

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

*“The media is telling lies, it’s all lies!”*

Post-apartheid racism and discourses  
of place-identity in a small town

Suntosh R. Pillay

2010

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Social Sciences (Clinical Psychology), in the School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

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Recommended (APA) citation:

Pillay, S.R. (2010). *“The media is telling lies, it’s all lies!” Post-apartheid racism and discourses of place-identity in a small town*. Unpublished Masters thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

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I, Suntosh R. Pillay, declare that

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## *Acknowledgements*

This short-dissertation symbolises many things, so many people need to be thanked:

As an academic project and write-up of exciting research, I thank Professor Kevin Durrheim for his engaging, flexible and encouraging supervision style; and for providing a casual, relaxed, but intellectually invigorating space for me to locate my voice and writing style.

To the Rural Transformation Project team, thank you for the platform and momentum.

To Thabo Sekhesa, who accompanied me on the data collection journey and allowed so many people to share their stories in their mother tongue. Our conversations, debates, and small town adventures have added richly to this analysis.

To the people of Swartruggens and Skierlik, for giving freely their time and their words.

This thesis also symbolises the completion of my Masters degree, and the start of my career as a psychologist.

Firstly, to my family, for a supportive atmosphere conducive to studying and growing

Secondly, to my fellow classmates, friends, and interns, who shared in the years.

Thirdly, to my lecturers, who made my studies in Pietermaritzburg an awesome period of personal and professional development.

For emotional balance I thank my closest allies, Vee, Letitia and Karishma; the amazing Community of Mandela-Rhodes Scholars; and the staff and mentors at the Mandela-Rhodes Foundation, who have invested in me as a person by broadening my horizons in inexplicable ways. Thank you.

Lastly, to my Creator; and to those who I have met along the way in serendipitous moments.

## **Abstract**

When a young white man from the small town of Swartruggens chose the informal settlement of Skierlik to go on a killing spree, this was labelled racist by the media. Only black people lived in Skierlik, and small towns in the North West province had a reputation for being racially divided. This study examined the impact of this event on residents' identities, specifically because it was widely publicised and discrediting to the town. Problematized places potentially threaten residents' sense of self. The concept of place-identity was used here from a discursive psychological framework, arguing that self-in-relation-to-place is socially constructed in the conversational space of human dialogue. Thus, this analysis exposed the spoken discourses that maintain and reproduce racialised constructions of place-identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Forty two semi-structured interviews were conducted in either English, Afrikaans or Setswana, during a two-week stay in the town. Despite the literature showing that place-identity threat in problematized places result in residents trying to preserve a positive place-identity, the data in this study shows a different trend. The central argument is that discourses of victimhood are constructed by both black and white residents, but for divergent purposes. White residents argue against negative media versions of Swartruggens, while black residents amplify disadvantage and promote media versions. Indian residents, largely omitted from media reports, maintain a positive place-identity by constructing an ambivalent third space of participant-observer in the town, geographically and socially separate in a black/white divide. The analysis is situated in relevant broader pre- and post-apartheid ideologies.

# Contents

<b>Declaration</b> .....	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	3
<b>Abstract</b> .....	4
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	14
Introduction.....	14
Part A: Making space for (a discursive) place	
2.1 Place-identity: Cognitive roots.....	17
2.2 Emotions and place: dominant (cognitive) guises.....	18
2.3 Research trends (erotic and religious cognitive guises).....	21
2.4 Removing the cognitive guise, seeing the political face.....	22
2.5 Rethinking place-identity: A discursive approach.....	24
Part B: The roots and rise of racialised place-identities	
2.6 Apartheid’s spatial impact.....	26
2.7 Post-apartheid: A renewed spirit of storytelling.....	28
2.8 Place-identity: caught between racism and reconciliation.....	31
2.9 The white identity crisis.....	34
2.10 Small towns: Discursive dumping ground of the national imagination.....	36
Conclusion.....	39
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	40
3.1 Introduction.....	40
3.2 Theoretical perspective.....	40
3.3 Academic context.....	42
3.4 Logistics.....	43
3.5 Sampling and participants.....	44
3.6 Data collection.....	46

3.7 Language and translation.....	48
3.8 Validity, reliability and generalisability.....	49
3.9 Data analysis.....	51
3.10 Ethical issues.....	53
3.11 On reflexivity.....	54
3.12 Conclusion.....	56
<b>Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion.....</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	57
4.2 Defending against stigma: ‘... if you want me to say negative things, I haven’t got anything to say’.....	60
4.3 Amplifying black victimhood: ‘this is a place of struggle’.....	67
4.4 Indian place-identity: An ambivalent third space.....	72
4.5 Discussion: The ideological roots of victimhood.....	80
4.6 Issues for further analysis.....	83
4.7 Limitations of this study.....	84
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>93</b>
Appendix 1: Statistical snapshot of Swartruggens.....	93
Appendix 2: Maps.....	95
Appendix 3: Swartruggens in the media.....	96
Appendix 4: Pictures of Swartruggens and Skierlik.....	97
Appendix 5: Transcription codes.....	101
Appendix 6: Initial interview schedule.....	102
Appendix 7: Informed consent.....	103
Appendix 8: Breakdown of sample.....	104

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **People and their places: A starting point**

There are times when a fisherman is caught, quite literally, between the rock he stands upon and the deep blue sea, catch of the day in hand, but with a sudden prick of conscience. Throw it back, or take the prize home? Ronnie Govender (1996, p.11) reminisces:

The hunter in me had won for the moment, but the guilt stayed and I never touched a rod again. Yet I enjoy a good braai, fresh mutton curry, fresh masala-fried fish. Two sides that could belong only to a man born and bred in Cato Manor?

He goes on:

But what Cato Manor did teach me, or rather what my mother, a Cato Manor woman born and bred, taught me, was that... if I listened carefully to that quiet voice inside and really struggled to heed its advice I wouldn't be trapped by the kind of contradiction that makes people build monuments to culture, civilisation and consumerism, and yet wantonly destroy places like Cato Manor (p.11)

There is an intimate connection between the stories a person will tell about themselves, and stories of the places they have come from. Govender illustrates this quite eloquently. These links have implications for the study of identity construction, for the study of social geographies, and especially for psychology, to name a handful of disciplines that have now taken an interest. In academia, environmental studies have generally stayed respectfully away from the domain of social psychology. Indeed, on the surface they have little in common. But the new brand of environmental psychology that has been blossoming since about the 1960s, albeit slowly, is putting 'places' in significant academic spaces.

For example, Govender's (1996) musings above, contained in a collection of short stories about life in the Durban suburb of Cato Manor, humorously captures through semi-fictional narratives the 'coming alive' of a place because of its people, and the simultaneous 'coming alive' of people because of this place. To understand people one must understand their significant places and vice versa. The existence of each is owed to the other. Casey (2001) calls it a "constitutive coingredience" (in Brown, 2008, p.28).

Exactly how does one's location impact on one's identity? What are the possibilities, then, for identity when one lives in a place that has been shaped and defined by an oppressive system, such as apartheid? What strategies do people use to maintain a satisfying sense of self, if the places they come from have been publicly problematised or stigmatised? These are questions that will be examined in the chapters to come. But while Govender's (1996) recollections expose the nostalgia and romanticism that is often found in both academic and popular books on the topic of 'place-identity', the topic of this dissertation is somewhat more sombre.

## **2008 – A bad year for race relations**

South Africa is at a point in its young democracy where much of the 'rainbow nation' enthusiasm that was the trademark of Nelson Mandela's presidency is diminishing (Valji, 2004). Some evidence of this is seen by opening almost any newspaper in South Africa, as writers lament the barriers to an effective post-apartheid transformation of society. For example, Mangcu (2008) comments that "the foundations of our democracy have never been shakier... and our public culture never more hateful" (p.183).

In 2008 racism had quite prominently reared its head in the public sphere and caused a nation to start having a conversation with itself – a dialogue about a topic that defines the history of this country for at least the last 300 years, since the first colonialists arrived. The post-apartheid conversation on race-relations, occurring in the media, in living rooms, and around the braai, was trying to make sense of a country that was apparently failing to embrace the rhetoric of the rainbow nation. At least one major incident had triggered this, but a few more were to follow.

The small town of Swartruggens, in the North West province, was chosen as the site of research, partly because of its catapult into national media due to apparent racial tensions between the black and white residents. This followed a shooting spree in January by a young white man in a black informal settlement called Skierlik. The media portrayed this as a racist attack. Social commentators inferred that this was typical of untransformed, unreconciled, and racist places that still thrive in South Africa. Furthermore, 'life in small towns' got put on the media agenda, with the implicit assumption that small towns were racist enclaves of mainly white Afrikaans-speaking people who were resistant to post-1994 change. Johan Nel, the shooter, was made the exemplar of (violent) white racism. The mayor of Swartruggens (a black female) publicly claimed this was a racist attack, with a backlash from the town's white community calling her comments irresponsible and equally racist (*The Times*, January 21, 2008).

The media frenzy was fuelled by other incidents of racism in the following months, most notably in February the Black Journalists Forum refusing their white colleagues entry to an information session addressed by then presidential candidate Jacob Zuma; later that month a video of white students from the University of the Free State humiliating black cleaners by making them drink a brew that had been urinated in; and in April, writer David Bullard being fired from the *Sunday Times* for suggesting in his column that if it were not for colonialism black people would never be enjoying the perks of modernity. All this occurred against a further backdrop of xenophobic attacks, exploding in the media in May when a black immigrant was burnt to death by an angry mob in the township of Alexandra. Debates raged online, in newspapers, on live forums, and magazines (e.g. *Weekend Witness*, March 8, 2008, p.8; SAPA, March 11, 2008; *Mail & Guardian*, November 21-27, 2008, p.3; *Sunday Times*, November 23, 2008, p.19). By June, a debate on racism even began in parliament, triggered more so by the inclusion of Chinese South Africans as "black" in terms of equity acts (SAPA, June 2008).

### **A research question emerges**

The Skierlik incident was chosen because it contains an additional layer of complexity: this was not only about racism; it was about *small town* racism. Many questions floated in

the public sphere at the time: Is race even an issue here? Is Swartruggens a racially divided town? Was Nel just a very disturbed man who happened to shoot black people? Has the media blown this event out of proportion? Are small towns really so untransformed? Does this reflect broader South African society? It would be impossible to adequately answer any of these questions. However, what seemed to be missing from media versions was a deep and contextually relevant exploration of how residents of the town were now making sense of *themselves* in relation to their home town, which had now been publicly problematised as a terrible place to live. The media, by its very nature and purposes, ‘reports’ news as if it was factual, objective, and true. Nuances of everyday interaction and life are missed in the pursuit of headline-grabbing stories. A reflexive analysis of how life in this town has come to be the way it is was absent. To move beyond the media’s (expected) focus on generalizable truths about this place, a study on discourse, “language in action” (Blommaert, 2006, p.2), might help. An analysis of discourse “aims to account for how particular conceptions of the world become fixed and pass as truth (Durrheim, 1997, p.181). A focus emerged: problematised places and their threatening impact on place-identity. This problematic resulted in an exploration of how residents of Swartruggens/Skierlik reproduce discourses of life in this town in the context of racialised attacks, through the careful social management of their identities in relation to what the media has said about them. Current research was showing that despite the threat to identity caused by living in a problematised place, residents actively constructed these places positively (Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009). Would Swartruggens follow suit?

### **Social constructions of place and identity**

The analytic lens used to make sense of the discourses of small town life is the concept of place-identity, broadly used to signify the inextricable link between one’s sense of self and one’s location. As Dixon and Durrheim (2000) claim, questions of ‘Who are we?’ are intimately related to questions of ‘Where are we?’ Subjectivity and identity formation and management are part and parcel of one’s physical location. For example, Teddy, Nikora and Guerin (2008) argue that the relationship of New Zealand’s Māori group to their land and the wider environment are regarded as an “essential prerequisite to psychological wellbeing”, with their valuing of land akin to “the nourishment of spirit,

history and identity” (p.1). The literature review (Chapter two) shows that the application of place-identity to small towns in post-apartheid South Africa is still a very limited body of knowledge. One exception is Dixon and Durrheim (2004), who investigated the impact of desegregation on holiday-makers at the beach, in a small coastal town in South Africa. They looked at the implication for place-identity, using a discursive psychological approach, arguing against the mainstream cognitivist tradition of place-identity studies. This study follows in the discursive psychological tradition of place-identity.

Place-identity will be explored as “a collective construction, produced and modified through human dialogue that allows people to make sense of their locatedness”, acting also as a resource for “rhetorical and ideological action” (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, p.40). The conceptualisation of the term goes against mainstream notions of place-identity as a cognitive-affective construct that is mentally and individualistically located. It will be argued that stories of ‘life in Swartruggens’<sup>1</sup> are shared collective constructions that are imbued with the person/place knot, which reveals the mutual nature of identity and location. Citizens share certain discourses of life and this study will attempt to expose these common discourses and the function they play in creating and sustaining a sense of ‘we’ and ‘our town’, which all function to manage identity.

The additional emphasis on small towns is important, both as a key element in this study’s research question, and in addressing the general gap in academia that fails to address the unique intricacies of spatial influence on identity.

### **Small towns: Moving from the structural to the social**

There has been very little research focusing exclusively on post-apartheid discourses amongst residents of small towns. A number of databases were searched, such as PsychInfo and Sabinet, and the results were sparse. Research and government initiatives tend to focus on economic, socio-political, or on quota-based racial transformation in small towns.

