured in the banner on the FSI webpage, *"THINKING THINGS THROUGH"*. If atheists needed sanction from a make-belief deity for their worldview on science and reason, such is forthcoming from none other than 'God' himself who offered the following crass endorsement on his/her own Facebook page.

> *"Muslim terrorists are killing people.*
> *Christian terrorists are killing people.*
> *Atheist terrorists are posting science articles online."*[204]

A further instance of how digital online media is influencing the media and social landscape in South Africa in relation to atheism and religion is the School of Pan Africanist Thought[205] which is represented on Facebook through a Public Group with 39992 members (December 2016). Although this online social media group is not explicitly defined by an alignment with

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[204] In South African Atheist - Facebook page, dated 6th August 2016.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/2422614432/. Accessed on, 8th August 2016.
[205] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1463758510550402/

atheism, it is not opposed to posts which critique religion, particularly the role of Christianity in the historical enslavement of, and discrimination against Africans. The general character of the group is one of Pan Africanist, Black Consciousness and post-colonial thought, with on-going serious reflection and questioning of the current role, if any, of religion in the emancipation of Africans from the economic, psychological, social, and cultural repression still being experienced.

One of the subjects which enjoy substantial online space on atheist group platforms is the debunking of religious creation stories drawn from Scriptural texts. The outright rejection of the biblical Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden account, as well as stories such as that of Noah and the great flood reflects a rejection on the part of atheists of the religious practice of passing as factual and historical accounts which are regarded by atheists as mythology.

As to what may or may not be the elements, virtues or faculties which constitute the identities of atheists, could be gleaned from a statement made by the administrator (A South African) of the Facebook page of Ex-Christians of Africa (Public Group).

> *"Ex-Christians of Africa does not stand for hate and this will not be a platform to promote hate. We have brains here and the correct use of the brain is what this group stands for and promote. I would like to thank all the members who have contributed to the development of this page by sharing their constructive and educational posts and those who have engaged civilly and critically with shared posts. Our wish is that this group promotes a community of enlightened people, who use critical and rational thinking and are or become freethinkers who map out their own life path using this two thinking skills."*[206]

The online availability and sharing amongst atheists of texts such as The Skeptics Bible[207] which contest the traditional Scriptural texts of the respective faiths also highlights the

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[206] In Ex-Christians of Africa – Facebook page, dated 2nd July 2016. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1701641650070601/. Accessed 6 August 2016.
[207] The Skeptics Annotated Bible website (http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/index.htm) and its Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/TheSkepticsAnnotatedBibleQuranBookOfMormon/?fref=ts) reflects the detail and seriousness with which these texts are engaged with.

disposition of atheists to critically engage with what is generally regarded as being sacrosanct within texts of religion; thereby also contributing towards the constructing and shaping of their individual and collective atheist identity. This point is best summarised in the responses of an Ethiopian atheist in communication with prominent Nigerian atheist, Leo Igwe (2016).

> *"It was rather an evolution over a couple of years. I didn't identify as an atheist at first, nor did I know what I was becoming, lacking belief in gods, was called atheism. The main drive for my unbelief was the bible itself. I found it to be misogynist, racist, homophobic and backward".* [208]

The atheist Facebook pages have also been instrumental in highlighting the still prevalent practice of witchcraft in Africa. Its presence has been felt by the most vulnerable of society, its children and women, with an increasing number of cases reported of children and women being subjected to torture and in certain cases being murdered for being accused of being witches. The fight against this practice features prominently on the South African Facebook pages of atheist groupings, as well as those populated by atheists elsewhere on the continent. Not unlike the manner in which religious beliefs are critiqued, witchcraft and the world of superstition, as made manifest in Africa, are also rejected.

The Facebook page of Ex-Christians Africa led to the story of a 9-year old Nigerian lad who was considered by a church pastor to be a witch and was murdered. Further reference to the article posted on NBC News Online – Africa noted that this was a case of one amongst thousands of children accused by pastors of being witches, children who were tortured and sometimes put to death. [209] This practice was reported as being a literal application of the biblical text, Exodus Chapter 22 Verse 18; *"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."*

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[208] Igwe, L. 2016. Atheism in Ethiopia. *African Examiner.* 17th June. Available online at, http://www.africanexaminer.com/atheism-in-ethiopia/. [Accessed on, 8th August 2016]. This article was referenced in a post on the Ex-Christians of Africa - Facebook page, dated 17th June 2016.
[209] NBC News. 2009. African Churches denounce Children as 'witches'. Dated 17th October. Available online at, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/33356826/ns/world_news-africa/t/african-churches-denounce-children-witches/#.V6cvT7h97IW. [Accessed on, 7th August 2016].

The cumulative voices of atheists represented on the various Facebook pages recorded above, represents a contestation to one of the foundational positions on African religiosity, attributed to John Mbiti, that Africans are 'notoriously religious'.

It is clear, however, that of the main religious traditions, Christianity has endured the greatest degree of criticism and scrutiny on online social media platforms. One of the challenges experienced during this study was identifying atheists who were previously members of the Islamic faith, to establish their experiences as atheists in relation to their history and socialisation within the Islamic tradition. Of the South African atheist groupings considered, representation from atheists who were from a Muslim cultural or religious background was very sparse. The cause of atheists who have abandoned the Islamic faith, as well as the perilous path which they tread as apostates is not lost on the broader community of atheists in South Africa. The multiple murders of bloggers in Bangladesh in 2016 who advanced the cause of atheism featured strongly across the South African atheist groupings pages.

The shaping of identities of atheists is also influenced by the degree of repression suffered by self-pronouncing one's alignment with atheism. The process and nature of identity construction of an atheist in Nigeria will differ from the experiences of a South African atheist, and both will differ from the experiences of an atheist in Saudi Arabia. Notwithstanding these different sets of circumstances, which, in many instances mean the difference between life and death, there is one common community which cuts across these varied experiences, and that is the borderless community of social media and the internet, which transcends national boundaries. Despite any reservations which South Africans may hold regarding the extent of their rights to freedom of religion, conscience and expression, any notions of being 'persecuted' for exercising such rights pales into insignificance when considering what atheists may experience in other parts of the world where religion is mandatory and is a central defining variable to one's identity.

To note just two international flashpoints which featured prominently on the Facebook pages of atheist groupings which highlight the treacherous path to declaring oneself an atheist, the current stance of Saudi Arabia on atheism and the challenges experience by

atheists in Nigeria are given brief consideration. The Independent (UK)[210] featured an article which indicated that the authorities in Saudi Arabia had considered legislation which equated atheists with terrorists, in an effort to clamp down on anyone viewed as a threat to 'public order'. In an interview with Mehdi Hassan of Al Jazeera's programme UpFront, held as recently as April 2016, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United Nations, Abdallah al-Mouallimi, effectively equated atheists in Saudi Arabia with terrorists as he felt that they were a subversive element in a country which was 'homogeneous' in its belief in Islam.[211] The case of atheists in Saudi Arabia, whilst distant from the experiences of South Africans, remains significant for the following reasons. Gauging by the coverage afforded such stories across the South African atheist grouping's Facebook pages, the plight of atheists anywhere appears to matter to atheists in South Africa. Furthermore, fostering open dialogue around such stories is a reflection of the rights enshrined in the South African Constitution supportive of freedom of conscience and freedom of association; rights which are fundamental to the construction of the identity of atheists in the country.

In a story which made international headlines in 2014, the intersection between atheism and social media in Africa became a tangible reality in the life of Nigerian atheist Mubarak Bala, who was incarcerated in a psychiatric facility for pronouncing his decision to abandon the Islamic faith of his family.[212] Bala lived in Kano State where the enforcement of Sharia Law, through a special Sharia Law police force called the Hisbah, could result in death for apostasy. Whilst incarcerated he used a smuggled mobile phone to broadcast his plight via social media (Facebook and Twitter) and two Nigerian atheists who heard of his pleas worked towards his release. One of them was Adeyinka Shorungbe who also went on to be one of the founders of The Humanist Assembly of Lagos. Shorungbe (2016) noted,

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[210] Withnall, A. 2014. Saudi Arabia declares all atheists are terrorists in new law to crack down on political dissidents. *The Independent.* 1st April. Available online at, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-declares-all-atheists-are-terrorists-in-new-law-to-crack-down-on-political-dissidents-9228389.html. [Accessed on 8th August 2015].
For further insights on the emergence of atheism in Saudi Arabia, reference could be made to the Facebook page of, Exposing Religion Saudi Arabia: Freedom from Religion – Saudi Atheists. Accessible online at, https://www.facebook.com/ExposingReligionSaudi/?fref=ts.
[211] An extract from the Al Jazeera Upfront interview. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShPciCVjMOg. [Accessed on 8th August 2016].
[212] Smith, D. 2014. Nigerian man is locked up after saying he is an atheist. *The Guardian*, 25th June. Available online at, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/25/nigerian-man-locked-up-atheist. [Accessed on, 8th August 2016].