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid the constant use of Swartruggens/Skierlik, unless the distinction is specifically made, further references to Swartruggens include Skierlik as well. Although some residents emphasize their geographical separateness, they are linked for all practical purposes, and are thus linked here when referring to them.

For example, Atkinson (2003) looked at the transformation of local municipalities in small towns in the Free State and Northern Province; Lemon (2005) inspected inter-racial property transfer in Margate; and Mograbi and Rogerson (2007) examined pro-poor economic advantages of dive tourism in Sodwana Bay. Large towns and cities in South Africa are the backbone of the national economy – over 80% of the national Gross Domestic Product is generated in urban areas (South African Cities Network, 2004). Post-1994 it was, understandably, in the national economic and political interest to focus on these larger metropolitan areas. However, there are also about 500 small towns that consist of fewer than 50 000 people, which equates to one tenth of the national population (Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), 1996). Despite this, small towns were classified as neither urban nor rural by the government, making it easier for their needs to be ignored (CDE, 1996). The tide seemed to change when in 2004 a “Small Towns Regeneration Initiative” was announced to address the economic decline of small towns in KwaZulu-Natal, and to stimulate job creation (Mabuyakhulu, 2004). And in 2006, the first ever “Small Towns Conference” was held in the Eastern Cape, with the goal of sustainable economic transformation (Mayoral address, 2007). However, this structural focus – while politically astute and publicly defensible – bypassed the constructed experience of people’s daily social life, which is pivotal in identity formation. Only the macro level – transformation of the political economy in small towns – has been of empirical interest; the micro level – narratives and social constructions – has been largely ignored.

This study is situated in the academic gap that has ignored the study of the discursive management of social life.

### **Points of departure**

The research question for this study, then, was to explore how residents of Swartruggens discursively manage their identity in the context of widely reported racism in their town. This problematic was investigated by analysing what participants were ‘doing’ with their ‘talk’ as they (re)produced shared discourses of place-identity constructions.

Given the above, this short-dissertation hopes to take the study of post-apartheid life three steps further by:

- 1) Using a discursive social psychological approach to explore residents' discourses through the theoretical lens of place-identity, arguing that a sense of self is inextricably entangled with one's location, and that this process is achieved through the interactional work of everyday talk, which co-constructs both self and location.
- 2) Focusing on a small town, instead of large metropolitan areas, and exploring specific discourses of life in a small South African town, especially in the context of post-apartheid racism and violence.
- 3) Not focusing exclusively on economic or structural changes; rather, exploring social constructions of identity as a discursively constructed lived reality, revealed through various stories of 'life in this town' that were offered in qualitative research interviews.

The following chapter will begin to tease apart the theoretical issues that are relevant to the above research question, by specifically drawing attention to various strands of inquiry – race, place, identity, and post-apartheid life – which will ultimately be interwoven in the context of this study's problematic: place-identity construction in a post-apartheid small town that has been publicly problematised and shamed as racist by the media.

## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

*“Liberation, Freedom, Justice, Peace, Truth, Reconciliation, Transformation, Memory.  
These words have marked our struggles in the past.  
They continue to define our struggles in the present”*  
– Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

When Johan Nel stole his father’s gun and drove his van to the small informal settlement of Skierlik to start killing unarmed residents, the media depicted this as an example of the strained black/white relations that South Africa has failed to harmonise. Columnists had a field day. Post-apartheid race-relations were being vilified on the altar of public opinion.

However, analyses of Skierlik, and the natural public blame game that would follow, focused on one additional aspect other than violence and race-relations: location. It was *small town* racism that began dominating public dialogue around the event. Location seemed to matter, making this event different from acts of racism that have occurred in bigger cities. A specific sort of geography was being called into question. The problematisation of small towns was creeping back into public discourse, reinforcing earlier academic findings by, for example, the Centre for Development and Enterprise (1996) that small towns are often seen as mini-citadels of apartheid.

The academic debate that journalists were unknowingly alluding to is captured by the question asked by Keith and Pile (1993a, p.1) as they introduce their book on the politics of identity: "Can concrete geographical and historical circumstances – whether the British general elections or civil disturbances on the streets of Los Angeles – be understood as expressions of abstract social relations?" This question is an important one if we wish to understand the shootings in Skierlik as an example of such expression, i.e. racism.

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<sup>2</sup> In Govinden (2008, p.8)

There is an emerging salience of 'place' and 'space'<sup>3</sup> in the project to engage dialogue among the social, political, psychological, and geographical sciences. This has led to a keen interest in the “constitutive spatiality of 'being'” (Ibid, p.16) and the implications thereof. As Keith and Pile (1993a, p.1) further note:

“In order to articulate an understanding of the multiplicity and flexibility of relations of domination, a whole range of spatial metaphors are commonly being used: position, location, situation, mapping; geometrics of domination, centre-margin, open-closed, inside-outside, global-local; liminal space, third space, not-space, impossible space; the city”.

The spatial lexicon has blossomed, and necessarily so, as 'localised' identities in a 'global' village become important areas of investigation in a post-modern and post-structuralist age. Space should not be overlooked as the mere background to action, the stuff upon which life happens, because "space is not an innocent backdrop to position, it is itself filled with politics and ideology" (Ibid, p.4). The *small town* may be a case in point.

Yet only twenty years ago, Saunders (1989, p.231) forcefully argued that “social theory has been quite right to treat space as a backdrop against which social action takes place... Space does not ‘enter into’ what we do in any meaningful sense, because mere space can have no causal properties and is quite incapable of entering into anything. It is passive; it is context... there is nothing for theory to say about space!” (in Gotham, 2007, p.723). This dictum that space is the inert milieu to action essentially characterises the dominant form of theorising in the social sciences. But an academic and analytic move taken a few decades ago now affords spatial factors its own significance. Spaceless formulations are being replaced with new theories of how power, agency, identity, ideology, hegemony, and other social variables are inherently spatially intertwined.

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<sup>3</sup> The space/place distinction has been made more strongly by some than others, but for our purposes Brown's (2008) clarification will do: “place is inhabited space (and space is simply empty place)”. Taleb (2005, p.5) offers this distinction: “Space refers to the surrounding environment that people inhabit. Places, however, are socially constructed or manipulated spaces that are deliberately politicized, culturally relative and historically specific to match the needs of people inhabiting those meaningful spaces”.

The implications for studying a small town like Swartruggens, problematised as an apartheid-era enclave of untransformed social relations, needs to consider the impact of spatial relations in creating its current predicament. According to the new spatialised theories of being, a change in status of a place must impact on identity. Swartruggens, virtually non-existent in the media prior to Johan Nel's inglorious claim to fame, certainly experienced a change in status, and thus a change of identity. This review charts through the academic terrain with this key problematic at its core – the management of *place-identity* in a post-apartheid small town that has been publicly stigmatised as having tense race relations (and thus, tense spatial relations).

This review starts by examining theoretical frameworks of place-identity, then situates it in a macro-systemic historical overview of apartheid's impact on place and identity, and finally applies this to the micro-systemic context of the small town of Swartruggens.

Part A introduces the key analytic device that this study uses – place-identity – a fertile meeting point that bridges together environmental studies, which is concerned with the study of spatialities, and social psychology, specifically the study of post-apartheid identity. We map place-identity's transition to a firmly sedimented field of enquiry using concepts such as place-attachment and community sentiment. However, its development has been rooted in the cognitivist tradition of research, and this review draws on arguments that call for a social constructionist reworking of place-identity, opting to use a discursively-oriented version of the concept. Part B situates place-identity in the context of post-apartheid life, drawing on the policies of spatial reconfiguration that resulted in racial identity to be so intimately tied to certain places. This section argues that place-identity is inseparable from a study of race-relations in current day South Africa. Finally, in Part C the micro-context of the small town is examined. Swartruggens and Skierlik are the spatial actors informing the key problematic of this study: how is place-identity managed in the context of a small town suddenly made famous for its post-apartheid racial violence?

## **PART A: Making space for (a discursive) place**

### **2.1 Place-identity: cognitive roots**

Relph (1976) begins one of the early texts on place-identity by asserting that to be human “is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and know *your* place” (p.1). Place-identity was eventually pushed into prominence on the intellectual map by Proshansky (1978), who began formally theorising the place-identity link. He noted (in Brown, 2008, p.20)

“The family is not simply a mother, a father, brothers and sisters; it is also a place called home. A school is not just other people called pupils, teachers and principals; it is also a building with classrooms, play areas, toilets, a principle's office, and a lunchroom. And a teenage gang is not just a social system relating its members to one another; it is also a back yard, a cellar hideout, or a corner poolroom, and perhaps all of these”.

Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff's (1983) soon developed their oft quoted definition:

“...‘place-identity’ is a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and behavior tendencies that go well beyond just emotional attachments and belonging to particular places. ...Place-identity as a cognitive sub-structure of self-identity consists of an endless variety of cognitions related to the past, present, and anticipated physical settings that define and circumscribe the day-to-day existence of the person.” (p. 62)

The “topocentric reality” of human life is now fast reaching a taken-for-granted status, despite its general neglect in academic writings prior to the 1960's (Karljalainen, 2003, p.88, in Brown, 2008, p.21). Urbanisation has played a major role in bringing forward the place-identity agenda, because the move from the rural to the urban has clearly highlighted the impact of place on people's subjectivities (Proshansky, 1978).

A review of place-identity literature encounters the use of a varied lexicon which may be researching the same phenomena, albeit from varied disciplines and with a multitude of methodologies. At certain junctures, however, there are umbrella attempts that try to put in perspective and even take forward the field of people-place relations. This section traverses the implicitly cognitive empiricism that has dominated the field, and fleshes out the various ways place-identity has been (apolitically) constructed. The result is an overly individualistic focus that ignores social and ideological origins of place-identity, and would thus benefit from discursive psychology's re-conceptualisation.

## **2.2 Emotions and place: dominant (cognitive) guises**

A theoretical starting point is place-attachment, a concept that generally revolves around the emotional bond a person has towards a place. Johnson (1998) describes attachment as “the process of turning physical space into a place endowed with either individual or collective meanings” (p.5) and Low (1992) writes that place attachment is “the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding of and relationship to the environment” (p.165). It is generally used in the context of studying people's affective responses to particular places.

In a study by Teddy *et al.* (2008), 12 members of Ngāi Te Ahi, a hapū from Tauranga, New Zealand, were interviewed to explore how they talk about their place attachment to Hairini Marae. Five key dimensions of place attachment, taken from literature, were used to structure their interviews: continuity, distinctiveness, symbolism, attachment and familiarity (Teddy *et al.*, 2008). Each of these has a distinct cognitive, apolitical flavour.

*Continuity* is about the historical and traditional links that (emotionally) tie a person to a particular place, such as being born and raised in a town. Having experienced important milestones in a particular place adds to its continuity value, serving as “container of memory” (Ibid, p.2). *Distinctiveness* refers to the attributes, qualities and descriptions of a place, usually self-defined by the people who live there. The distinctiveness of a place may help to either positively affirm residents' identities, while also highlighting its

geographical separateness from other places (Ibid, 2008). For example, people often make qualitative categorical distinctions between folks who live in small towns compared to bigger cities. *Attachment* is a reference to the “mutual caretaking bond between a person and a beloved place” (Fullilove, 1996, p. 1516), which include the emotions and behaviour that accompany the sense of belonging to a place, and being protected by it. *Symbolism* is best described by Low’s (1992) six-fold typology of symbolic linkages between people and place: genealogical linkage; linkage through loss of one’s land; economic linkage, such as owning or inheriting land; cosmological linkage; celebratory linkages, which include annual events or religious or secular pilgrimages; and narrative linkages, through the stories or naming of a particular place (in Teddy et al., 2008, p.3). The final dimension, *familiarity*, includes safety, security, and comfort. Access to resources, for instance, ensures that a personal sense of safety and continuity of living can exist.

Across all five dimensions, Teddy et al. (2008) found that in talking about Hairini, place attachment went beyond the physicality of the place; it was equally about social and cultural relationships, history, and socialization, and for groups such as the Māori this includes all social relationships past and present. Still, the construction of place-attachment remains an individual pursuit; although it considers social and cultural relationships, it is mentally formulated and exists in various cognitive categories.

In the same vein, Peacher (1996) did a phenomenological investigation of the human experience of place, using an unstructured, open-ended dialogical interview method with twenty adults. They were asked to describe places which were special to them. She interpreted the interviews to reveal five themes descriptive of one's experience of place: identity, connection, security, possibilities, and beauty/awe.

The theme of *identity* comprises the way in which a place can strengthen one's sense of self and hold poignant memories that may span across one’s life. *Connection* involves the affective tie to people or structures that one associates with a place, such as their old school or first girlfriend. *Security*, the third theme, is about the ability of a place to

provide a sense of familiarity (cf. Teddy et al., 2008), safety and even relaxation. *Possibilities* included opportunities for personal change and growth, which participants felt were provided in the place they described. *Beauty and awe* included experiences of feeling alive, something spiritual even, and general aesthetic appreciation. Peacher's (1996) results were discussed in terms of the role that one's subjective experience of a place provides in affecting one's sense of well-being, stability, and identity. While useful, these categories also rely on an implicit cognitive and overly individualistic premise which does not allow one to reflexively analyse the social, political, ideological and interactional origins of place-identity (cf. Dixon & Durrheim, 2000).