> *"Social media has created an avenue for people to engage with each other and find out they are not alone in having questions about religion or rejecting it totally. There's quite a few Nigerians asking questions now, that is always a good thing."*[213]

Mubarak Bala's summary of his experiences once again highlights the very real manner in which social media shapes the lives and identities of atheists in Africa.

> *"Without Twitter I would be a dead man, or a drugged incapacitated dullard,' he said. ' Social media is the ultimate pen, the weapon that reaches far and wide… The online community is what brings us together, the challenges are much, but we squeeze through, everyday."*[214]

8.5. Atheist Identities, Post-colonialism, and Human Rights:
Intersections on the Online Information Highway

Attempting to understand the intersectionality between atheism, post-coloniality and human rights, as represented within the world of electronic social media, deals directly with the creation, re-ordering, and dispensing of knowledge, as well as the power-dynamics within which these activities become manifest. If the view is advanced that the developments in communications technology which undergirds the world of social media are a key contributor to the growth and nature of atheism in South Africa, as this thesis suggests, then, understanding the new patterns and philosophies of knowledge creation and related systems of delivery become imperative. In this regard, therefore, the investment undertaken thus far in trying to understand the media trajectory from Marshal McLuhan and Alvin Toffler (Information Overload), through to Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook: Information Management and Social Media), will enhance the effort to understand how a new chapter in the book of atheism in South Africa is being written, by participants and activists on social media platforms.

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[213] Adegoke Y. 2016. How social media is helping atheists survive in one of the most religious places on earth. *True Africa*, 13th April. Available online at, http://trueafrica.co/article/social-media-helping-atheists-survive-one-religious-places-earth/. [Accessed on, 7th August 2016].
[214] Adegoke, Y. 2016. How social media is helping atheists survive in one of the most religious places on earth.

First, however, the idea that the world of atheism in South Africa is constituted of a homogenous grouping of people must be dispensed with. Operating in a period which is a blink in time away from the demise of direct colonialism[215] and institutionalised racial and economic discrimination, it will be naïve to assume that, *'just because the viceroy has packed up and left'*[216], that the period post-1994 is truly representative of post-coloniality in a South Africa now devoid of the systemic inequalities of the past. Accordingly, and whilst there is much common ground amongst atheists of different socio-political and economic backgrounds, it may not be an unreasonable expectation that representations of the identities of atheists on social media platforms will continue to reflect contestations to colonialism as well as challenges to the vestiges of centuries of institutionalised discrimination in varying degrees and in distinctly different incarnations.

Therefore, given the history of racially demarcated privilege and disenfranchisement still freshly imprinted on the South African atheist conscience, what may hold as post-colonial logic for a 50 year old 'Black' African male who was born and raised in Soweto, Gauteng, may not necessarily hold for a fellow South African, a 50 year old 'White' African male who was born and raised in Constantia, Cape.[217] As with racial classification, class distinctions also bear upon understandings of and responses to the post-colonial objective, with both being subjected to the vagaries which come with the passage of time; or as phrased by Achille Mbembe (2001:15), *"every age has contradictory significations to different actors".*

From the context of the electronic here and now, looking back on the key literary works and contributors within the school of post-colonial theory, it has to be acknowledged that many of the great publications[218] preceded the era of social media, and even the internet in certain instances. Notwithstanding this reality, the insights offered by key post-colonial theorists remain applicable across time and into the present world of social media and new media. Joanne Sharpe offers a clear context from which to pursue the inquiry further.

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[215] Amina Mama (1995:38). *'Beyond the Mask'*.

[216] The application of the phrase was derived from a lecture by Professor Paul Fry of Yale University in his lecture, 'Post-Colonial Criticism' (1.40minutes). Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UarXGSuyyrw. [Accessed 9th August 2016].

[217] The syntax of the sentence was inspired by that within a statement by Gayatri Spivak (1999:334).

[218] Key works such as, Edward Said's, *Orientalism*, published 1978, Homi Bhabha's, *The Location of Culture*, published 1991, Gayatri Spivak's, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, published 1990, and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, published 1999, and Achille Membe's (2001), *On the Postcolony*.

"Thus, postcolonialism is an analysis and critique of the ways in which western knowledge systems have come to dominate. It is a form of analysis that is focused around cultural productions in order that, as well as looking at the ways in which the world came to be represented in the formal documents of explorers, educators and as governors, it also looks at novels, songs, art, movies and advertising as forms of knowledge about the world, and as ways in which this knowledge is communicated. As we shall see later, however, postcolonialism is also a more positive project which seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding – often talked of in terms of 'other voices' – in order to present alternatives to dominant western constructs."

Joanne Sharpe (2008:5)

The question which almost immediately comes into dialogue with the sentiments expressed by Sharpe is that most pivotal of questions within postcolonial theory, *"Can the subaltern speak?"*[219], or its variation, 'Have the subaltern spoken?' A prior question as to exactly who the subaltern are, is pertinent, but one which remains beyond the scope of this study to deliberate fully, suffice to note that South Africa, on the whole, fits the descriptor of being a 'post colony', to the extent that for centuries the coloniser-colonised relationship was, in the majority, a lived socio-political reality. In relation to the subject of atheism, articulations from the subaltern in South Africa are clearly in its infancy and could be argued to be confined to within the sphere of activism, for now; implying that within the academy, the subaltern may not have spoken. Furthermore, it is evident that any serious academic effort to interrogate the sociology of atheism is overdue and represents exciting new prospects for future academic inquiry in South Africa.

If the subaltern do speak, this thesis suggests that it is the language and the medium of the electronic age that will contribute significantly to shaping their discourse and which, by implication, becomes reflective of their identity. It is in this sense then, that a South African

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[219] Spivak, G.C. 1988. *Can the Subaltern Speak*. In, Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* p.271.

zeitgeist moment (Mbembe 2001:15) with regard to atheism has begun and is a current work in progress.

The key question which remains, however, is whether the subaltern or the colonised of South Africa have appropriated the medium of social media and new media to create their own lexicon and set of post-colonial *'languages of life'* as referred to by Achille Mbembe (2001:15), to create the positive post-colonial project which Joanne Sharp (2008:5) alluded to above which, *"seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding – often talked of in terms of 'other voices' – in order to present alternatives to dominant western constructs."* The latter point, however, does require some qualification in that atheism's critique and rejection of religion extends beyond just its western constructions, but to a disruption and rejection of all manner of religious faith, Eastern, Middle Eastern, and African indigenous not being excluded.

Stephen Morton (2003:9) in discussing the key ideas which permeate the work of Gayatari Spivak, noted that within the post-colonial experience the corollary activity of unlearning *"the privileged systems of western knowledge that have indirectly served the interests of colonialism and neo-colonialism"* must accompany the pursuit for alternatives to the dominant ideas and constructs which sustained the colonial project. In the post-1994 South African context the tasks of unlearning the past, on the one hand, and on the other, re-engaging 'denied' knowledges[220] and creating new knowledge and new ways of continuing the disruption of the project of colonialism, is made all the more complex by experiences such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the widespread popularised lexicon of 'the Rainbow Nation', in what appears to be a blanket masking of the colonial period and its ramifications. The extent to which the community of atheists in South Africa succeeds in exhuming this collective memory of the subaltern will mark its contribution towards a post-colonial shift in the power-knowledge dynamic and thereby effect genuine healing and recovery from the residual effects of the colonial enterprise. It is in this regard also that online digital social media platforms are becoming indispensible as the medium through which this cause will be articulated.

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[220] Bhabha, H.K. 1994. *'The Location of Culture'*, p.112.

In discussing the missed opportunities for its own enlightenment and Africa's embracing of the "alien" Enlightenment Missions of Christianity as well as of Islam, Nigerian atheist and human rights activist, Leo Igwe, points to what might need to be the first acknowledgement in the 'unlearning' of the religious dimension within the post-colonial effort.

> *"The real tragedy is not that Europeans and Arabs infiltrated and darkened the continent with their cultural myths and superstitions. After all, Africa has its own traditional myths and taboos, which have also undermined the process of African enlightenment and emancipation. But that Africans have at the end of the day - blindly embraced these alien dogmas and misconceptions at the expense of social peace, intellectual growth, moral progress, truth and originality."*[221]

Igwe's writing and activism is rooted in a deep understanding of the practice of witchcraft and he has published extensively on the subject.[222] In the summary to his PhD. research, Igwe attributes the growth of awareness on the dangers of the practices of witchcraft on the African continent to the effectiveness of social media platforms, *"In the context of increased social media penetration, witchcraft accusations and their social trajectories have achieved increased visibility in Africa."*[223]

It is in this very real context that Igwe's article, *'Towards a New Enlightenment'*, represents an urgent appeal to unlearn alien dogma's of religion and superstition within the paradigm of a 'New Enlightenment' as a way for atheists in the post colony to mediating their transition beyond the colonial religious mind-set.

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[221] Igwe, L. Undated. *Towards a New Enlightenment*. The article was published online on the website of Mukta-Mona, which was the online channel for the late Bangladeshi atheist, Avijit Roy (12 September 1972 – 26 February 2015) whose murder was motivated by strong opposition to his advocacy work within the Bangladesh (Bengali) atheist community. The article is still available online (although mukta-mona.com is not operational) at, https://mukto-mona.com/Articles/Leo_Igwe/new_enlightenment.htm. [Accessed 11th August 2016].

[222] Liepe, B. 2016. *Examining the Growth of Witchcraft Accusations in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p.15. Igwe, L. 2004. A Skeptical look at African Witchcraft and Religion. Available online at, http://www.cissmun.org/cissmun/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/13943554-database.pdf. [Accessed on 13th August 2016].

[223] The summary of Leo Igwe's PhD. research is available online at, http://www.bigsas.uni-bayreuth.de/en/JF_research_projects/witchcraft_igwe/index.html. [Accessed 13th August 2016].

"The New Enlightenment project requires that no race or region be left out. That no place or people the left in the dark. And that the entire human race glow and be aglow with the illuminating matrices of reason, science, critical thinking and free inquiry. I am deeply persuaded that it is only on the basis of the New Enlightenment that Africa can experience a genuine renaissance and realise a civilisation with a global dimension."

The views of Leo Igwe, which were not accessible other than by social media platforms, could very well mirror the sentiments expressed by Christopher Hitchens (13th April 1949 – 15th December 2011), an atheist and one of the key figures in the New Atheist movement. Even before the force of the internet had reconfigured modern communication (social media and new media) to the extent that we understand it today, Hitchens anticipated its revolutionary impact on the creation of new knowledge and also articulated his insights within the frame of a renewed Enlightenment.

"Above all, we are in need of a renewed Enlightenment, which will base itself on the proposition that the proper study of mankind is man, and woman. This Enlightenment will not need to depend, like its predecessors, on the heroic breakthroughs of a few gifted and exceptionally courageous people. It is within the compass of the average person. The study of literature and poetry, both for its own sake and for the eternal ethical questions with which it deals, can now easily depose the scrutiny of sacred texts that have been found to be corrupt and confected. The pursuit of unfettered scientific inquiry, and the availability of new findings to masses of people by easy electronic means, will revolutionize our concepts of research and development."

Christopher Hitchens (2007:283)

If the proposed project for a new Enlightenment, or an approximation thereof, is to be advanced, consideration will also need to be given as to how social media and new media channels support the free flow of new information and the recovery of knowledge previously *'subjugated'*; in the Foucauldian sense. Having already traced through the policies of Christian nationalism pre-1994 in South Africa and the control mechanisms

institutionalised for its survival within the education and media sectors, it will be the very nature and distribution of knowledge which will mark the shift towards the new Enlightenment and the positive post-colonial posture articulated by Sharp (2008:5). Accordingly, entering into dialogue with Michel Foucault on the recovery of knowledges previously subjugated would need to be premised on an understanding, or at least an acknowledgement, of the intentionality behind the systemic alienation and exclusion of knowledges. Motivating Foucault's idea of subjugated knowledges is the intention to subvert the traditional power-knowledge relations which characterised the colonial agenda, thereby creating new spaces for free and critical inquiry. Foulcault (1976:3) elucidates the point.

> "By subjugated knowledge I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical content that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systemisation.....On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else. Something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated....that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work".

The nexus of the Igwe and Hitchens new Enlightenment proposition, with ideas just espoused by Foucault take on special significance within the current and rapidly developing social media and new media environments. Firstly, and in relation to the past, the curtailing of the flow of knowledge or the redacting or censoring of knowledges is made all the more difficult and near impossible with the advances in internet based communications.[224] If the

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[224] On the aspect of exhuming subjugated knowledges it is interesting to note renowned scholar on Christianity in the post colony, Professor R.S. Sugirtharajah, advocating for the open engagement with the apocryphal Gospels within Biblical Studies.
Sugirtharajah, R.S. 2009. *Postcolonial and Biblical Interpretation: The Next Phase*, in 'A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings', p.455.

> *"All along, biblical studies have been confined to the canonical Scriptures – the eventual winners in the doctrinal battles of the early church. Postcolonial biblical criticism needs to expand the biblical canon and incorporate those diverse texts which were suppressed or excluded in the ecclesiastical power-game of selection and rejection. Some of these texts did*

appeal of post-colonial studies scholar, R.S. Sugirtharajah, is to be heeded (although spoken of within the context of biblical criticism), then it could be argued that that emergence of atheism in South Africa, as represented on social media is a demonstration of post-coloniality in on-going revision, away from abstract theorisation, and towards a deeper engagement with what constitutes a post-colonial identity.

> *"The creative and productive future of postcolonial biblical criticism depends on its ability to reinvent itself and enlarge its scope. It should continue to expose the power–knowledge axis but at the same time move beyond abstract theorization and get involved in the day-to-day messy activities which affect people's lives."*
>
> R.S. Sugirtharajah (2009:465)

Secondly, both the technology as well as the sociology supporting social media and new media represents a dramatic subversion in the power-knowledge dynamics of old, with the individual in a position to exercise control and influence over the nature of content which, in the context of this academic inquiry, will become a constituent element in the construction of the atheist self-identity, or even the atheist *'subjectivity'*[225], as post-colonialism theorist Amina Mama would refer to it, which is a deeper consideration than just appearances, or reflections, of identity.

Through the proliferation of new media and social media, it could be argued that there is no longer need for the colonised to be *represented*, but that *'agency'* is once again restored to the subject.[226]

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not make it into the canon because they contain risqué passages, involving, for example, excessive kissing of Jesus and Mary; include parables populated with dodgy characters; and, more significantly, portray strong women who defy gender typecasting."

[225] Amina Mama defines 'subjectivity', albeit within a post-structuralist paradigm, as follows.
"The terms subject and subjectivity are central to post-structuralist theory and they mark a crucial break with humanist conceptions of the individual which are still central to western philosophy and political and social organisation. 'Subjectivity' is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world." (*Beyond the Mask*, (1995:2))

[226] Maggio, J. 2007. *"Can the Subaltern Be Heard?": Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,* p.422.

One of the online sites in which atheism in South Africa, post-coloniality and Pan-Africanism finds combined expression, is that of renowned South African musician Don Laka. Of particular significance to this study and the pivotal place of social media in supporting the emergence of atheism in South Africa, is the fact that Don Laka's much publicised pronouncement of his rejection of religion had its first impact on social media in July 2016, in which he challenged his Facebook friends to a debate on Christianity and his rejection thereof. The story and the subsequent controversy which ensued were carried in conventional media thereafter.[227]

With regard to the influence of a human rights paradigm on the construction of the identities of atheists, all atheist group sites considered on Facebook were reflective of an on-going critique of the hand of religion in, either, the advocacy for the framing of public policy along the lines guided by scriptural texts, or the pleading for the accommodation of religious practices, which sit contrary to the human rights character and aspirations embodied in the South African Constitution. The human rights issues which feature prominently in debates across these various sites include, the rights of children to be protected from religious instruction which could be considered harmful to them, the rights of members of the LGBTQ community (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer) not to be victimised, and the rights of women to be treated with equality.

The fact that South African atheists are so emboldened to articulate their views online on a range of subjects which challenge the dominant narrative of religion in the country is attributable in no small measure to the fact that when it comes to the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association, the Constitution and the judiciary works. This will need to remain the cornerstone of the social media and new media infrastructure which is a pivotal information system and communication network for and amongst atheists.

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[227] Times Media Group. 2016. *Don Laka calls for a religious debate: 'Jesus is not God'.* 6th July. Available online at, http://www.timeslive.co.za/entertainment/2016/07/06/Don-Laka-calls-for-a-religious-debate-Jesus-is-not-God. [Accessed on, 17th August 2016]. In responding to Christianity, Don Laka noted,

> *"'Jesus is not God," he started by saying. "I find no logic in a god who hates sin and doesn't get rid of it, instead he sends his son to come and die a brutal death so we can all be cleansed? He is powerful why doesn't he just make wipe sin out?"'*

The further real effect of social media through electronic online channels is that it allows for the previously invisibilised[228] to be heard and seen, thereby becoming a part of the on-going disruption of the residual colonial effect. For the South African atheist, however, grappling with this post-colonial reality is multifaceted, which often means having to respond simultaneously to continuing contestations on race, religion and class. Amina Mama's description of the development of separate responses to racism and pseudo-science through the ages is useful in describing what may still be a set of *simultaneous* realities in South Africa in the continuing struggle against racism on the one hand and the hegemony of religion on the other.