Place-attachment has remained the dominant conceptual equivalent to place-identity in the literature. However, other studies have opted to speak of 'community sentiment'. While the applications of this concept have been varied, it still lives in cognitive territory. For example, Pretty, Bramston, Patrick and Pannach (2006) operationalise community sentiment as individual perceptions. Their research into the exodus of youth from rural Australian towns argues that the focus on education and employment options represents a limited structural and economic definition of 'community' and understanding of migration practices, which omits factors related to the psychology of community. They opt to study young people's *relationship* with their community of origin, referred to as 'community sentiment', and particularly the individual feeling of belonging. They explored how young people across a broad spectrum of rural towns *feel* about their home communities. In Australia, 20 percent of people live in rural towns, which are defined in relation to their geographic proximity to public services. Pretty et al. (2006) noted: "The findings encourage communities to value and nurture that which generates a sense of belonging in its youth, as the pull of *positive community relationships* may offset some of the push of structural disadvantage" (p.238, my emphasis). When explicated, positive community relations include individual perceptions of belonging, sense of community and support. The individualised (and cognitive) construction of identity is favoured.

Other research applications of the spatial implications of self-construction have operated from the same basic premises set up by the place-attachment/community sentiment/place-

identity cognitive empiricism. These individualistic approaches continue to locate place-identity in the heads of individuals, as mental constructs, instead of social phenomena.

### **2.3 Research trends (erotic and religious cognitive guises)**

These recent trends show that place-identity, in both qualitative and quantitative studies, is being investigated in relation to other concepts which had previously been researched independently of each other. For example, Korpela and Hartig (1996) considered how Finnish university students evaluate their favourite places using terms set out in restorative environments theory, arguing that processes of emotional- and self-regulation underlie the formation of place identity, and that a person's favourite place is an exemplar of environments used in those regulation processes. Graham and Litt (1998) looked at how the gay leather scene in Sweden was influenced by the interaction of place, identity, and the erotic uses of one's body, arguing that identity and location are intertwined. In a study of sacred places, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) attempted to integrate religion, devotion, place, identity, and "religious place attachment" (p.385), arguing that the rituals involved in religious worship act as socialising agents that allow people to learn place attachment. There is also a small body of work on place-identity in children. Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies (2006) try to explore "to what extent children do manifest an awareness of belonging to a collective identity, what such identities may be, and how they relate to various kinds of identifiable geographical space" (p.4). Their analysis looks at various levels of identification children may have, and how these relate to more officially received versions of national identity, such as in the public education system.

Despite this exciting variety of research, there are inherent difficulties with these types of studies, due to their individualised approach to person-place relations. These modes of theorising have pushed place-identity into an asocial and decontextualised corner, overemphasising the emotionality of place-identity and bypassing the macro-systemic, social, political and economic context within which these identities develop and sustain themselves. Hopkins and Dixon (2006) trace this problem back to the humanistic roots of early place-identity theories, and call for a move away from this individualistic conceptualisation. As Dixon and Durrheim (2004) note: "place identity processes,

however individual they may appear, are powerfully shaped by the history of relations between groups" (p.459).

## **2.4 Removing the cognitive guise, seeing the political face**

Contemporary social theory, argued Soja (1989), has not conceptualised space well enough, resulting in its suffering from a dual illusion: space as opaque or space as transparent. The illusion of opaqueness has concretised space, as fixed and undialectical, ignoring its deeper social origins and mutual influence of ideology and power. It is a decontextualised, inert backdrop to action. The illusion of transparency removes its material reality and reduces space to an abstraction, a mental representation of what it might be. Two decades later, due to cross-fertilization across disciplines, notions of space and place are moving beyond the dual illusion.

The idea of space as merely an empty and passive receptacle waiting to be filled by social processes is discredited, as "space can now be recognised as an active constitutive component of hegemonic power" (Keith & Pile, 1993b, p.37), and even "the way in which we talk in everyday language is routinely spatially marked" (Keith & Pile, 1993a, p.16). The idea of a political psychology, then, emphasises the need to challenge hegemonic constructions of place, politics and identity. Drawing on Lefebvre (1991), Keith and Pile (1993b) argue that space is produced and reproduced and represents both the site and the result of social, political and economic struggles, and that "all spatialities are political because of the (covert) medium and (disguised) expression of asymmetrical relations of power" (p.37). Soja (1989, p.6) also contends:

“We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology”.

Harvey (1993), for example, discusses the small American town of Hamlet. With a population of around 6000 it long existed outside the national imagination in the state of North Carolina, until a chicken processing plant caught fire in 1991, killing 25 workers

and seriously injuring 56 (out of 200). The geographical isolation of Hamlet and the few alternative employment options made Imperial Foods a vital economic 'small town' asset. Employees, however, worked for minimum wage and lived below the poverty line. After the fire, the occupational and safety hazards at the plant that were exposed by the few journalists who bothered to cover the event led to virtually no political reaction or media hype. The periphery that small and rural towns find themselves in – geographically and politically – makes them far more vulnerable to exploitation than their city and urban counterparts (Harvey, 1993). The hegemony of capitalistic exploitation amongst a population in a desperate *place* remained firmly entrenched and unchallenged because of its disguised expression, due in part to an uncritical ignorance by the government and media of the spatialities that facilitated such oppression.

Political context is also seen in Johnson's (1998) study of outdoor leisure. She looked at racial variation in place-attachment, testing the hypothesis that African-Americans had less interest in wildland recreation and was less concerned with environmental issues in general, than white Americans. In trying to explain these racial differences in environmental participation, Johnson (1998, p.6) looked at socio-historical and cultural factors such as slavery, sharecropping, and lynching, which she argues affects African-Americans' "collective memory" of the natural environment. As narratives of these places get carried through successive generations, "to forget these places of oppression would be to disgrace the memory of those who suffered and endured such hardship" (Ibid, p.7). The capacity of such places to evoke emotions such as fear, anger and even disgust, imbues these places with social meanings based on past events of oppression, which are in turn kept alive by specific historically-rooted discourses. Lower degrees of place-attachment to unstructured natural environments, then, may explain why African-Americans are less likely to camp, hike, or backpack (Johnson, 1998). Like the Holocaust in Germany or apartheid in South Africa, the history of slavery and black oppression in America had affected the way certain ethnic groups experience certain places.

Similarly, using the Kangnung Dano festival in Korea, Jeong and Santos (2004) argue that such regional festivals offer opportunities for the contestation of local place-

identities, which are neither cohesively shared by a community, nor apolitical constructs. Kangnung Dano is seen as reflecting “simplistic and dualistic classifications of festivals into sacred and secular, public and private, and social conflicts and cohesion through place identification” (p.640). They argue that regional identity is a dynamic construction due to routinely contested meanings of place, which often have political undertones. These kinds of studies have opened up the way for an exploration of place-identity that is not blind to socio-political and ideological factors.

## **2.5 Rethinking place-identity: A discursive approach**

A point has been reached where the evolution of place-identity as a concept has taken interesting turns. While the political dimensions have been woven into some studies, the overall location of place-identity remains mentally situated, carrying with it all the inherent inconsistencies of the cognitive tradition (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). Teddy, Nikora and Guerin (2008) capture quite succinctly the wrangled mess and bias that this particular field of study finds itself in:

“When we look to the related academic literature on the associations between people and place, stability and wellbeing have been inconsistently explored depending on the discipline and the methodology (geography, psychology, anthropology, sociology, architecture). People-place relations have been subsumed under a plethora of abstract academic classifications: rootedness (Hummon, 1992), topophilia (Tuan, 1974), sense of place (Hay, 1998; Relph, 1978), psychology of place (Canter, 1977; Fullilove, 1996), place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992), and place identity (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Korpela, 1989; Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983). Most of these literatures have also been concerned with attachment to place in western societies and ‘cultures’, usually involving neighbourhoods or regions within western cities, and westerners’ sense of identity within such regions.”

Despite a plethora of studies, this field is rooted in a cognitive-affective paradigm of research, seen clearly in enduring terms such as place-attachment and community sentiment, and the types of empirical studies they have spawned. This partly stems from Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff’s (1983) seminal definition of place-identity as a “complex cognitive structure” (p.62).

While their definition initiated an increasing body of literature on place-identity, it is wholly inadequate for a theory that accommodates political, cultural, social, and historical influences. This critique, offered by Dixon and Durrheim (2000), resulted in a re-conceptualisation of place-identity, with the authors arguing for a social constructionist reworking of the concept. Thus, in contrast to Proshansky et al.'s (1983, p.59) idea of a mentally located self, with cognitions representing the “memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings”, a discursive critique of place-identity focuses on how everyday discourses are used in the construction of such identities, “including the justification of certain kinds of person-in-place relations (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, p.28).

Through everyday conversations about one's self, others, and environment, Dixon & Durrheim (2000) argue that place-identity is discursively developed. Through interaction and talk, language creates one's social reality and located subjectivities. Drawing on the work of Edwards and Potter (1992) in discursive psychology and Billig (1987) in rhetoric, this approach to place-identity stresses its social *origins* and the conversational practices of dialogue and interaction which give rise to these located subjectivities. Constructions of ‘people who live in a small town’ would thus be embodied in the very practices and everyday talk that life in a small town would entail, and these co-constructions of shared discourses will no doubt be ideologically, rhetorically, and politically saturated with meaning.

This study takes as its first premise the assertions that the last few pages have led to: that place-identity is social in origin and reproduction, available for inspection through people's situated conversational practices.

These discursive battles of identity management will be made clearer as we move from place-identity theory to a context-specific fleshing out of the embedded nature of place-identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa. This is the historical macro-context of this study. The ‘small town’ will then be used as the physical and social micro-context to

highlight our problematic: what kind of discursive complexities are involved in managing one's identity when that identity is linked to a problematised place?

## **PART B: The roots and rise of racialised place-identities**

### **2.6 Apartheid's spatial impact**

Soweto, Sharpeville, District Six, Skierlik. Each place points to a specific racialised event. The racially patterned geography of events is of course no accident in South Africa, because the national struggle for equal rights arose from *places* that were unequally treated – non-white homelands. As Desai (2001) notes of Chatsworth, one of the allocated Indian areas in Durban, it is both a 'place' and a 'struggle'; the place and its people personify the 'struggle' (against racial discrimination).

Under apartheid, your race determined your spatial fate. The racialisation of landscape is evident in a book on segregated cities in Southern Africa, written by geographers, whose choice of twelve places include all the major cities in South Africa such as Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Durban, and Kimberly, in addition to Namibia's Windhoek and Zimbabwe's Harare (Lemon, 1991). The forced construction of racialised spaces is described against a backdrop of impending transformation, with the release of Nelson Mandela and the publication of the book relatively coinciding. Wills (1991), for example, notes that the beginnings of Pietermaritzburg's "transformation to a post-Apartheid city" would become evident only with fundamental "*spatial* and social change" (p.90, my emphasis). In order to forcibly maintain power, colonial forces took "control over spatial relations through segregation and urban containment", resulting in South Africa's forced creation of apartheid cities, such that "[n]o other country, certainly, has embarked on so thorough a reorganization of its urban space for the purposes of segregation" (Lemon, 1991, p.2).

Race relations in the Transvaal, where the North West province now exists, have been historically strained as far back as the 1890s where, for example, Indians were victims of

commercial suppression that saw them restricted to separate 'bazaars' in Transvaal towns (Ibid, p.3). The Orange Free State, however, was worse off in terms of inter-racial contact, with Indians excluded altogether from 1891 to 1985; only the Cape had a degree of integration and free movement, largely between whites and coloureds (Ibid, p.3). The imposition of distinct and deprecating racial identities based upon pre-ordained spatial movement and fixed purposes of place was further entrenched by the Transvaal Local Government's Stallard Commission of 1922, whose aim was to restrict the growing number of urban Africans. Lemon (1991, p.4) quotes the Stallard dictum that:

the native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the White man's creation, when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister (Transvaal, 1922, par. 42).

The philosophy of this recommendation had far-reaching implications for the future of South Africa and the genesis of the radical racial and political violence in years to come, especially due to the imposition of racialised policies of space.

The Group Areas Act of 1950, following the legal implementation of apartheid in 1948, was in retrospect undoubtedly the key point in which space and the politics of place-identity took on critical significance. The dislocation and destruction of whole communities had a devastating emotional impact on those who were uprooted from familiar and ancestral places to foreign spaces that had to forcibly become 'home'. Fullilove (1996), writing on the adverse psychiatric implications of being displaced, argues that an intimate knowledge of one's place – familiarity – is vital for survival because it ensures comfort and security. Peacher (1996) also found that the loss of a special place was described by participants as emotionally devastating. The impact on place-identities would mean a frantic endeavour to reconstruct notions of self in relation to a new (foreign) 'home'.

Virtually all towns and cities in South Africa, almost 20 years since the demise of formal segregation, remain a "cultural landscape contoured by apartheid" (Govinden, 2008, p.10). The evident and dramatic link between location and identity was seen clearly

through the effects of the Group Areas Act, where one's physical location was explicitly linked to one's (racial) identity and consequent life experience and opportunities. As Lemon (1991, p.8) put it:

Group areas exemplify the fundamental tenet of apartheid ideology that incompatibility between ethnic groups is such that contact between them leads to friction, and harmonious relations can be secured only by minimizing points of contact... For the majority, then, race zoning has kept people from knowing or understanding one another.

Drawing on Es'kia Mphahlele's phrase *tyranny of place*, Govinden (2008, p.26) astutely asks: "... how might we think of place as fate...?" Race determined one's spatial destiny, which in turn determined one's identity. However, once apartheid ended, while the legal control of place-race relations was formally abolished, the long-standing effects on place-identity would not so easily change.