> *"If, in earlier epochs, the racial superiority of white people was seen as a God ordained truth, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the doctrine of white supremacy being substantiated and legitimised by the emerging sciences: by biology, phrenology, evolutionism and, later, by anthropology, all of which reified racist sentiments which accorded with imperialist interests, giving them the incontestable status of scientific truth"*
>
> Amina Mama (1995:94)

With regard to the strengthening community of atheists in the country and notwithstanding the fact that new social media friendships germinate on grounds electronic, many develop into very meaningful long-term friendships which extend to personal meetings and family interactions, thereby contributing towards the establishment of vital support structures for atheists, beyond just the electronic medium. This support structure on social media and new media platforms also comes in the form of the wealth of resource material and information related to the atheist worldview, covering a wide range of issues including, textual criticism of religious Scriptures, assessments of the commodification of religion, debates on religion and the rights of women and children, academic publications on studies related to atheism, to mention a few. Furthermore, atheist group sites engender debate on

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[228] The term appears to have been popularised by author and social activist, Arundhati Roy, as demonstrated in her interview with Laura Flanders (at 15.10 minutes) on the plight of the Dalits in India. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-yMiBGBOe0. [Accessed 12th August 2016].

these and many other issues, resulting in the exchange of opinion as well as factual information and research findings.

The cause to safeguard children from what is considered by atheists to be the harmful effects of religious doctrines, is a perennial concern reflected on Facebook sites of atheist groupings. Facebook sites such as 'Parenthood Religion-Free South Africa'[229] and 'Secular Parenting in KwaZulu Natal' are aimed at raising children with a 'secular' outlook on life, as opposed to one subjected to the religious indoctrination of a specific religious belief system.

The importance of this subject and the real dilemmas which parents with an atheist or non-religious worldview face every day in raising children was also brought to light in indispensable detail in Dale McGowan's (ed.) (2007) publication, *Parenting Beyond Belief: On raising ethical, caring children without religion,* which sought to address the very concerns raised by parents, such as those posted on the South African Facebook sites identified. It has to be recognised also that these secular parenting and parenting without religion sites signify a reaching out for some form of organisation and co-ordination to address the very practical and lived realities of parents with a non-religious worldview. In McGowan (2007:20), Dan Barker[230] captures, perhaps, what lies at the heart of the secular or non-religious parenting which is also being given voice to via the South African sites identified.

> "I think most freethinking parents have similar feelings. We don't want to force our kids into any mold [sic], unless reason and kindness are molds [sic]—well, no, reason and kindness are open-ended, not constricting. What we truly want is the satisfaction of seeing our children become mature, self-reliant human beings, at any age, thinking for themselves, free and happy. Parents who want anything else are obsessed with control and not free and happy themselves."

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[229] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1208095819202136/
[230] Dan Barker is the co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (USA) and has himself authored a set of books related to non-religious parenting, *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children, Maybe Yes, maybe No: A Guide for Young Freethinkers,* and *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong: A Guide for Young Skeptics*.

8.6. Online Digital Media, Satire, Comedy and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa

The growing genre of comedy on religion is being given new reach beyond the theatre and television, through online digital media platforms; South Africa being no different from the rest of the world in this regard.

Comedy has long been the medium through which people have tried to make sense of the full spectrum of human experience, from before birth, to after death and everything in-between. Deeper than its popularised effects of jesting, parody, humour, mirth and laughter, comedy has always been rooted in the struggle to pry open life's most complex questions which often remains masked and unasked. It is in this regard that comedy has been present in the shaping of each epistemological epoch. From early Greco-Roman history to the present, comedy has often taken root better in the tragedy and sorrow of life than in its joys, and from this early history, the gods were often on the receiving end of parody and humour, as noted by Paul Shulten (2011:66).

Following research of the genre through the works of authors such as Keith Thomas (1971), *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Hans Geybels and Walter Van Herck, (eds.) (2011), *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus (1997), *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins*, and John Morreall (1999), *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*, examining this field of comedy on religion was considered necessary as it clearly represented a contestation to religious normativity, an issue which finds congruence with this study, particularly in view of the advent and proliferation of new media platforms, such as YouTube. One of the questions which threads through this discussion, therefore, is whether there may be a path to atheism by way of comedy on religion, or does comedy on religion in some way support an atheist's self-identity as an atheist. Towards this end, the work of four South African comedians and satirists will be considered, Casper de Vries, Thenjiwe Moseley, John Vlismas and Jonathan Shapiro, also known as Zapiro.

Before considering any causal relation between the phenomenon of non-religion and comedy on religion it will be necessary to highlight that comedy on religion is, in large measure, a critique of religion and its constituent elements, and as a genre which constantly

aims to appraise the validity of an idea or set of ideas, comedy on religion will always stand alongside, and in tension with issues such as the right to free expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and the idea of blasphemy. It is acknowledged, however, that the parody of religion, often taking the form of ridicule, is itself a critique of the proposition(s) of religion. Any resulting offence taken by the religious to such ridicule does raise the question as to whether anyone has the right to be offensive to the religious belief of others. To the emerging and burgeoning fraternity of comedians on religion this question is answered strongly in the affirmative, with many such comedians, as discussed further below, also self-pronouncing their atheism in the process.

Understanding the real place of comedy on religion within the context of this study cannot be had outside of an appreciation of comedy as a serious response to the *structural ambiguities within society,* with the subject matter of comedy often revealing society's underlying tensions and anxieties. John Morreall (1999:4), drawing on the work of Reinhold Niebuhr discusses these structural ambiguities as the ***basic incongruities*** which constitute the *disparity* between the way life ought to be and the way it is. In many respects it is also the polarity between religion and non-religion which represents the ambiguities and incongruences which characterise these disparate paths to achieving what life ought to be, thereby becoming some of the best subject matter for the craft of comedy.

Amidst these incongruences, paradoxes and ambiguities is the quest for the philosophical commodity, *the truth*. South African comedian John Vlismas, at an October 2015 presentation of one of the Creative Morning sessions in Johannesburg, expounds on the place of comedy as the instrument to probe and shock society into thinking through their reality in pursuit of the truth. This bears relevance for present day South Africa which is, to a large extent, a society still in transition from a draconian pre-1994 era, in which legislated social control went hand-in-hand with mind-control, to a present day relatively more open and free society in which freedom of conscience and freedom of expression are central principles within the Constitution.

There is no escaping the fact, however, that freedom of conscience and freedom of expression, by virtue of their very nature, exist within a marketplace of ideas, and in the

context of this study, a marketplace of ideas on the spectrum of religion, on the one hand, to non-religion, on the other, and every permutation in-between.

"We have the benefit of certain things. We have like, a freedom. We have certain rights to be heard, certain rights to gather. People have rights to education, but are we doing enough with it? That's what I want to talk about. Because, my thing is about becoming better. All of us should become better; less judgemental, more understanding, more tolerant. Like, these are all important things to me and shock is not something you just do by getting up and doing, 'Hey fuck Jesus'. There's no point to that, but if it will shake you out of complacency, that's quite important. We mustn't think that a new conservatism replacing an old conservatism is good enough. I don't think it is. Because for me comedy is a vehicle, it's a way in which we provoke people into thinking. I know a lot of people say, 'but comedy is when you make people laugh'. Sure, but great comedy, for me, is when you make people laugh and think."

John Vlismas (2015, 9.20 minutes)

In line with the views expressed by John Vlismas, deeper insights are offered by Taels (2011:24-25) on the crucial role played by humour in highlighting what is viewed as the disjuncture between reality and the non-reality of the subject or a particular phenomenon or belief. According to Teal (2011:24), *"every joke is nothing but a polite insult"* and noting Cicero (1st Century BCE), *"laughter arises 'from the castigation of deformity and disgrace in a not disgraceful way'"*. When it comes to the subject of religion, however, humour directed at the religious worldview or religious proposition are often considered far from being *polite insults* and are often considered as being deeply disgraceful, offensive and disrespectful to religion and the religious. Furthermore, the range of responses from the religious to parody and comedy directed at religion varies between the different religious groupings, with the aim being the repression of parody and comedy on religion and the cessation of any ridiculing of a religious deity and/or religious doctrine.

This latter point was brought into sharp focus through the work of another prominent South African self-pronounced atheist, cartoonist and satirist on religion[231], Jonathan Shapiro, or Zapiro as he is more popularly known, and in particular his depiction of the Hindu deity Lord Ganesha in the cartoon published by the Sunday Times (South Africa) on 27th October 2013. A complaint was brought against Zapiro by the Hindu community and related interest groups with the South African Press Council and the Press Ombudsman, in a matter referred to as *Rajan Zed and Others Vs. Sunday Times*. The core of the complaint was that the cartoon was considered to be disrespectful and that it ridiculed and trivialised Indian culture and religion, with some complainants regarding it as blasphemy. The complainants sought a ruling in their favour and a formal apology from Zapiro. As part of his submissions on the matter Zapiro explained that,

> *"cartoonists do two kinds of cartoons involving religion – some comment on a particular religious doctrine or the way some of its adherents behave (especially with regards to universal human rights); others (like the one in dispute) use religious iconography as a metaphor to comment on something else."*[232]

Notwithstanding the importance of the Press Council Ombudsman's finding in favour of Zapiro in this case[233], it is the legal and constitutional principles embraced by The Sunday Times Legal Editor, Susan Smuts in her arguments submitted to the Press Council which is of greatest significance for this study, as recorded in the ruling by The Press Ombudsman. Susan Smuts notes,

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[231] Andy Mason(2010:207) noted,
  > *"As a campaigning atheist, Zapiro makes no secret of his opinion that the world's biggest religions are the source of many of the world's biggest problems, and that religious fundamentalism needs to be strongly challenged, whether it is Christian, Jewish or Muslim."*
[232] Case: Rajan Zed and Others Vs. Sunday Times. Press Council: Ruling by The Press Ombudsman dated 5th November 2013. Available online at, http://www.presscouncil.org.za/Ruling/View/rajan-zed-and-others-vs-sunday-times-2536. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].
[233] For further public responses on the case, reference could be made to IOL New Report: '*Hindu cartoon complaint dismissed*', dated 5th November 2013. Available online at, http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/hindu-cartoon-complaint-dismissed-1602580. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].

*"The complainants are aggrieved at the cartoon. They are entitled to feel
aggrieved at it, and we acknowledge their feelings. We do, however, submit
that we should not be compelled to elevate religious factors over other
considerations when making our decisions;*

*Democracies can only thrive when there is robust debate and freedom of
expression. We submit that this implies that citizens will of necessity
frequently encounter views and opinions and statements that they find
offensive. These views should be expressed and debated, not banned or
punished, as it is only through discussion that they can be tested and our
knowledge and understanding deepened."*

The ruling also notes Smuts' reference to Section 16 of the Bill of Rights in her concluding
remarks.

*"The cartoon most certainly did not deride or denigrate Hindus or Hinduism,
or attempt to stir up hatred, and none of the complainants have suggested
that it did so. We submit that the cartoon is comfortably protected by the Bill
of Rights……while it was possible that Zapiro could have found another way to
illustrate his point, his decision was valid and protected by freedom of
expression – there was no reason why he should be compelled to exclude
Ganesha, or any other deity for that matter, from his options."*[234]

Zapiro's frequent deployment of religious symbolism may appear antithetical to the thrust
of his push-back against the forces of religion, however, he does apply the metaphors drawn
from religion to great effect in framing his social criticism and his depiction of prominent
public figures such as Nelson Mandela. Andy Mason (2010:206) in his monumental literary
analysis of the history of cartooning and satire in South Africa, *'What's So Funny: Under the*

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[234] For a case brought in November 2013, this submission of Susan Smuts is remarkably similar to Zapiro's own
responses to the controversy raised by his depiction of the prophet Muhammad in May 2010. Zapiro noted,
> *"The issue is depicting the prophet... it's that simple….That's for adherents of Islam! Why
> should non-believers be censored?"*
Reference: News24 report dated 28th May 2010. *Zapiro responds to cartoon furore*. Available online at,
http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Zapiro-responds-to-cartoon-furore-20100528. [Accessed on 23rg
October 2016].

Skin of South African Cartooning', notes that Zapiro spoke of his first encounter with Nelson Mandela as an 'epiphany', as the closest he had come to a religious experience. This, according to Mason, partly explains Zapiro's repeated use of readily recognisable biblical symbolism to depict Nelson Mandela as a saviour-figure. For Zapiro, religious symbolism and the satirising of religion did not stop at Christianity or Hinduism, but fairly embraced Islam and Judaism as well, stirring up just as much controversy as did the 'Ganesha cartoon'. Andrew Rice (2010)

The outcome of the *Rajan Zed and Others Vs. Sunday Times* case and the arguments put forward by Susan Smuts, together with the valuable and continuing body of work of Zapiro as one of South Africa's most important social critics and advocates for Article 16 of the Bill of Rights (RSA), mirrors the legal challenges experienced by American satirists Lenny Bruce (1964) and George Carlin (1978) in relation to their First Amendment[235] Rights. The concluding remarks of legal scholar (First Amendment Centre US) Justin Abodalo (2014), in his article expounding the significance of the Lenny Bruce and George Carlin cases, entitled, *'50 years ago, Lenny Bruce's arrest no joking matter'*, serves as a fitting conclusion of the Zapiro case, as recounted.

> *"Having strong protection for our freedom of speech should generate appreciation of the First Amendment. Lenny Bruce, George Carlin and the nation's Founders gave us the freedom of speech and the freedom of laughter. In freely exploring our sense of humor, we find our sense of humanity."*
>
> Justin Abodalo (2014)

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[235] Article [I] United States Constitution (Amendment 1 - Freedom of expression and religion)
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."
Extract from the United States Constitution, available online at, http://constitutionus.com/. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].
Article [16] South African Constitution (Freedom of Expression)
"16. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes— (a) freedom of the press and other media; (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research. (2) The right in subsection (1) does not extend to— Chapter 2: Bill of Rights 8 (a) propaganda for war; (b) incitement of imminent violence; or (c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm."
Extract from the Constitution of South Africa, available online at,
http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/saconstitution-web-eng-02.pdf. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].

The very nature of atheism, as a counterpoint to theism, reflects one of the most contested areas in which comedy had no small hand in trying to deconstruct, interpret and make meaning of some of the most perplexing questions affecting human existence throughout history; questions and issues which are traced through by Hans Geybels and Van Walter Herck (ed.) (2011), in their book, *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*. Villy Tsakona (2011:252) summarised the juxtaposition between religion and humour as follows, *"Humour is based on incongruity, namely on the incompatibility between two co-occurring meanings or ideas."* Within this comic and philosophical maelstrom, issues of freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, intellectual freedom, the right to blaspheme become real and consequential variables, which impacts upon the world of the religious, the non-religious and to apply the Colin Campbell (1971) term, 'the irreligious'. Furthermore, this impact is also felt in the shaping of public policy.[236] These are issues which comedy gives a voice to, often testing these social principles at their extremities. Over the years and through the evolving nature of media, these voices of comedy have included theatre, cartoons (digital and conventional print), motion pictures, stand-up comedy and music. The challenge which self-pronounced South African atheists who are practitioners in comedy and satire are actually grappling with is perhaps best summarised by Talal Asad (2009:33) in his discussion of the proposition of *"blasphemy as a civilizational identity"*.

> *"The willful destruction of signs—that is to say, the assault on images and words that are invested with the power to determine what counts as truth—has a long history of transcending the distinction between the religious and the secular. Like iconoclasm and blasphemy, secular critique also seeks to create spaces for new truth, and, like them, it does so by destroying spaces that were occupied by other signs."*

In the South African context, besides the shift away from the *'signage'* of the relatively conservative history to which John Vlismas refers, the more *liberalised* set of values

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[236] For further commentary on these principles in relation to the Zapiro 'Ganesha Cartoon', reference could also be made to the article by South African atheist and social critic, Tauriq Moosa (2013), in his article, *'Religious people are so sensitive'*. Published on M24, 31 October 2013. Available online at, http://www.w24.co.za/Wellness/Mind/Tauriq-Moosa-comments-on-Zapiros-Hindu-cartoon-20131031. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].

embodied within the constitution, together with the *liberalising* mechanics of new media and social media, strengthens the role and expression of comedy as the medium through which the incongruity, incompatibility and ambiguity between the world of religion and non-religion can be constructively mediated. Therefore, more than online media simply being content providers for the debates between religion and atheism, which is a very significant development in itself, since the advent of Facebook and YouTube 12 years ago these media formats supported direct public participation in comedy and satire on religion thereby raising the general awareness towards the non-theistic position and opened up the debate and the critique of religion in ways previously considered not possible, as noted by Silva and Garcia (2012:90).

> *"humour is an instrument for deconstructing society, often looking upon areas that are otherwise sealed off. Some topics, it seems, we can only discuss while laughing."*

The field of comedy on religion in South Africa could, however, be considered to be in its infancy relative to the international stage, with a handful of artists being prepared to publicly declare their atheism and extend their craft to the satirising of religion. The case of South African comedian and satirist Thenjiwe Moseley is an accurate example of the latter, perhaps more than being forthrightly atheist. Furthermore, and of significance given the context of new media platforms within which the emergence of atheism in South Africa is being discussed, Thenjiwe Moseley's career in comedy was launched solely via the Facebook platform, with the successful marketing of sold out stand-up comedy shows being achieved through social media alone.[237] In the case of all three of the stand-up comedians discussed, Moseley, Vlismas and de Vries, the satirising of religion features strongly in their performances.