## **2.7 Post-apartheid: A renewed spirit of story telling**

The social construction of a post-1994 place-identity was never going to be an easy task; it was (and continues to be) a mammoth discursive project that in many ways is not totally free of the paradigm of urban division that haunts our national spaces. These ghosts of a troubled spatial past affect black people in a particular way, given the oppressed places and identities that they are emerging from. Govinden (2008, p.14) makes the point that "the 'lived city' in memory layered on the 'lived city' of the present makes for a complex web in time/space dimensions". Part of this complexity is no doubt a direct legacy of the apartheid era mass transformation of the physical landscape of South Africa, described already. Space and place became key targets of racial and social reconfiguration. Post-apartheid, black place-identities of the past could no longer fit comfortably with the place-identities required for the present. This begs the question: How are place-identities of black people being (re)constructed to adapt to post-apartheid life?

One way of reconstructing past-place identities to fit with present place-identities relies on an autobiographical move to begin telling those stories of self and place that were

suppressed under apartheid. Govinden (2008) argues this point, noting that South Africa is living through a time of memory, (re)constructing past images “of places and spaces, birthed by the logic of apartheid, but also signifying resistance to apartheid” (p.9). She argues that histories of people and their families are inseparable from place, and place in South Africa often signifies certain events – Soweto, Sharpeville, District Six, and Sophiatown are prime examples. Place thus evokes and anchors memories and, argues Govinden, our national memories are inevitably of colonialism and apartheid. Excavating the past, therefore, is meeting at a crossroads, where memories of self and memories of place (and the events of those places) intersect and reveal their mutuality. That these ‘memories’ are really stories being told through everyday discourse, adds further reason to situate place-identity in a discursive psychological framework, because the use of language is the key vehicle of identity reconstruction and historical liberation.

This is illustrated in Brown's (2008) research, which provides a detailed analysis of “everyday racialised practices in order to contribute towards the understanding of the practices through which we construct black and white subjectivities” (p.8) by exposing the sedimented conversational and embodied routines of people in the city of Durban. Such an analysis draws on Wetherell and Potter's (1992) notion that the enduring aspects of our subjectivities arise out of the discursive practices of the time, and that our identity is constructed out of these narratives which we have available to us in everyday dialogue. She argues that place becomes a material site for the (re)production and structuring of social identity, of which racialised discourses are often central.

Exploring the places depicted in certain South African novels, Govinden's (2008) literary analysis of the Indian and Chinese diaspora reveals key themes that are relevant to a discourse on place-identity politics. Reflecting on Zuleikha Mayat's written experiences of 'Indian life' in a generally white conservative town, Govinden (2008, p.12) notes how "despite the dominant images of Potchefstroom as a conservative Afrikaner town, the people of Potchefstroom experienced a rich interaction and interweaving of histories, cultures and traditions". These sorts of transgressive discourses allow the construction of a new history of people-place relations, which may facilitate post-apartheid adaptation.

If indeed South Africa is living through a time of memory and storytelling, Brown (2008, p.32) further notes that "generally, memory work is read in place-identity writing as active: we construct place through our memories, through talk about places of the past and present and future". Till (2005) draws on Benjamin's (1970) work and notes that "memory is the self-reflexive act of contextualising and continuously digging for the past through place. It is a process of continually re-making and re-remembering the past in the present rather than merely discovering historical 'facts'" (p.11, in Brown, 2008, p.32).

South Africa, too, used similar techniques of collectively constructing the national identity in order to dispel overt racism and racist rhetoric in the 'new' South Africa. Two reasons for this are because an enhanced appreciation for a particular place, as in post-1994 South Africa, is immediately linked to nation building and tourism. Tourism is an industry that exists because of its ability to usually positively brand places. The "rainbow nation" brand (myth/construction) was the key discourse that encouraged travel into and within South Africa. For example, Govinden (2008) notes that in developing a literary heritage of the city of Durban, competing discourses are attempting to construct the past in different ways, market them as such, and hence subscribe to a particular genre of tourism, such as mainstream or alternative. The former depoliticizes place, constructs it as multicultural and celebrates cultural diversity, while the latter would ensure tourists see the townships, apartheid museums, and social injustices that continue to exist beyond the 'rainbow nation'. But while the 'rainbow nation' might have boosted tourism, it was also helping serve political goals of creating a proud new nationalism. This was no easy task, given over 300 years of colonialism and about 50 years of racially segregated living. The point here is that these competing discourses of post-1994 life reveal the exact dilemma that people are facing as they attempt to reconstruct place-identity to suit the new democratic climate of non-racism and 'rainbow nation' rhetoric. The spirit of story telling, then, that South Africans are engaged in in order to make sense of a troubled past, is not without a dilemma: a fork in the road of storytelling that makes them choose between discourses of racism that are long entrenched in everyday dialogue, or discourses of reconciliation that are foreign, but necessary to maintain the rainbow nation ideal.

## 2.8 Place-identity: caught between racism and reconciliation

King (2007, p. 17) argues that “overt racism has been challenged by the removal of apartheid, however it cannot be assumed that racial prejudices have been completely erased from the social practices of the South African society”.

The system of apartheid, using policies predicated on racial hierarchy, placed whites with a distinct economic advantage, which sharpened political, social and emotional distance between race groups (MacDonald, 2006). Post-1994, through South Africa’s liberal constitution, democracy has been established by providing citizenship to all members of all races, thereby separating the notions of ‘race’ and ‘citizen’, in theory. Despite the change in policies, economic and class differences remain embedded in the national social structures that have deeply implanted colonial history of white supremacy.

White South Africans are now in a precarious social position. Much of the power which is available to employed whites originated because of the racist pre-1994 laws, which guaranteed them jobs over black applicants. Cilliers (2008) quips: “Unfortunately, the world of apartheid was so perverse that if I could have been given the choice to be a very clever black kid or a very stupid white kid, if I wanted to live a good life I might have been well advised to choose being a stupid white kid... the cleverest black kid was likely not to achieve the quality of life that the dumbest white kid could achieve” (p.17).

While many white people still hold their positions of power in their respective institutions, the work and social context has changed to one of racial integration and employment equity. Cilliers (2008) and others suggests that the result is the emergence of a discourse of white denial (‘Apartheid wasn’t *all* bad!’), white guilt (‘How could we and our forefathers allow the system to continue?’ or ‘we didn’t realise just *how bad* it was’), white indifference (‘Let’s forget about Apartheid now and look towards the future, it’s over and done with’), and white anger, especially at employment practices like Affirmative Action that favour black candidates (‘It’s just apartheid in reverse now, and the country’s no better than it was 20 years ago’). These emerging post-apartheid

discourses, which are also seen in the media, are part of the identity-management project that white people have begun to engage in, following a long and uneasy political history.

One initiative that attempted to deal with, amongst other things, white guilt and white denial was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a project that can (perhaps awkwardly) be placed within the broad umbrella of post-apartheid storytelling. Part of healing a psychologically ravaged nation, especially people who were affected by gross human rights violations, rested on 'perpetrators' coming forward, confessing their sins, and seeking forgiveness (this social construction of whites as perpetrators played out smoothly). The crux of the TRC, which began in 1998, was that amnesty could be given where deserved, and a process of forgiveness, healing, and understanding would begin. This was the path to reconciliation taken by South Africa, using a model that has become widely admired around the world (Valji, 2004).

However, Gqola (2001, p.97) notes that it would be naïve to assume that after the TRC South Africans would suddenly find new, improved ways of relating to each other. She contends that reconciliation is a much more ambitious endeavor than it is made out to be, arguing that "[I]n the proceedings and operations of the TRC there are conflicting and competing discourses on 'truth' and 'reconciliation'" (p.98). By this she means that one must not assume that by knowing the 'truth' that one has established a precondition for reconciliation, because the task of retrieving memories is not a 'truthful' exercise – distortion occurs because all confessions serve a purpose that is sculpted through the use of language. The allusion to a discursively situated investigation of race-relations is quite clear. 'Truth' is itself a social-construction and does not have a neutral reality outside of its construction in language. It is perhaps more valuable to inspect the everyday discourses used by people in their day-to-day lives and analyse the ways in which they are using language to either hinder or develop the reconciliatory process in South Africa.

The use of language to construct pleasant race-relations is perhaps best described through the example of the phrase 'rainbow nation', coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Motsemme and Ratele (2000) note: “[O]ne of the single most unifying symbols of the unfolding South Africa... is the insertion of the 'reconciliation text', as embodied in the 'rainbow nation' rhetoric... Yet for the 'rainbow vision' to become visible, gain ascendancy and greater legitimacy it must be performed over and again, flagged through a range of linguistic and visual signs” (in Gqola, 2001, p.99). The ‘rainbow nation’ and “various discourses evident in the public domain in contemporary South Africa all confirm the *centrality of unity* to the identity 'South African” (Gqola, 2001, p.96, my emphasis). While this theme may be evident in the popular press and national branding, whether or not this has filtered through to everyday interactions and conversational practices remain uncertain. Whether or not reconciliation is just an empty (albeit somewhat dominant) discourse that is not rooted in the lived experience between race groups remains the subject of regular surveys that are usually printed in the popular press.

For example, the South African Reconciliation Barometer, which tracks reconciliation processes annually using quantitative surveys, found in 2008 that “significantly more South Africans are fearful about their economic circumstances, their physical security, the health of race relations and, in general, the direction in which the country is moving” (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2008, p.8). Public opinion was not favourable.

In Swartruggens, for example, there was a general outcry from black residents that this act of violence had only exposed what long existed in the town (*Mail & Guardian*, January 19, 2008). Black people accused white people of being racist, all the while denying their own acts of racism, such as shouting “Kill the Boer! Kill the farmer!” when Johan Nel made his first appearance in the Swartruggens Magistrate’s Court (*The Times*, January 21, 2008). These dual events painted an uneasy picture of Swartruggens, suggesting that race-relations were strained for a long time in the town. However, since the perpetrator of the shooting was white, it was whiteness that was most critically attacked in the ensuing race debate. A strong defense of whiteness was needed, because Johan Nel was being made the exemplar white racism. Like black people struggling to adapt old notions of self to post-1994 renewed versions of self, so to were white people grappling with the adaptive challenge that post-apartheid life presented. Place-identity

construction was no less complex for white South Africans who were also struggling to fit comfortably into a new social order not explicitly predicated on racial hierarchy.

## **2.9 The white identity crisis**

The black crisis of identity, described in the preceding sections, was in some ways a welcomed crisis, or challenge. It signified a move from oppression to equal opportunities. It signified an era of new spatialities and new adventures for identity construction. As others have noted, it resulted in a renewed spirit of storytelling, though not without the dilemmas that accompany such a radical (but favourable) change in social climate. For white South Africans, the post-apartheid challenge was a lot less romantic.

At the first Steve Biko Memorial lecture in Cape Town, Njabulo Ndebele (2000) suggested that the adaptive challenge for white South Africans is to reflect upon the deeply rooted insensitivity for black life that long exists in the white community, calling for a “shift in white identity in which whiteness can undergo an experiential transformation by absorbing new cultural experiences... [and] participate in a humanistic revival of our country”. Mangcu (2008) also notes that white solidarity, which he concedes is no more or less prevalent than black solidarity – is part of a conservative nationalism that was necessary to keep apartheid alive, but which must change if proper integration is to occur:

For as long as both blacks and whites are locked in their respective domains of denial – the black denial of the experience of HIV/AIDS, crime, corruption and Zimbabwe, and the white denial of racism in their midst – then for that long the goal of building a truly non-racial society will remain elusive (p.113).

The phenomenon of white denial is not without considerable pain, as Steyn (2001, p.x) notes in her studies of white subjectivities. Here, she remembers her thoughts while at a workshop on non-racism in 1992, pondering the realities of what life under a black government would be like, while being confronted with complex issues of her own identity as a white South African woman:

We had all been damaged, ironically, by socio-political structures that had been designed to protect us, deeply humbled by a historical outcome of an arrogant system originally intended to entrench our white superiority and entitlement. We were grateful the nightmare was ending, whatever our fears for the future. (p.x)

Steyn (2004) goes further, suggesting that there are discursive strategies which are used by white people to signify resistance to transformation in the country, which she labels “white talk”. Based on a discourse analysis of the letters written to *Rapport* newspaper in 2001, a national Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, she focuses on aspects of white talk within white Afrikaans speaking South Africans. Suggesting a crisis of Afrikaner identity, Steyn (2004) notes that these ethnic anxieties are pervasive, and explores the dual purpose of white talk: “to restore the Afrikaner mythology that secured a special place for the Afrikaner in the political, economic, and social life of the country, so that the ground gained through the apartheid era of systematic Afrikaner advancement is not lost in the new social order, while presenting Afrikanerdom as compatible with the New South Africa” (p.143). In a similar study, Steyn and Foster (2007) assert that the central challenge for white people today is the question of how to maintain privilege despite black political rule. While many discourses are available and prevalent, Steyn and Foster focus on resistant white discourses – white talk – as analysed in two weekly columns published through 2000 in a Sunday newspaper. Their study reveals how “two discursive repertoires, New South Africa Speak and White Ululation are played off against each other to enable positive self-presentation while resisting transformation” (p.25). There is a certain ambivalence, then, inherent in the white identity during post-apartheid life.

For whatever strides the white community – certainly not a homogenous social group – has made in dealing with those fears that marked the early 1990s transitional period from white- to black majority rule, these strides have certainly been marred by the events in Swartruggens and Bloemfontein, pitting discourses of racism up against reconciliation.

One needs simply to read topical deliberations in the media, especially online forums where there is less censorship of comments, to realise that there are many competing discourses – controversial tensions even – on racism and reconciliation. For example, van der Westhuizen (2008) triggered intense debate on a widely read website by posing the

question “You can take Afrikaners out of Apartheid, but can you take Apartheid out of Afrikaners?” Her statements came at a sensitive period of race-relations in this country. Four white Afrikaans university students from the town of Bloemfontein made headlines around the world for filming black university cleaners being humiliated by these students, who then distributed this video for others to see.

Replete with racial stereotypes, comments on van der Westhuizen’s (2008) article state that these students do not represent the broader Afrikaner community, while others point to the violent crimes that black people have committed on white people, especially farmers and women, who claim to live in fear of being murdered or raped by black people. The nature of public opinion on this ‘racist’ incident is vast and diverse, and the rhetorical strategies by readers to justify their viewpoints confirm complex racial divisions. But this incident was not isolated. A national Forum for Black Journalists expelled their white colleagues from attending an exclusive blacks-only address given by then ANC president Jacob Zuma in 2008. David Bullard, a popular weekly columnist was fired for apparent racist undertones in a piece he wrote. The small town of Swartruggens was already catapulted into the media spotlight. The students from Bloemfontein who made the offensive videos were seemingly unrepentant. The explosion of public opinion articles in the media showed that none of these incidents painted a happy picture of race-relations in South Africa (e.g. *Sunday Times*, November 23, 2008, p.19). But the question of why the stereotype (and certainly the stigma) of ‘small town racism’ was playing itself out in the media, is one which allows us to draw the threads of this argument together. It is in the micro-context of the small town that an intersection occurs, where place-identity, post-apartheid life, the dilemma of racist and reconciliatory discourses, and discursive psychology meet. The *small town* illuminates the salience of spatial considerations in this post-apartheid project to understand place-identity construction, and the linked topic of the nature of race-relations in specific places.

### **2.10 Small towns: Discursive dump of the national imagination**

Goredema (2008) offers an interesting explanation about the primacy of *small town* racism in media reports about Skierlik. Her quantitative analysis provides us with at least

one answer to the question of why small towns in South Africa tend to carry such a negative reputation in terms of race-relations. Her study also reiterates the importance of interweaving theories of identity and place, as each is owed to the other.

In a content analysis of media reports, Goredema (2008) argues that the media is an active participant in the construction and definition of what constitutes the 'new South Africa'. She looked at how the print media positions small towns in the national imagination and analysed the way in which the media's representation of the small town as the 'other' is part of a process of risk reduction. Thus, "[t]he role the national print media plays in identifying this 'other' and projecting 'non-South African' (and therefore defining 'South African') onto this 'other' is investigated" (Ibid, p.5).

The towns of Bredasdorp, Mokopane, Newcastle, Prince Albert and Swartruggens were chosen, using all national and regional print newspapers published between 2004 and 2008 that were available on a University of Free State electronic database. A total of 156 articles were used (17 of them about Swartruggens). Crime was the most frequent topic of the articles (62), followed by development issues (26) and then racism (24). Tourism and spotlights on positive public figures featured the least, with just five articles in total. Goredema (2008) notes that the 'small town' provides the national imagination with a convenient 'other' on which racism, the most undesirable characteristic associated with this country, can be projected:

"This allows for the imagination of a new South Africa that is tied to new values, whilst the old values are relegated to – but kept under close lock and key – to the basement of the South African small town" (p.17)

Through the discursive creation of the 'other', small towns become the unconscious dumping ground for all the anxiety-provoking, unwanted contents of the national consciousness. The media implicitly facilitates this process via their reporting.

According to Joffe (1999), the 'internal other' reduces the risk and danger posed by a distant other, who is more mysterious and dangerous (in Goredema, 2008, p.10). She

argues that small towns are *internal* others, providing South Africans with an ‘other’ who is (discursively) distant but familiar, and therefore not threatening. The risk of threat projected onto this ‘other’ can therefore be carefully monitored and kept in check. By splitting off the ‘small town’ from the national consciousness, the risk of destroying the rainbow nation rhetoric is minimised – so, when bad old habits return, like racism, small towns are the place for it to go.

The exclusion of the small town on the intellectual terrain is also evident. Govinden's (2008) literary analysis, like most studies of race, space and place, has favoured the city as site of study, and even her extensive bibliography and references neglect to place small towns on the academic map, which may be indicative of its absence even in local literary works as it is in general social scientific work. Keith and Pile (1993b) also note the salience of place in the works of novelists like Salman Rushdie, and take a spatialised reading of *The Satanic Verses*. Still, it is the city that is the site of study. Rushdie himself has written that “the city as reality and the city as metaphor is at the heart of all my work” (Rushdie, 1991, in Keith & Pile, 1993a, p.21).

Marginality has often faced residents of small towns, but has rarely been researched. For example, one would expect a certain amount of stigma that comes with living in a small town that has been publicly labelled as racist, especially if one belongs to the group labelled as perpetrators of this racism. Even the status of victim carries a certain amount of stigma, alluding to powerlessness. In other instances of problematised places, Hugh-Jones and Madill (2009) found that despite public information that is discrediting to a place, residents continue to construct their place-identities positively. How will residents of Swartruggens make sense of their town and their identity in relation to the public discourse around the Skierlik event? This is a fertile issue of investigation, because problematised places have received far less attention that they deserve. South Africa, as whole, certainly qualifies as a problematised place, given the racialised social engineering that the people and its land have been subjected to. Zooming in on one specific town offers a glimpse into the discursive practices that permeate national conversations and discourse on a broader level.

## 2.11 Conclusion

Pinning down complex issues such as racialised identity construction can be illuminated if the *located* nature of identity is emphasised. The (re)production of a racialised sense of self – black or white – is rooted in the politically- and socially saturated geographies that South Africans live in. These geographies shape identity and are never innocent or coincidental backdrops to actions. When these geographies are problematised in the public sphere, as in the case of Swartruggens, does this threaten the identities of its residents? Do black residents helplessly accept the status of victims? Do white residents defiantly deny their status as racist? Is there even a racialised division in the construction of place-identity? Do residents, black and white, try to construct their town positively?

There are three issues which this argument has tried to coherently intersect by this point. Firstly, there is the issue of the media's discourse and portrayal of race-relations in Swartruggens. Secondly, there is the geographical problematisation of *small town* racism, which has earned them a reputation for being enclaves of apartheid-era style life. Finally, this opened a fertile path for considering the social construction of post-apartheid place-identities and its discursive accomplishment. These interrelated issues have led to the main problematic: post-apartheid place-identity construction in the small town of Swartruggens, following discourses of tense race-relations in the media. The resultant research question asks, "How is place-identity constructed in this problematised place?"

The following chapter describes the methodology used to carry out this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

*“Ultimately, the political usefulness of discourse analysis to political activists may be in its potential to go beneath the surface, to disrupt what may be seen as taken for granted and natural, to reveal contradictions and to show connections between that which may seem distinct”<sup>1</sup>*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Silverman (2000, p.78-9) notes that “in many qualitative research studies there is no specific hypothesis at the outset. Instead, hypotheses are produced (or induced) during the early stage of research”. This chapter reflects on how this study’s specific research question emerged, and how this study was carried out. I take a critical, reflexive approach to outlining the methodology, as opposed to a third-person account that constructs the pretence of merely carrying out a straightforward research design. This chapter explores how the data for this study was collected, how it was analysed, why certain methodological choices were made, and the ethical issues that arose. Difficulties that were encountered are also examined, in addition to an elaboration of my personal position and values, and its possible impact.

#### 3.2 Theoretical perspective

This is a qualitative study, operating from a social constructionist paradigm, using the analytic perspective of discursive psychology. Each aspect is discussed.

Qualitative research elucidates knowledge from, and about, a natural setting. Babbie and Mouton (2005) encourage “getting one’s hands dirty” and immersing oneself in the natural environment being studied, so that attitudes, behaviours, and feelings can be observed from the “normal course of events” as a social process naturally unfolding (p.271). Cultural and contextual significance is magnified. This implies an idiographic research strategy, which focuses on particular instances of an event, which may be extrapolated to similar contexts.

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<sup>1</sup>De la Rey (1997, in Gqola, 2004, p.94).

Knowledge is not put into old boxes; rather, new boxes are created for new 'truths'. Epistemologically, truth in qualitative research is a context-bound interpretation. Bryman (1984, p.78) observes the fluidity, novelty, social enigma, and even serendipity that encourage qualitative research, with the subject's point of view almost always being "the empirical point of departure".

Social constructionism is one paradigm of qualitative research, that "focuses on the way people come to share interpretations of their social environment" (Colman, 2006, p.166). The assumption is that people construct their own meanings about life, and that these meanings have become embedded in their social worlds, creating shared systems of understanding that are historically, culturally, and institutionally enduring. Durrheim (1997, p.175) contrasts this with the positivist paradigm of social research, whose aim is a "predictive model of science" that yields factual ('true') information about an objective reality. Burr (2003, p.152) asserts that social constructionism is opposed to claims of universal truths for at least three reasons. Firstly, she dismisses the notion of objectivity, arguing that we all have presuppositions that cannot be put aside. It is a theoretical but impractical ideal to be able to step outside of our humanity and 'see' the world as it 'really' is. Secondly, social constructionism is a "co-production" between researcher and research participant. Being totally 'outside' the research process is impossible. Thirdly, she claims there is no such thing as impartial facts, because research questions derive from a researcher's assumptions about the world. Burr (2003, p.153) concludes:

[S]ince there can never be any objectively defined truth about people – something which remains true regardless of the time or culture in which they live – that all claims to have discovered such truths must be regarded as political acts.

Burr situates social constructionism at three levels: ontologically, its view of reality is one which is built up through language and discourse, the building blocks of socially shared meanings; epistemologically, knowledge is seen as relative to the context from which it was derived, not as something that exists in individual mental processes; and methodologically, social constructionism uses reflexive techniques of analysis, such as discourse analysis, which critiques ideology and the larger political forces shaping the nature of social reality.

'Discursive' psychology is a form of social constructionism that is most suited for this study. It has a specific analytic focus – the use of language in everyday talk. It locates psychology in

the ordinariness of everyday life and interaction and, most importantly, rhetorically constructed talk. Pioneered (arguably) by Edwards and Potter (1992), discursive psychology is interested in the pragmatics of social actions, i.e. the purpose being served by constructing something in a particular way. This is a preferred methodological theory for two reasons.

Firstly, by focusing on words, instead of words *as pathways* to invisible mental contents such as attitudes, outward expression becomes the focus of analysis; after all, it is in the interpersonal space of interaction that these ‘thoughts’, ‘attitudes’ and ‘beliefs’ actually construct themselves and play out. Identity in post-apartheid South Africa is therefore not located ‘inside’ a person; identity is something that is actively produced during conversation. Variability, inconsistency, and contradictions in identity are welcomed as grist for the mill; after all, different conversations enable different constructions of self.

Secondly, the topic of race-relations is given a lot more analytic rigor using a discursive approach. Discursive psychology falls under the broad umbrella of discourse analysis and is therefore interested in deconstructing language in order to expose the ideologies that have become normalized in one’s way of talking. This approach is best suited for our current climate of political correctness, where explicit racism is by and large no longer the social norm. The ‘new racism’ that has emerged is clothed in a “rhetorical disguise” (Mason, 1994, in Brown, 2008, p.52). These new forms of racially-laden discourse operate beneath the surface of mundane dialogue. They appear rational, legitimate and even as common sense. But racist discourse covertly creeps into what overtly appears to be liberal opinions based on rational argument. A critical discourse analysis, rooted in discursive psychology, is able to deconstruct socially built identities and expose the sedimented, taken-for-granted, racialised ideologies that permit these identities.

It is for these reasons that this study situates itself in this specific theoretical frame.

### **3.3 Academic context**

This thesis is part of a broader five year collaboration between the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the University of Cape Town (UCT), called the Rural Transformation Project (RTP). Melissa Steyn, Associate Professor at UCT and director of Intercultural and Diversity Studies (iNCUDISA) coordinated the multidisciplinary team of which I was a part.

The project was funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and SANPAD (South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development). The overall investigation was meant to focus on transformation in nine South African “small towns”. There was no official definition that we worked with to delineate a small town; part of this choice involved looking at discourses (both in the media and of residents themselves) about the town, and whether it was generally referred to as “a small town”.

Due to this thesis arising out of the Rural Transformation Project, it did not begin with a specific research question in mind. The project was interested in a broad understanding of what life was like in the town as compared to before 1994, and was guided by an open-ended questionnaire to facilitate conversations around transformation. The topic of post-apartheid place-identity construction emerged during the research process and was consequently integrated into the research design while in the field. The project was meant to be quasi-ethnographic, but due to limited funds and time, I only spent two weeks in the town. However, after two weeks I felt that data saturation was occurring, so it might have been optimal for our purposes. Staying in the town and experiencing day-to-day life added rich background information and context to the actual interview data.