Whilst it may not fall within the scope of this study to establish a causal relationship in any great detail between the emerging genre of comedy on religion in South Africa and its effects on the prevalence of atheism in the country, it will be sufficient to recognise that the

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[237] *Thenjiwe Moseley on Network SABC* (2016). Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dJw6HnzwYI. [Accessed on, 19th October 2016]. [1.20 minutes]

conservatism of old, which suppressed the expression of atheism, has now met with some degree of contestation, if not resistance, in the form of comedy.

With John Vlismas the lines between being a social critic on the one hand and comedian on the other, is less distinct, as demonstrated throughout his work, in particular his October 2015 presentation called, *'Shock',* in which his self-pronouncement as an atheist to the audience is explicit [11.02 minutes]. Of further significance than his declaration on atheism itself, it is his unreserved and public chastisement of the Catholic Church [10.51 minutes] for its handling of the rampant rape of children across the church, which signifies the opening up of religion and religious institutions for public scrutiny, areas previously considered 'sealed off' from open critique.

Casper de Vries, in an interview (2013) with Renaldo Gouws, breaks the seal on the conservatism which characterised much of pre-1994 South Africa, relative to the present, and openly discusses the post-Apartheid social transition which now makes it possible for him to comfortably self-pronounce as an atheist and as a gay South African.

> *"I just want to explain, in my time, when I was young, we had these fucking dinosaur Afrikaner people telling us what to think and what not to do and that being a moffie* [Male homosexual] *is wrong and that everything that is basically wrong now was right then, and then when the new South Arica happened it filled me with such pleasure to see those fuckers disappear into the fucking creaks of the ship and the sewage because they were wrong. And now there's a religious fervour that's sort of turning because of the fact that there are problems in South Africa and those religious people use that as a racist thing to say, yah, but it's Blacks and they are stupid and that's why God is now punishing us, and I'm very concerned about that because I see those fucking rats who I thought was gone, peeping up from the wreckage again; 'Ah, yah! Let's use God now for political gain', and that I don't like."*

<div align="right">Casper de Vries [2013, 6.29 minutes]</div>

The poetic licence and expletives which Casper de Vries applies in articulating his opinions does nothing to detract from the import of the changed post-1994 social circumstances, which are clearly more accommodating of opinions and identities, such as that of atheists, which were previously ostracised.

If comedy on religion is a contestation to the hegemony and controlling tendencies of religion, then Thenjiwe Moseley represents a strong, yet unique, contribution to this discourse. The parody of religion features prominently in her work[238], often touching on issues which are current and topical, but sensitive and controversial at the same time. In the first film excerpt referenced, Moseley places the unregulated proliferation of religious institutions and practices aimed at monetising and profiteering off religion through the performance of supposed supernatural acts, or miracles, under the spotlight. In the second and third[239] Moseley sources referenced, subjects previously considered sacrosanct such as prayer and ancestor veneration are parodied. Of relevance to this study is whether the work of Thenjiwe Moseley, alongside the other South African comedians considered, contributes to the breaking of the taboo and proscriptions which surrounds religion, thereby opening religion, religious practices and practitioners up for scrutiny, critique and lampooning.[240]

Part of the answer to the preceding question could be gleaned from the growth of comedy on religion internationally and its place within the social phenomenon of non-religion globally. Whilst the subject of humour within atheism might not readily appear as being a topic requiring formal academic research, the growth of the genre, at least as represented through online new media platforms, may indicate otherwise. Of no minor significance, also, is the fact that the historic library of humour on religion is available online, as a valuable resource to, both, the non-religious and the religious. The role of humour within the

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[238] Thenjiwe Moseley. 2015. *Pastor Thenjiwe. African Prophet with powerful miracle water*. 10 April. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4Q6pQ0v5xY. [Accessed on 17th October 2016].
Thenjiwe Moseley. 2015. *Praying*. 26th August. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wjkzek6K7A. [Accessed on 17th October 2016].
[239] Thenjiwe Moseley. 2016. *Asking Ancestors for help #Thenjiwe*. 19th April. Available online at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkwk4VRFVXs. [Accessed on 21st October 2016].
[240] For an alternate perspective on the point consideration could be given to the controversy stirred by the online anti-atheist comments made by prominent South African comedian Trevor Noah, as discussed in the article, *Hey, Trevor Noah – We Don't All Need a God*. The Humanist. 2nd April 2015. Available online at, http://thehumanist.com/arts_entertainment/culture/hey-trevor-noah-we-dont-all-need-a-god. [Accessed on, 22nd October 2016].

American atheist movement formed the basis of a study by Katja M. Guenther, Natasha Radojcic and Kerry Mulligan (2015), entitled, *Humor, Collective Identity, and Framing in the New Atheist Movement*, which was aimed at establishing,

> *"linkages between humor and political and cultural opportunities and present an analysis of the importance of humor for collective identity and framing in the New Atheist Movement, a social movement focused on reducing the social stigma of atheism and enforcing the separation of church and state"*, and were able to demonstrate that, *"the New Atheist Movement is able to use humor effectively in the political and cultural environment. We further demonstrate that humor is central to the development and maintenance of collective identity and to the framing strategies used by the New Atheist Movement. Through a diverse range of forms, including jokes, mockery, and satire, humor is a form of resistance and also can be harnessed to support the goals of social movements."*
>
> Guenther, Radojcic and Mulligan (2015:1)

In what has now become a globalised world of comedy through the medium of the internet, popular personalities who were/are self-pronounced atheists[241], such as, George Carlin (Late), Richard Pryor (Late), Ricky Gervais, Bill Maher, Sarah Silverman, Stewart Lee, Peter Cook (Late), Eddie Griffin, Bill Burr, Dave Allen (Late), Jim Jefferies, Bill Hicks (Late), and Rowan Atkinson, will continue to bring their influence to bear on atheists present and future. It will be fair to conclude therefore, that as to the question raised above on the effects of comedy, South African and international, in contesting the hegemony of religion, the response will have to be in the affirmative. Consequently, and in the context of the emergence of atheism in South Africa, the genre of comedy on religion signifies that push-back to the sway of religion and its historical privileging within South African society, thereby contributing in some measure towards the levelling of the field for atheism to take its place in the marketplace of ideas. In the case of atheist comedians who are now

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[241] For further insights on the significance of humour within atheism reference could be made to, Pillay (2013:161). Available online at,
http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/10728/Pillay_Patrick_Brian_Segaren_2013.pdf?sequence=1. [Accessed 22nd October 2016].

deceased, death would have lost its sting given the *'eternal life'* granted to their work by the internet, and new media and social media in particular. If the total body of work of self-pronounced atheists within the field of comedy, past and present, is an enterprise in the emancipation of the human spirit then the point will rest well in the words of Webb Keane (2005:61)[242],

> *"According to this moral narrative, modernity is a story of human liberation from a host of false beliefs and fetishisms that undermined freedom in the past. It is a narrative in which freedom as such is pitted against certain forms of religion, such that their elimination (and, in some versions, replacement with the religion of sincere beliefs but, in others, with no religion at all) is a condition for the fuller realization of human agency."*

8.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to demonstrate the association between the advances in electronic communications technology and its effects on the emergence of atheism in South Africa and from the analysis undertaken it can be reasonably deduced that there is a positive correlation between these variables. More than just the important function of being a relatively new set of platforms to disseminate resource material to support the advance of atheism, new media and social media have also served to establish and strength new relationship networks amongst atheists in South Africa.

Although the internet and various media and communications platforms represent a significant user-driven shift in how information is dispensed and sourced, and in how people communicate with one another, the future of the internet may be less free of interference from interest groups. As demonstrated in this chapter, the internet has been for atheists a space where free expression of their views and free association with others of like mind could be experienced unhindered. The internet cannot be allowed to go the route that conventional media went through during the 1980s and 1990s, with ownership and content

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[242] In, Sullivan, W.F., Hurd, S.H., Mahmood, S. and Dachin, P. (eds.). 2015. *Politics of Religious Freedom*.

management becoming concentrated in the hands of a few corporate interests. The loss or manipulation of freedom of information flows or freedom of expression on the internet will impact negatively on the advance of atheism globally and in South Africa.

Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner (2007:34) offer the following cautionary in this regard,

"It is therefore the responsibility of the active citizen to creatively engage these technologies, as well as to critically analyse the diverse developments of the cyber-culture. This requires dialectical thinking that discriminates between the benefits and the costs, the upsides and downsides, of emergent technologies and devising ways that they can be used to promote positive values like education, democracy, enlightenment, and ecology. Active citizens thus face novel challenges, and the future of democracy depends in part on whether emergent technologies will be used for domination or democratization."