### **3.4 Logistics**

I live in Pietermaritzburg. Swartruggens is about 700km away. Two research assistants also accompanied me, Thabo Sekhesa and Sarah (not her real name). Thabo was a black male in his 20s who conducted the Setswana interviews; Sarah was a white female, aged 20, who conducted the Afrikaans interviews; and I am an Indian male in my 20s, and conducted the English interviews. We flew from Durban Airport to Lanseria Airport in Gauteng province; Swartruggens was still another 150km by car. We rented a guesthouse lodge in Swartruggens, situated on a farm. Finding accommodation via the internet proved tricky. We hired a car for the two weeks. However, once we drove to a specific suburb or central town, that entire district could be covered by foot. We only drove between suburbs, which were about half a kilometre away from each other. The nearest city is Rustenburg, about 50km away; the holiday resort Sun City is about 30km away. Thabo and I stayed in Swartruggens for 14 days (the section *Data Collection* describes Sarah’s early departure).

### 3.5 Sampling and participants

Most South Africans are currently engaged in post-apartheid place-identity reconstruction. However, Swartruggens was purposively chosen as a single case study because as Silverman (2001) notes, “purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested” (p.104). Swartruggens dominated media headlines after the Skierlik shooting, but prior to that it was virtually non-existent in the mainstream media (see Appendix 3). Many lay theories had been offered in the media about the nature of race-relations in the town. The town was therefore chosen because place-identity construction in this context would yield interesting findings given the discourse of *small town* racism that had publicly emerged. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note that when selecting a case, qualitative researchers “seek out groups, settings and individuals where... the processes being studied are most likely to occur (in Silverman, 2001, p.104).

Once in the town, participants were purposively and conveniently sampled. We sampled for diversity (Patton, 1990, in Dixon & Durrheim, 2004, p.462) in terms of gender, race, education, age, number of years living in the town, and occupation. A descriptive list of key informants, such as school teachers, farmers, shop keepers, unemployed people, domestic workers, housewives, community leaders, and ward councillors was used as generic guide. The criterion for inclusion was that the participant self-identified as a resident of Swartruggens or Skierlik. Snowball sampling was mostly used. Participants usually referred the researchers to people in the town who would be interested in being interviewed.

As Bryman (1984) astutely points out, serendipitous moments in the research process often makes qualitative research an exciting endeavour. This proved true from day one. Our first stop was at the police station, to introduce ourselves (a move triggered by the assumption that Thabo and I might create suspicion if word gets around that two young men are going around asking people about race-relations). Clearly our own fears and prejudices were playing out here. However, the policemen gave us quite a warm welcome, and a community notice board in the police station listed many local organisations with their phone numbers. A few phone calls later we had secured a number of interview appointments for the week. A key informant was made in this way, who eventually got us access to the Skierlik settlement. Once we got talking to the residents of Skierlik, one specific community member took a keen interest in our study and offered to take us on ‘tours’ of the town (with his own historical version of

these places). More contacts were made as we toured the town and met new people in new places. Soon, our data collection was well under way and a diverse sample was emerging.

In total, 42 residents were interviewed: 19 women and 23 men. Racially, there were 23 black participants, 12 whites and 7 Indians. Twenty interviews were conducted in English, 12 in Setswana, and 10 in Afrikaans. A more detailed breakdown of the sample is in the following tables and graphs: (for a non-graphical sample breakdown see Appendix 8)

**Table 1. Afrikaans interviews (n = 10)**

	BLACK	WHITE	INDIAN
FEMALE (7)	1	6	0
MALE (3)	1	2	0

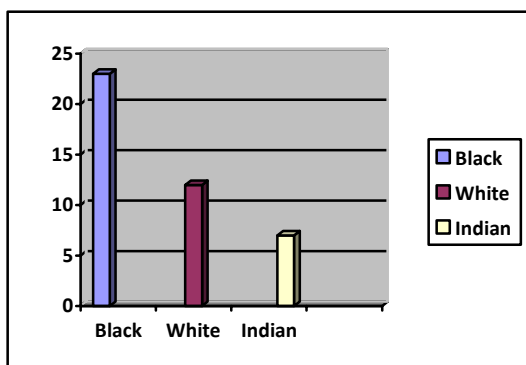
**Table 2. Setswana interviews (n = 12)**

	BLACK	WHITE	INDIAN
FEMALE (6)	6	0	0
MALE (6)	6	0	0

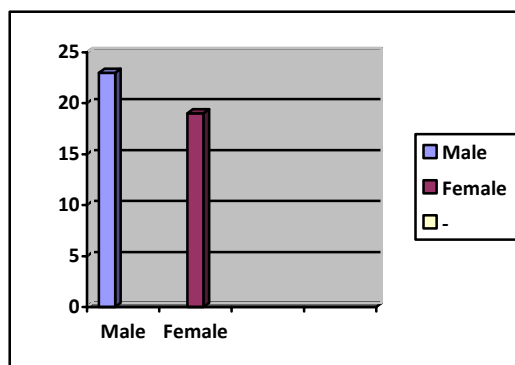
**Table 3. English interviews (n = 20)**

	BLACK	WHITE	INDIAN
FEMALE (6)	3	2	1
MALE (14)	6	2	6

**Figure 1. Number of participants by race**



**Figure 2. Number of participants by sex**



### 3.6 Data collection

A qualitative, exploratory methodology provided the space for an open and flexible approach that allowed us to discover phenomena in a way that was not overly constricting and rigid. The research design was made to become progressively focused over the course of our stay in Swartruggens, allowing a research ‘problem’ to develop over time, because “it is frequently only over the course of the research that one discovers what the research is really ‘about’” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.175). I began with a three –pronged plan.

First I tried to compile basic information about the town, such as its maps, demographics, history, primary economic activity, and tourist interests. This would offer a macro framework within which to position micro-level, personal narratives of the residents. A lot of this ‘preliminary’ research was actually done *in the field*, once we got to Swartruggens. There is a very sparse body of knowledge about the town that is available on the internet or through publications. The local library in Swartruggens contained some useful documents.

Secondly, five days of exploratory interviews took place. All interviews were digitally recorded. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview, which revolved around issues of post-1994 transformation in the town (see Appendix 6 for the interview schedule and Appendix 7 for Informed Consent form). These questions were primarily for the purposes of the Rural Transformation Project. However, race-relations were anticipated to be a ‘hot topic’ in the town, because Johan Nel’s trial was taking place in Rustenburg in the same week. The open-ended interviews allowed plenty of space for participants to introduce their own topics. Inevitably, constructions of self in relation to place started to emerge. Being a racially diverse group, each of us was able to ‘fit in’ with different segments of the town’s population. In race research especially, this helps people to feel more at ease due to an assumed intersubjectivity (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983 p.73). Upon reflection, and as the data will show, this was true of the current sample as well.

Thirdly, an ‘interesting identity story’ was determined, after about five days of exploratory interviews. This meant uncovering a common issue that people could identify with and talk about in the context of their varied experiences of life in the town. This was identified from the initial pool of informants and the themes that emerged strongly were later followed up in

detail. Skierlik, and its impact on inter-racial relationships in residents' everyday life, became the obvious choice. Diverse voices and their positioning on this issue were further explored.

Using convenient samples and snowballing techniques, participants were recruited by walking through the town's central business district, visiting shops and local businesses, visiting schools to get access to teachers, meeting with prominent locals, and by 'hanging around' popular locations, such as the liquor stores, petrol station, and main grocery store.

All interviews took place rather informally between an interviewer and participant. The duration ranged from 15 minutes to over an hour. Interviews began very race-neutrally, asking about life in the town and changes they have seen over time. Some interviews naturally moved into race-relations and Skierlik, while others were prompted. Similar to Durrheim and Dixon's (2001, p.7) interviews with beachgoers, there were many instances where an interviewer was referred to in colloquial terms such as 'my brother', 'my man', "indicating informality and fraternity". Most interviews took place at the participant's place of work. Some participants, who were contacted through telephone appointment, were interviewed over lunch at a local restaurant. One interview took place at a couple's home, who invited for me tea.

Interviews with Skierlik residents unfolded in different phases: when Thabo and I first arrived, we were introduced to everyone in a group context and an informal (but recorded) group interview took place. It was very open-ended and served as an ice-breaker experience for both the researchers and interviewees. This was followed up with individual interviews. Individuals who were most vocal were chosen for individual interviews. The interview appeared cathartic for residents, who seemed to urgently want their story to be heard. We began chatting in smaller groups throughout the day, and eventually two outspoken and popular residents took us on tours of Swartruggens and its surrounds, and allowed us to informally interview them along the way. They got us access into their internal networks, and took us to other sites in the town to collect data, which we otherwise would not have known about, such as the mineworkers' residences and slate quarries.

Of course, there were many instances during the data collection process where people declined to be interviewed. This became a particular problem for Sarah, who was initially finding it difficult to get white, Afrikaans speaking participants. In fact, only four days into

her stay and a week remaining, Sarah opted out of the research process. She felt intimidated by comments she had received from a participant (a white male farmer), who cautioned her against going around town asking white people about sensitive issues like race. Sarah felt uncomfortable with his tone and insinuation. Thabo, Sarah and I had a lengthy debriefing, where we all aired our personal feelings towards this situation. Thabo also confessed to feeling a bit uneasy (he had been told that being out at night can be risky), but decided to stay on. I booked Sarah an immediate flight back home. Despite some tensions that arose within the debriefing session, I believe we all parted ways on a cordial and friendly note. Sarah had done sufficient Afrikaans interviews during her stay, and we managed to get more white participants on our own thereafter, so this did not affect the diversity of the sample. In fact, Indian females are the most under-represented group in the sample, with only one participant (another Indian woman declined to be recorded, despite her willingness to regularly chat informally over the course of the two weeks).

Overall, the data collection process depended a lot on both fitting in, but also being new. We always explained our role as researchers collecting information for a short-dissertation, but our stance was that of 'curious visitors'. This allowed participants to become experts of their own town, and we conveyed a genuine display of interest in what they had to say, sometimes at the expense of creating a tangential interviewee. However, this is justified by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.73) who note that "whether or not people have knowledge of social research, they are often more concerned with what kind of *person* the researcher is than the research itself". As Silverman (2001, p.211) also notes, "In practice, researching involves entering a series of social relationships". We entered these social relationships with sensitivity and kindness.

### **3.7 Language and translation**

Translation presents a tricky problem for discursive psychology, which prefers using naturally occurring data in its original form (Edwards & Potter, 1992). However, the rationale for conducting interviews in Afrikaans and Setswana and then translating to English arose out of participants' choices. Thabo and Sarah are both bilingual and the participants they enlisted had the option of being interviewed in English. They almost always preferred using their mother-tongue. Only Indian residents spoke English as a first language.

All interviews were recorded using a visible, professional digital recording device. As Sacks (1992, Vol 2, p.26) notes, “if you can’t deal with the actual detail of actual events then you can’t have a science of social life” (in Silverman, 2001, p.149). Thabo and Sarah both transcribed and then translated the interviews they conducted, and tried to retain the nuances of the original interaction as much as possible. However, inevitably meaning is filtered and some of it lost through translation. As Johnstone (2002, p.31) contends:

Different languages make available different grammatical strategies, different vocabularies, and different prior instances of discourse for people to adapt as they create new ones. Thus translation can never be exact.

Transcription conventions, loosely based on the Jefferson method, are contained in Appendix 5. Recorded interviews have three advantages: they are public records available to the scientific community for verification; they can be replayed, refined in transcription, and reanalysed; and you can inspect “sequences of utterances”, which was important for this particular project (Silverman, 2001, p.149).

### **3.8 Validity, reliability and generalisability**

It would be easy (perhaps even tempting) for a study of this type to slide into ‘anecdotalism’, where a few exemplary cases of the ‘evidence’ is shown, to the exclusion of many other deviant instances that do not fit the main argument (Silverman, 2001). Four methods of increasing a qualitative study’s validity were met (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). These are: firstly, keeping two sets of notes, one to observe the environment and the other as a “theoretical memoranda” (p.275), noting theoretical ideas; secondly, triangulating, by using multiple researchers to collect data; thirdly, ensuring that what subjects have said is true to their original words and contains no errors (digital voice recording was used); and lastly, due to a two-week long data collection, we were able to “stay in the field until data saturation occurs” (p.277). In addition, the analysis is not based on just a few exemplary instances of participants’ responses; there has been comprehensive data treatment; and the original material is available for reinspection (cf. Silverman, 2001).

Although Burr (2003) is critical of trying to be ‘objective’ in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that trustworthiness is the key criterion of objectivity, which will give any study credibility and increase validity, and that if one establishes credibility – a harmony

between information gathered and meanings interpreted – then reliability naturally follows (in Babbie & Mouton, 2005, p.274). Smaling (1989) regards objectivity as “doing justice to the object of the study”, while recognising that although complete objectivity and validity are worthy and necessary endeavours, they remain elusive theoretical ideals (in Babbie and Mouton, 2005, p.274).

The issue of qualitative studies’ generalisability is well debated in the social sciences. Mason (1996) insists that research have a “wider resonance” and Alasuutari (1995) suggests that qualitative research is more about extrapolation than generalisation, i.e. showing that one’s results relate to broader entities in the social world (in Silverman, 2001, p.103). Certainly, the analysis that this study has led to does contribute in some way to the broader project of post-apartheid research, and adds to the sparse ‘small town’ literature and the emerging field of discursive psychology. In this sense, there is a wider resonance that this thesis engages with. Equally, one can compare this study to other similar studies in order to increase generalisability. This possibility looms large here, given that nine other similar studies are being co-ordinated under the umbrella of the Rural Transformation Project. A more radical approach is explicated by Peräkylä (1997): “The possibilities of various practices can be considered generalizable even if the practices are not actualised in similar ways across different settings” (in Silverman, 2001, p.109). Basically, because practices (and discourses) are socially shared, similar “possibilities of language use” exist across settings. Thus, the possibilities of getting similar post-apartheid constructions of place-identities in other small towns are a linguistic possibility. As Sacks (1984, p.22) put it: “tap into whomsoever, wheresoever and we get much the same things”.