All said and done, atheism is now online.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The task of exploring the field of atheism in South Africa was a venture in scholarship into unchartered academic terrain, which served as both a constant challenge as well as being a source of inspiration throughout this study. From its earliest conception through to its research design and the implementation of the project plan, the responsibilities which came with formulating a study which could very well formally inaugurate the subjects of atheism and non-religion into the South African academy were constructively embraced as being a part of a unique opportunity and contribution towards new knowledge creation within the Humanities in the country.

Although the developing groundswell internationally on the subject of atheism has been of immeasurable benefit in proving the need for a more country specific response to the subject of atheism, these developments were approached with respect and caution in this study, so as not to detract from the research objective of investigating what may be truly South African representations and understandings of the phenomenon. The initial trepidation which greets any scholarly enterprise of this nature was positively counterbalanced by the study becoming progressively self-affirming and self-validating with the passage of time and effort, in the sense that each component of the project proved its purpose and place within the whole research strategy. Notwithstanding the best efforts invested in a set of research methodologies crafted to bring the research plan to fruition there could be no illusions as to a set of assured and successful research outcomes, particularly in the light of the negative stigma which is still attached to atheism and atheists within a country-context of religious normativity. The decision to develop a research design with a multi-faceted set of empirical components was vindicated by the fact that the project as a whole yielded a sufficiently diverse yet cogent set of responses which adequately answered the key research question and addressed the supporting research objectives which undergirded this study.

The hybrid post-colonialism and human rights theoretical framework adopted in this study suggested that interpretations of current representations of atheism would be well served by a historical caste of mind. It was considered imperative that this project proceeds from a

clear understanding of the historical trajectory of the atheist worldview which goes back millennia, thus necessitating a chapter focused on understanding the development of atheism over various epochs such as, Greek antiquity, The Enlightenment period in Europe, and of late, the New Atheist Movement, which has truly become transnational. This study held firm to the position that there could be no meaningful assimilation of the constructs which constitute atheism, or post-coloniality, or the human rights paradigm, outside of a compelling set of historical discoveries of these ideas and paradigms. The historical antecedents to current understandings of atheism sought to foreground and locate the rest of this study within existing scholarship with a view to discerning, through formal research, the measure and might of a South African voice on atheism. The fact that this fast emerging field of vibrant and exciting scholarship on the international scene has not made landing in South Africa as yet only serve to amplify the urgency for this project. The decision to dialogue backwards into history on the subject was also vindicated by the fact that history tends to repeat itself, often unbound by time and national lines. Chapter 3, therefore, on *The Historical Antecedents to Current Understandings of Atheism* together with the well-resourced literature review adequately addressed the first research objective of this study.

The post-colonial theoretical framework found its critical edge in this study in its contestations to Christian normativity and the challenge it presents to the empire of religion. To attempt to apply the post-colonial, or the human rights paradigm, to understand the place of atheism within the South African context, without due account of the role of religion within the project of colonialism, becomes futile. This study sought to bring post-colonial theorists into dialogue with South African atheists and in so doing, recover marginalised critiques of the colonial project and the place of religion therein. The post-colonial and human rights theoretical frameworks were crucial to establishing the historical forces which shaped or influenced the emergence of atheism in South Africa (Research Objective 2). The fact that South Africa pre-1994 was a tightly controlled 'Christocracy' supported by a regimented system of Christian National Education is now uncontroversial. The impact of the institutionalisation of religion into all facets of public and private life impacted directly on the suppression of alternate worldviews such as atheism. This finding found repeated confirmation during the literary resources examined as well as during the interviews with atheists.

The set of interviews undertaken with self-pronounced South African atheists broke new ground within the Humanities in the country. The interviews, jointly and severally, affirmed the view that this research was timeous within an open democracy, to test and contest the still dominant normative assumptions of religiosity. The interviews succeeded, without exception, in discovering participant's reasons and/or journeys towards the point of self-pronouncing as atheists. The recounting of early childhood and adolescent histories on the part of the majority of participants also confirmed the systemic isolation which characterised Apartheid South Africa.

One of the significant findings which emerged from the interviews was that participants had actually moved beyond 'religion-bashing' and did not actively seek the eradication of religion from society, although it was the majority view that religion should have no direct hand in the formulation of public policy and neither should the State be any party to the establishment of religion in public life. It could be stated as a firm finding of this study that participants were unanimous in their embracing of a secular social dispensation and a worldview of secularism. This issue raised a common and strong objection shared amongst participants to religious instruction in schools and to learners being subjected to religious proselytising, particularly as advanced by Christian religious groups.

A further finding which emerged from the interviews is that participants were not accepting of any direct positive correlation between a position of atheism and an absence of any moral code or framework. Although participants did not report on incidents which could be categorised as them being ostracised or discriminated against for their self-identification as atheists they were not unmindful of the negative labelling and social marginalisation which results from not fitting in with the dominant narrative that to be moral one has to be religious.

The research plan designed for this study did encounter limitations which will need to be considered in any future academic enterprise on the subject of atheism. As this was a qualitative study which applied the non-probability snowball sampling technique to establish the sample of participants to be interviewed, there could be no claim to statistical representation across any segment of the broader South African population. The lack of any

reliable and respected measure of levels of prevalence of atheism, non-religion as well as religiosity is a significant gap in this field of research, which this study could clearly not address, but which information would have helped understand how the phenomenon presents itself within the context of demographically stratified data. As this study progressed it became abundantly evident that the resurgence in Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist philosophy in the country represented new ground for researching the emergence of atheism and non-religion. Although this subject was broached briefly in chapters 4 (Discussions on Steve Biko), 6 (Atheism and the South African Communist Party) and 8 (Online digital media and Pan-Africanist thought), it is acknowledged that this study may not have sufficiently penetrated these potential areas of research. A continuation of serious academic inquiry into these new research opportunities could represent one of South Africa's most important future contributions to the field of the sociology of non-religion and atheism globally.

To more comprehensively address areas pertinent to this inquiry which could not have been developed to a significant degree during the interviews, but which required attention in their own right, the chapters on *The Law, Religion and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa* (7) and *Public Culture, Social Media and the Emergence of Atheism in South Africa* (8) were considered requisite to understanding the legal and media frameworks within which the purpose and meaning of atheism will continue to be defined in South Africa. In the absence of a sufficiently developed history of case law which specifically addresses the subject of atheism, the scholarly engagement with the evolution of South African law on the subject of freedom of religion adequately answered, in the affirmative, the question of the protection offered to atheists relating to freedom of conscience under the current set of constitutional provisions. Chapter seven also found that the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience were not absolute rights, but rights which were tempered by and held in tension with the totality of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and particularly the provisions which determine the limitations of such rights.

Chapters seven and eight together with Chapter six on the analysis of the interview data adequately addressed research objectives four and five which sought to determine how atheism has been understood and articulated, with particular reference to the legal and

civic attitudes to, and conceptions of, non-religion in South Africa. It is acknowledged that although all three of these chapters sufficiently explored the subject in relation to the research objects, they scratched the proverbial surface of a phenomenon deserving of further and more focused research.

Having considered the ways in which this study has met the objectives with which it set out, it remains to be said that history will ultimately vindicate or refute the strongest conviction held throughout this project that South Africa can have a place at the table of serious scholarship on atheism and non-religion, globally. To be a part of and to represent in some measure the African and South African research component within networks such as the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (UK), will count as a humble yet very significant victory for this study.

That South Africa is able to take its place and make a meaningful and academically credible contribution towards formal scholarly research in the field of non-religion and atheism is now, hopefully, settled.

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Annexures

Proposed Interview Schedule.
Format: Semi-Structured Interview

Participant's Name: _____
Age: ____Years   Residential Location: _____   Gender: _____
Education: _____   Occupation: _____
Interviewer: Patrick B.S. Pillay

Date of Interview: _____   Place: _____   Time: _____

Interview Schedule
1. Have you ever been aligned with any religious groups, institutions?
2. Do you still have any relationship with any religious institution?
3. Briefly describe your historical experiences with religion, within Family or Institution; within society.
4. What do you think are the general South African understandings of Atheism?
5. What do you understand to be the dominant issues on Atheism internationally?
6. What do you understand to be the concern of Atheists in South Africa?
7. What would you estimate to be the level of prevalence of Religion in South African Society; between 0%-10% or 11%-25% or 26% -50% or 51%-70% or 71%-90% or 91%-100%?
8. What would you estimate to be the level of prevalence of Atheism in South African Society; between 0%-10% or 11%-25% or 26% -50% or 51%-70% or 71%-90% or 91%-100%?
9. Please describe your journey to the point of non-belief.
10. What in your view is the association between religion, morality and non-belief?
11. If you have had any experience in which you were ostracised for pronouncing your Atheism, please describe this.
12. What do you consider to be the place of religion in the shaping of public life and public policy?
13. Do you feel that there are sufficient legal provisions in South Africa to support your position of non-belief?

Letter of Invitation

Mr John Doe
C/O University of KwaZulu Natal.
School of Music
Durban

7 May 2016

Dear Mr Doe.

University of KwaZulu Natal – Student Number 871873990.
Invitation to Participate in PhD. Research Project and Information Sheet.

This letter serves to introduce myself and, respectfully, seeks your participation in a Research Project being undertaken by myself as a doctoral student within the University of KwaZulu Natal – College of Humanities: School of Religion Philosophy and Classics [SRPC]. As a participant in this research project you will be requested to participate in an interview that will be conducted at your convenience. The interview will be guided by a set of key research question and objectives, as detailed below. This letter offers an outline of the nature and objectives of the Research Project and the interview, together with the university protocols which will apply to your participation in this project. The *Consent to Participation* at the end of this letter will be completed at the interview. I wish to draw your attention to the Clause below relating to your right not to participate in this Research Programme and will respectfully accept your decision in this regard, if it is such. The following Information Sheet offers a brief background to the Research Project.

Research Project Title   The Emergence of Atheism in Post-Colonial South Africa.

Central Research Question   What are the understandings of, and engagements with atheism and non-belief in post-colonial South Africa and what does this reveal about the legal and civil representations of non-belief?

Research Objectives.

1. To understand the historical antecedents to current understandings of the phenomenon of atheism, internationally and in South Africa.

2. To ascertain what are the historical forces which have shaped or influenced the emergence of atheism in South Africa.

3. To critically interrogate how atheism has been understood and articulated in South Africa, with particular reference to the legal and civic attitudes to non-belief.

4. To understand the prevalent conceptions about non-belief in Postcolonial South Africa.

UKZN Ethical Clearance Protocol Reference Number HSS/1656/015D
A copy of the Ethical Clearance Certification is enclosed for your reference.

Research Project Supervisor Dr Federico Settler
                                 University of KwaZulu Natal - Pietermaritzburg
                                 Faculty of Humanities
                                 School of Religion Philosophy and Classics [SRPC]
                                 New Arts Block - Golf Road Campus
                                 Pietermaritzburg
                                 Telephone: 0765719006 / 033-2606078
                                 Email: settler@ukzn.ac.za
Project Location   University of KwaZulu Natal - Pietermaritzburg
                                 School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
Alternate Contact Person   Mrs Catherine Murugan.
                                 Administrator – School of Religion Philosophy and Classics
                                 Telephone: 033-2605560
                                 Email: Muruganc@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Research Ethics Dept. Administrator Human and Social Sciences Ethics Committee
Ms Phumelele Ximba
Telephone: 033-2605000

In terms of the research data drawn from the interviews, all university protocols will be followed.

Participation is Voluntary	Participation in this Research Project, through the planned interviews, is entirely voluntary; with the right being reserved to you not to participate in the project, or to withdraw participation at any stage.
Confidentiality & Anonymity	All participants' details will remain anonymous.
Research Instruments	Single Interview lasting approximately 40 minutes will be conducted at a venue, date and time convenient to yourself. Audio Recording devices will be used to record the interviews.
Disposal of Data	The primary data will be stored at the Project Supervisor's office at University of KwaZulu Natal – Pietermaritzburg. Data on which any research publication is based will be retained in the School for at least five years after publication. Should the Project Supervisor leave the employ of the University, the data will be retained by the University.

This request is also supported by a personal declaration by myself on the factors motivating my study, as well as a letter of support from my Academic Supervisor, Dr Federico Settler.

You are welcome to contact me directly should you require any further information on the research project or the proposed interview.

I look forward to receiving your responses to this request.

Thank you.

Mr Patrick B.S. Pillay

Contact Detail:		
	Address	No.1 Laurence Crescent, Hayfields, Pietermaritzburg, KZN
	Telephone	033-3966927 / 0794966292
	Email	patrick@referencepoint.co.za

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT
[To be completed at the interview]

I………………………………………………………………(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature and purpose of the research project, and I consent to participating as an interviewee in the research project conducted by Patrick B.S. Pillay, entitled, **"The Emergence of Atheism in South Africa"**. I am aware that the researcher will use audio recording to gather data during the interview, and all the materials used in the study will be treated with confidentiality. As a participant I am aware that I have the right to withdraw at any time from the research project if I feel any discomfort or for whatever reason, without any negative or undesirable consequences to myself.

ADDITIONAL CONSENT.

I hereby provide consent to:
(Please circle your decision.)

My name(s) being used during the interview.	Yes	No
My name(s) being used throughout this research project and in any subsequent publication which may arise from this research project.	Yes	No
Audio-record my interview.	Yes	No

Name of Participant   _____

Signature of Participant   _____Signed at _____ Date _____

Name of Researcher   Patrick Brian Segaren Pillay [Student Number 871873990]

Signature of Researcher   _____ Signed at _____ Date _____

A Personal Declaration   **March 2016**

This study marks a new point in a long personal journey from belief, within the Christian faith, to a firm position of non-belief as an atheist. This journey, particularly in recent years, has been characterised by a strong desire to formalise my interest in the subject of religion and atheism; not just for the study of these subjects in and of themself, but in the context of their impact on the shaping of social analysis, public policy and systems and structures of new knowledge formation.

I always maintained that there is merit in seriously considering the subject areas of non-belief, atheism, and anti-theism as worldviews worthy of research within tertiary academic institutions. To some extent this aspect was developed during my Masters Programme; which engaged with humanist and atheist critiques of the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption, which is central to the Judeo-Christian belief system. The title of my Masters Project [Awarded 2014] was,
> *"A Post-Structural Theological Critique of the Perspectives of Christopher Hitchens*
> *on Vicarious Redemption."*

The life and works, and public engagements of the late Christopher Hitchens [1949-2011], through his strong critique of religion and the Judeo-Christian belief system in particular, formed the focus of my study. The study, however, opened the doors to the broader spectrum of critiques of religion. Whilst much of the research was shaped by the international discourse on the subject; there was the ever-present nagging need to find application and relevance for this important debate within the South African context, thus paving the way for the current study on the emergence of atheism within South Africa.

Given the South African academic terrain on religious studies and philosophy, on the one hand, and the structural formations between church and academy, on the other, it is my view that the subject of non-belief and atheism has been under-researched and to a large degree, a serious academic account of the phenomenon called atheism is non-existent in the country. The view generally held of Africa and South Africa as being a 'religious' continent and country, may serve to conceal a rich history and independent worldview of non-belief and of the non-religious.

Even the most pedestrian gaze at the burgeoning discourse on the question of the place of religion in the public sphere will reveal that religion is a critical social variable and one which continues to influence the construction of public policy. The extent to which South Africa's relatively progressive post-1994 Constitution and Bill of Rights will serve to diminish or advance the influence of the religious on the formation of public policy will remain a key focus throughout this study. I do share the concern, though, that the constitutional provisions, as accommodating as they may appear, may not necessarily serve to guarantee the reversal of the privileging of religion which has been a part of South African society for centuries. In this latter regard, the 'pushback' must be strengthened through critical and on-going formal reflection and research and it is my hope that this study will make some contribution towards this cause.

It remains my firm commitment that my personal history through this important subject and my viewpoints will not undermine or prejudice my engagement with this study.

I look forward to an exciting and academically rigorous study.

Patrick B.S. Pillay

University of KwaZulu Natal – Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

12 November 2015

Mr Patrick Brian Segaren Pillay (871873990)
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Pillay,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1656/015D
Project title: The emergence of Atheism in post-Colonial South Africa

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 05 November 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Supervisor: Dr Federico Settler
Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis
School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

Letter of Support From Academic Supervisor – Dr Federico Settler.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Letter of Introduction

Dear Research Participant,   18 March 2016

I herewith wish to introduce to you, Mr Patrick Pillay, who is a doctoral student under my supervision in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Mr Pillay is conducting an approved research towards his degree: The Emergence of Atheism in South Africa.

I write this letter to assure you that this research is located in the academic sub-discipline Religion and Social Transformation (sociological in nature) and that it no way seeks to advocate nor vilify atheism or non-belief. The primary purpose of this study is to establish the prevalence of non-belief in South Africa, and experiences atheists in post-apartheid South Africa.

Please be assured that the utmost care will be taken with recorded interview data, insofar as we will ensure that all names, positions and place reference will be anonymised.

Please assist Mr Patrick Pillay through making yourself available for a 40 minute interview.

If you have any queries contact me directly on 033-2606078/ 0765719006
(alt. email: settler@ukzn.ac.za)

Kind regards,

Dr Federico Settler
Lecturer, Sociology of Religion
Principal Investigator, Religion and Social Transformation

1910 - 2010
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Founding Campuses: Edgewood   Howard College   Medical School   Pietermaritzburg   Westville

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