Differently put, drawing on Wetherell’s (2007) concept of “personal order”, Hugh-Jones and Madill (2009, p.609) conceive discursive practices as having some “cross-situation consistency”, whereby individuals are able to draw from existing culturally relevant discourses “but in ways that are shaped by the life history of that individual”. While meaning-making encompasses an element of the personal, it also consists of a certain banal repetitiveness that inevitably relies on shared socio-historical processes of meaning-making. This allows an analysis of discourse to transcend the context of data collection, facilitating an understanding of place-identity that recognises, but is not limited by, the specific interactional context of the research interview. The transferability of findings, therefore, is potentially

increased, because participants will “repeat patterns of sense-making” (Ibid, p.606) across situations, employing similar discursive constructions as those that appeared in the interview.

### 3.9 Data analysis

A critical discourse analysis (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992) was used to analyse the transcribed interviews, focusing on verbal communication - “language in action” (Blommaert, 2005, p.2). Since the roots of discourse analysis are in the analysis of traditional texts, “the controlling metaphor behind this approach to research, explicit or not, has often been that analysing human life is a matter of open-ended interpretation rather than fact-finding” (Johnstone, 2002, p.20). This follows the social constructionist view that reality emerges from the language that creates it.

Language offers a means to talk about, to describe, to contradict, to argue, to develop, and to maintain the realities we live in. Depending on the situation, the context, the circumstances, or the interpersonal space, language is used to do different things. Edwards (1991, p.523) offers an apt summary:

The idea that semantic categories... permit multiple and even contrasting possibilities for description suggests that language’s category system functions not simply for organizing our understanding of the world, but for *talking* about it in ways that are adaptable to situated requirements... and to the need to put words to work in the pragmatics of social interaction

Place-identity is one such semantic category that is constructed in variable ways through the use of language. Discourses of life in Swartruggens were rooted in language’s rhetorical devices and these reports were *constructed* as factual through various discursive strategies (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This allows “the flexibility and rhetorically contested nature of everyday life where the world is not given in a single particular way” to come to the fore (Potter, 2000, p.35). Through a reading and re-reading of the interviews, I was able to immerse myself in the data and eventually inductively tease out common patterns and discourses from numerous interviews through an emic style of analysis (cf. Durrheim & Dixon, 2001). Blommaert (2005, p.4-5) calls the object of analysis the ‘voice’, i.e. “the way people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so. In doing so, they have to draw upon and deploy discursive means which they have at their disposal, and they have to use

them in contexts that are specified as the conditions of use”. Part of the analysis is being aware of, and drawing attention to, the social norms and regulations which govern the dialogue between participant and researcher, and even the unspoken discourses against which the speaker is creating an alternative version (for example, saying that “we are actually a very nice, friendly town” may work to undermine the dominant, albeit unmentioned, discourse of *racist* small towns). Versions are never mere descriptions; they are active constructions.

Discourse, in the tradition of discursive psychology, is always performative. Words are not just words; they are actions, trying to do something in the way they are spoken in interaction. According to Potter (2005, p.741), discursive psychology is: 1) practical – a means to an end; 2) accountable – it weaves psychology into everyday practices by constructing individuals as sites of responsibility and agency; 3) situated – firstly, psychological concerns, orientations, and categories are “embedded in interactions”; secondly, they are “rhetorically oriented”; and thirdly, they are “situated institutionally”, constructed in relation to the setting; and 4) displayed – it does not see language as the transporter of thoughts between minds, it locates psychology in talk and interaction. The fifth factor, that discursive psychology is embodied, i.e. situated constructions of the body are analysed in relation to the discourse, is one limitation of this study. Embodied behaviour was not considered in the analysis. For the purposes of this thesis’s research question, a sole focus on spoken discourse sufficed.

A focus on discourse sheds light on facets of the communication process that are important but not immediately evident. Critical discourse analysis invalidates the idea of unitary truths, and is critical of the status quo – exposing it, challenging it, and sometimes even intervening. As Johnstone (2002, p.228) notes: “discourse is always designed with an eye to details of social relatedness such as power and solidarity and people’s need to save face”. Durrheim (1997, p.181) also describes discourse analysis as a “critical enterprise, a form of ideology critique,” with the aim of accounting for how “particular conceptions of the world become fixed and pass as truth”.

Discourse analysis, therefore, presupposes an analyst who is both politically aware and sociologically informed. Without these qualities, ideological critique becomes difficult. My own reflection on this confirms my personal attraction towards discourse analysis. I elaborate more on this in the section *On Reflexivity*. Similar to Hugh-Jones and Madill (2009, p.606), “the process of analysis involved identifying sequences of talk having similar rhetorical

function around self, others, and place and examining implications for identity construction and management”. Particular attention was given to racial positioning, reference to the media, and notions of blame and accountability.

### **3.10 Ethical issues**

Four ethical principles are highlighted by Wassenaar (2006): autonomy, beneficence, confidentiality, and non-maleficence. Each is further discussed in relation to this study.

Autonomy and respect for the dignity of the person is usually operationalised through gaining informed consent. No form of deception was used in this research; participants were fully informed about all the aspects of the research. The reason for this study was explained in participants’ language of preference, and two research assistants were employed for the purpose of enabling mother-tongue interviews. Informed consent was usually obtained verbally. Verbal consent was preferred because the method of data collection was verbal, through conversations with people, and the literacy levels of participants were unknown. Verbal consent also allowed the flow of conversation to be as close to a ‘natural chat’ as possible. However, a written informed consent form was available to participants if they felt more comfortable signing something (see Appendix 7). Perhaps due to the informal and courteous rapport that often quickly developed between researcher and participant, nobody in the sample opted to sign the written consent. Participation was explained as voluntary and participants were told that they could stop the interview at any stage should they feel uncomfortable to continue. Some participants exercised this right.

Confidentiality is maintained throughout the study. During transcription, pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. The data has been securely stored in a private place to avoid unscrupulous use of any information, using SecureDoc password protection software. Copies of the data (both recordings and transcriptions) are contained at iNCUDISA at UCT. However, despite assurances of anonymity, few participants were concerned about this. Nevertheless, given the critical nature of a discourse analysis, every effort has been made to ensure that participants cannot be identified, even if this thesis happens to be read by a resident of Swartruggens.

Regarding non-maleficence and beneficence, the research team was sensitive to risks, and ensured that participants were not exploited in any way, as a direct or indirect consequence of the research. The probing of contentious issues in the town was done in a sensitive and unbiased manner. The only cost to participants was time. Wassenaar (2006) notes that beneficence obliges that the researchers attempt to maximise the benefits that the research affords the participants in the study. Although there was no material benefit from this study, the reflective process of engaging in a conversation about one's life in the town is hoped to have been valuable. Govinden (2008) argues that South Africans are living through a time of story telling, where there is a renewed eagerness to want to tell one's life's story to others, given this country's history of autobiographical suppression. Kvale (1996) also suggests that after an interview, one may have "obtained new insights into important themes of their life world". Some participants confirmed this point and were grateful for the time that we as researchers had invested in making Swartruggens and Skierlik a worthy site of study. In addition, given their sudden catapult into the media after the shooting, they had been inundated with journalists whom they had become sceptical of (unsurprisingly, given that most media reports of the town painted a place in crisis). Even with the knowledge that this study might very well turn into an exposé of the racial fault lines in the town, which will merely confirm media version, many participants appreciated the difference between a more considered academic analyses and a sensationalist, headline-grabbing story.

### **3.11 On reflexivity**

Johnstone (2002, p.26) asserts that "sensitive analysts should always be casting critical eyes on their own process of analysis and on the situation they study, whether or not methodological critique is the end goal," and Gramsci (in Said, 1978, p.25) notes: "The starting point of a critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is..."

The personal lenses through which I see myself, the world, and others will no doubt have affected my 'findings', observations and analysis contained in the next chapter. Trying to be engaged and disengaged at the same time, to participate and to observe, to interview with that elusive ideal of neutrality, while pushing aside my own biases and personal (maybe even unconscious) agenda, was as much a part of the process as the physical act of gathering information.

I am an Indian male, Hindu, in my 20s, having lived in an Indian (now desegregated) area in Pietermaritzburg all my life. The public schools I attended never had white students. School life was apolitical. At university my social circles were always multi-racial. My interest in print and online journalism began here and I started writing news articles and opinion columns. I was majoring in cultural and media studies, and psychology. Political issues began to interest me, especially South Africa's post-Apartheid transformation. I generally lived with an assumption that most South Africans are good human beings who are simply uncertain about how to racially integrate in a meaningful way, i.e. make friends, visit each other, hold conversations and, above all, abandon deep-rooted stereotypes. Integration seemed natural to me; but then again, I was born in the 80s, during apartheid's dying days. My status as 'previously disadvantaged' was never obvious to me. Disadvantaged how? So I often thought that perhaps I'm missing something – perhaps non-racism is easy for me because my mind has never been in the hands of the oppressor, to paraphrase Steve Biko, because I grew up in the era of rainbow nation rhetoric and political correctness.

I decided to become a clinical psychologist to better understand people and their motives, desires, attitudes and behaviours. My interest in political writing crept in later. I then became influenced by the values of the Mandela-Rhodes Foundation, who were funding my studies and who got me thinking very deeply about their four guiding principles: educational excellence, ethical leadership, social entrepreneurship and reconciliation. This last one – reconciliation – was the one that hooked me. What does it mean and how do we do it? Why does racism persist? When I joined the Rural Transformation Project, I found a comfortable compromise: a research project that satisfied both parts of me, the political writer and the psychologist.

I can think of at least two ways in which my personal profile raised issues to reflect on during my time in Swartruggens. Firstly, the very first person I encountered when we arrived in the town was an Indian Muslim man, around my age, buying some food from the local (and only!) petrol station. "Indians!?! In Swartruggens?!" I struck up conversation, feeling a sudden sense of belonging in this faraway town, and was (happily?) surprised to learn of Rodeonia, "the Indian area". My preconceptions of Swartruggens were shattered. In fact, I joked earlier that the only reason I had come along was because this was *my* thesis. I did not anticipate conducting too many interviews if the locals only spoke Setswana and Afrikaans. And how on earth would I 'fit in', I thought, in a racially divided town that had probably never

interacted with Indian people? (Despite the town's Indian presence, I was surprised during a conversation with a white farmer, who struggled to find the correct word to refer to Indian, and eventually asked, without thinking anything strange of it, "Umm, what is it that you call your nation?") I was quite taken aback by the casual, almost blasé othering process, let alone what I thought was quite an old-fashioned (apartheid-era?) reference to "your nation"). The lessons I learnt here included doing my background homework in more depth, not relying on media representations of a place, and to expect the unexpected.

Secondly, my journalistic impulse had to be kept in check all the time. I could see a full page feature article in every corner: poverty, abandonment, racism, crime, apathy, stigma, religion, and politics. These were burning issues here. And it was the week that Johan Nel was being sentenced. Swartruggens made page 3 of the *Mail and Guardian* and front cover of the *Sunday Times* Review section in our first few days there. My thoughts raced. "I'm right here, I'm on the ground, I could be writing such provocative pieces". But I also began appreciating the difference between deadline-driven journalism and polished academic research. The former needs sound-bites, good pictures, and talkative interviewees. The latter needs patience, it needs discussion *before* being published, it requires review, and it probably will not make headlines. As I analysed the data and read and re-read the dozens of narratives that have emerged, and as I wrote up my study, I'm still learning the difference between these two valuable forms of investigation and writing styles.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

Silverman (2000) reminds us that we live in an interview society, where interviews are more than the mere conveyance of information and more than resources that tell a story about something. Interviews are a central part of meaning-making in social life. Indeed, from the perspective of discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis, an interview provides a microcosmic lens into the dominant ideologies shared by a social group. The deconstruction of dialogue is a significant academic project that can shed new light onto old topics. Using the methodology explained in this chapter, we are now at this study's climax – the analysis.

In the following chapter, the interview data is used to tackle the problem of place-identity construction in a publicly discredited small town. The findings are situated in the broader ideological trends of post-apartheid South Africa.

## CHAPTER 4

# ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

Following a shooting spree, accusations of racism, media sensationalism, and the eventual problematisation of their small town, it is little wonder that residents of Swartruggens would begin a frantic endeavour to reconstruct their social identities in a way that provides stability amidst a radically changed environment.

Descriptions of Swartruggens have been contentious. Certainly, given the popular press's documentation of its history as a place with very strained race-relations, the contested dialogues that emerged during interviews and analysis has exposed the racial fault lines. After being publicly labelled as racially divided by the media, how do residents socially construct themselves in relation to their town following a publicly discrediting incident like Skierlik? Discursive social psychology explains that people find ways of managing their identity by managing their talk in interaction; this analysis looks towards these shared conversational practices for answers.

The rhetorical conflicts that emerged have created the impression of three distinct groups of people living in Swartruggens and the settlement of Skierlik: black people who share a collective sense of victimisation and have constructed this position as a historical fact of the town, and white people who share a collective sense of stigmatisation and have constructed this position as historically incongruent with the identities they have shared before the media reported on the murders in Skierlik (the third group will be discussed later). These two competing versions can be conceptualised in the following way.

Firstly, they are two sides of the same (discursive) coin: victims of racism versus victims of the media. The shared theme (between both blacks and whites) is one of victimhood. Victimhood is operationalised in talk through discourses of struggle that are shared by black residents, and discourses of stigma that are shared by whites. This framework highlights the key discursive battle being fought in Swartruggens: the battle to lay claim of being the victim.

However, despite being two sides of the same coin, they do nevertheless remain opposing sides. On the one side is a shared black victimisation that highlights despair, and on the other side, a stigmatised white identity, that is less despairing and more implicitly hopeful. The hopeful undertone of white discourses is linked to the construction of a friendly, caring and supportive town. There is a sense that the town can be restored to what it was if only the media can stop telling “lies”. The discursive tension here is essentially between the town being a place of despairing struggle or a place of support, unfairly stigmatised. However, this conceptualisation allows space for a third competing version that is also evident.

This version falls somewhere in between these sides, and borrows portions from each of the preceding two versions, constructing what is essentially a discourse of ambivalence. This discourse of ambivalence is also racialised, shared largely by the Indian residents. They are ambivalent because they are not as victim-constructing as the black residents, and do not feel as stigmatised by the Skierlik shootings as the white residents. Stuck in between, there is an almost bystander effect, where they are able to watch ‘from the outside’ what is happening, implicated but constructing themselves as non-participants. Still, they are residents of this town and it is interesting to see how the construction of an ambivalent discourse of place and identity helps distance themselves from the drama of black/white tensions in Swartruggens.

This analysis, then, focuses on two main positions, each implicated in the other:

- (1) There is a discursive battle for status of victim, and this battle is racialised. Two things are meant by this. Firstly, blacks construct themselves as victims of the town and of racism, and secondly that whites construct themselves as victims of the media.
- (2) Indians have discursively constructed a place-identity that occupies an ambivalent third space in relation to the black/white constructions of place and self.

This analysis ends with some thoughts on the ideological roots of racialised victimhood, and a commentary on issues for further analysis. These racialised constructions (black, white and Indian) of place-identity may serve the purpose of limiting agency and neutralises the need to take concerted action to change the status quo. The construction of victimhood and its subsequent neutralisation of action are most severe, because it enables whites to blame the media for distorting the image of race-relations in the town, thereby allowing white economic and structural hegemony to continue. Any accusations of white privilege or white racism can

be shrugged off as media sensationalism. Blacks, in turn, can continue to blame whites for whatever disadvantages they suffer, which on the flip side is actually disempowering, because the impetus for improvement in their standard of living is put in the hands of white people. Indians can enjoy the privilege of their third space because it distances them from the black/white racial tensions, allowing them to construct themselves as innocent bystanders who need not get involved in matters that do not overtly victimise or stigmatise them. However, by positioning themselves as ‘disempowered blacks’, ‘stigmatised whites’, and ‘ambivalent Indians’ the task of reducing agency and *escaping blame* for the incidents at Skierlik is discursively accomplished. To do anything else would be counter-hegemonic and puts too much at stake – their very identity, an identity long wrapped up in discourses of victimhood and in many ways entrapped by place.

This analysis is a discursive one and takes as an elemental premise that living in this town requires participants – residents of the town – to discursively construct a particular version of the town which is congruent with their identity, an identity inextricably linked to place. These discursive constructions of Swartruggens are, by extension, a construction of their own place-identity. Descriptions of self and life in the town, following the Skierlik murders, are treated as rhetorically produced versions by participants that serve to assemble particular place-identities which are needed in order to deal with the above-mentioned discursive dilemmas. Rhetorical references to the nature of race-relations accomplish the task of assigning accountability for their argued identities, because all discursive actions are part of “activity sequences” involving such things as blame and responsibility (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.155). These intergroup issues, social in origin but produced as individual versions of reality, are all part of the activity sequence that is attempting to create, maintain and enhance place-identity. Such discursive tasks are the “primary stuff of lived human life” (Ibid, p.156).

The following extracts draw attention to the “dilemma of stake or interest” (Ibid, p.158) that participants find themselves in while constructing particular versions of life in their town and consequently manage their place-identity. No conversation is treated as a disinterested factual account – they are all *constructed as* factual using certain discursive techniques that this analysis will expose.

## 4.2 Defending against white stigma: ‘... *if you want me to say negative things, I haven’t got anything to say*’

This section illustrates the discursive construct of a white place-identity that is primarily concerned with stigma management and reconstructing themselves as victims. The following two extracts<sup>1</sup> show two different speakers who are both trying to achieve the similar objective of denying any racial tension in the town. The first speaker makes no explicit reference to the media or to the Skierlik event. Instead, it is an unspoken premise upon which her own constructions of the tight-knit small town are built. Although the media’s grand narrative of a racist town is never articulated by either me or this speaker, it remains ever-present – the discursive elephant in the conversation.

Extract 1<sup>2</sup>: White female (interviewed jointly by Indian and black male researchers)

- 1 R: So tell me about the people in Swartruggens?  
2 P: I say (.) you know what (.) when they come through my door they always laughing  
3 always smiling (1) ‘hello Ma!’ (.) always (.) they haven’t one woman in the truck and  
4 they never drink because I don’t drink (.) so I smell the alcohol first (1) Never  
5 R: Mmh  
6 P: Never never:: (2) so you know what (1) I haven’t got even (.) uh uh:: um safety things  
7 around my shop  
8 R: Ok  
9 P: Nothing  
10 R: Ja ja  
11 P: The people (.) I handle everyone who comes to me with respect  
12 R: And they respect you back? (P: Ja) Ja  
13 P: So sir if you want me to say negative things I haven’t got anything to say

There is a deliberate attempt to build a positive image of the town, which by the end of this extract is seen to be based on the premise that I, the interviewer, am expecting something negative to emerge. The question “So tell me about the people in Swartruggens” is heard and interpreted as a subtle accusation against the people in Swartruggens – “So sir if you want me to say negative things I haven’t got anything to say” suggests that a competing discourse exists, is being argued against, but will not be explicitly acknowledged. That she hears the initial question as an opportunity to argue against negative constructions of the town alludes to a stigmatised place. She works hard, throughout the interview, to construct a version of

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<sup>1</sup> Transcriptions codes are contained in Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> R refers to the researcher; P refers to the participant

Swartruggens and herself – as both this place and her identity are mutually implicated – in a positive light. As a white woman in a town publicly branded as the home of white racists, her race constructs her as an individual “who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (Goffman, 1963, p.19). The discourses she argues against and argues for confirm this.

She quickly attends to several contestable issues in this small town: promiscuity of truck drivers who pass through Swartruggens (line 3); alcohol abuse (line 4); safety (and therefore crime) (lines 6-7); and respect (line 11). Each of these issues is potentially stigmatising, especially crime and respect. It is crime, after all, that catapulted Swartruggens into the media; and underlying the construction of this crime was a discourse of disrespect between black and white residents of the town. Lines 11-12 argue that respect involves a mutual give-and-take. This reference to respect is important, because it attends to the nature of interpersonal relations in the town, and the foundations upon which they ought to be built. It suggests that there is a common understanding amongst people and amongst groups, that mutual respect is a given. The lack of safety fences around her shop is provided as further proof that crime is not a fear, because people respect each other enough not to commit crime. Lines 2-4 create the image of happy people who are more than just passing truckers or customers of her shop; “hello Ma!” suggests familiarity and care. She constructs herself a mother-figure to them – they greet her as ‘Ma’ and she even ensures that they neither drive drunk nor pick up women to have sex with. The image of family is drawn on here to build this maternal rhetoric of care and support. If she is the mother, then the others are like her children. And mothers care for their children, and children respect their mother. The family image works as a metaphor for the town, a town that cares and respects its family-members/residents. The use of ‘never’ three times emphasises the point that any sort of disrespect is both not expected and will not be tolerated. The Skierlik shooting, therefore, is an example of a breakdown in this construction of Swartruggens as a mutually respectful and safe small town. If the town had a dispositional character it would be one that is respectful; descriptions of the town as racist or violent, then, do not gel with the town’s ‘disposition’ and must therefore be untrue (or a rare exception). The shootings are never mentioned at all during the entire interview; yet, her construction of the town works hard to counter the popular discourses of Swartruggens that are in the media, though they remain unspoken in the interview, they are nevertheless present via their counter-constructions. She expects me, after all, to be waiting for “negative things” to be said. The mark of stigma in Swartruggens is

being a *white* resident. She has to therefore also construct an alternative version of whiteness to the one she assumes I have read about in the papers. She is what Goffman (1963) calls a “discredited” person, whose potentially stigmatising quality (in this case skin-colour) is publicly visible and mutually known.

The following extract is less subtle, but tries to achieve similar goals with the talk.

Extract 2<sup>3</sup>: White female interviewing white female

- 1 R: Would you say the community is close?  
2 P: We are very small, therefore everybody cares for each other. *We don't have the*  
3 *stories here that you have seen and heard on the news.* We don't know that things  
4 the news is talking about. It doesn't matter if the people are black or white or any  
5 colour, people support each other.

Like the previous extract, the researcher does not offer the participant a direct invitation to speak about racism, opting instead to ask about the closeness of the community. Race relations, however, becomes the salient point around which ‘closeness’ is constructed, and an alternative version to media reports of racism becomes the key point of reference around which a stigmatised place-identity is developed.

She assumes I am well aware of what the media have said about the town – “we don't have the stories here *that you have seen and heard on the news*” – and pleads ignorance and denial as her defences – “we don't know that things the news is talking about”. This denial, however, does not permit space for at least acknowledging the material fact that a shooting spree did happen, in a black settlement, by a white shooter. For whatever other stories the “news is talking about”, the one story that cannot be denied is this shooting. One tenuous possibility is that a potentially racist *incident* (such as a shooting) is less stigmatising than the long-standing effects of *generalised racism* in the town. Generalising that a town is racist, which the media has done, requires proof of many other episodes of strained race-relations, which upsets the historical grand narrative that she (as a white resident) continues to (re)produce. She is being strategically vague (Edwards & Potter, 1992) in her reference to “stories” in the news, and tries to invalidate any examples that I may be aware of that lend credibility to the media's version of these strained racial relations. Place-specific racism and

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<sup>3</sup> The extracts that were translated from Afrikaans do not contain the usual transcription conventions.

racist white residents are constructed as foreign and unknown, something which is anomalous in a town where “everybody cares for each other”. Again, like in extract 1, a certain ‘character of the town’ is being constructed. By assigning a certain disposition to place, this disposition is also assigned to the identities of residents that occupy this place. A caring place, then, must consist of caring people. A discourse of care (and respect in extract 1) is pitted up against a discourse of violent disrespect in an interactional effort to reduce a stigmatised place-identity.

Similar to Yiftachel’s (2006) findings amongst Mizrahi residents (Jewish immigrants from Arab countries) who lived marginally in Israel’s development towns, there is a concerted effort here to portray solidarity and positive community sentiment, due to years of reproduced discourses of ‘local pride’. The speaker in this extract makes clear her resistance to this ‘new’ discourse of racism, which has been thrust upon residents by the media. Her preferred identity is one congruent with a version of Swarthuggens before its public discrediting. She tries to undermine this discourse of racism by creating a discourse of unfair stigmatisation. Using the popular notion of tight-knit small towns, she argues that “We are very small, *therefore* everybody cares for each other”. The use of ‘therefore’ implies that everybody cares for each other *because of* the geophysical fact that this town is small. The construction of place and identity and their mutual link is made clear in the statement: people are caring because they come from a small place, or put the other way, small places create caring people. Whichever way the causal inference goes does not matter – caring people and caring places are tied together inextricably. There is no space for racism in her construction of this small town. The forceful construction of an alternative (and by implication more legitimate) version of the town is needed to dismiss the master narrative that predominates in the media. In just four sentences, she works hard to undermine this narrative and reduce the associated stigma.

The final extract in this section falls somewhere in between the previous two extracts in the way the speaker goes about his rhetorical business. While neither omitting mention of Skierlik (like in extract 1), nor forcefully arguing against strained relations in the town (like in extract 2), the case for a rational conservatism is being made that subtly helps reduce the stigma of irrational and violent small-town white people.

Extract 3<sup>4</sup>: White male, 50s (interviewed by white female)

- 1 R: Are you feeling in certain places less comfortable or more comfortable?  
2 P: ummm, (4) the fact is there is a mutual underlying fear and incidents like the Skierlik  
3 incident and a few months/about a year ago where there was a farmer murdered and  
4 two weeks ago there was a farm attack just outside the town  
5 R: Ja ok  
6 P: (...) ummm this church complex has an electric fence, alarm systems and safety gates,  
7 for good reasons (R: ok) ummm there was years ago burglary in our hall and during  
8 church services car theft. It was simply a necessity to do this, even if you don't want to.  
9 This situation you will see everywhere. We just- to protect ourselves because/ because  
10 here/ because crime is a reality in the town. I think at the end I will feel safe to go to  
11 places during the day, but during the nights you are a bit more careful to go to certain  
12 places. You would maybe pass there, but you would not get out of your car there. We  
13 recently had a conversation with people who are staying in Borolelo where/ where  
14 they/ where they have especially middle aged women who doesn't go out at night  
15 because they are scared. There are elements in the street.

The construction of place-identity is done differently by this speaker, but again, it is serving the same rhetorical ends: to make a case for unfair stigmatisation. The “Skierlik incident” is mentioned in light of other incidents of violent crime. All the farms are owned by white people in Swartruggens and its surrounds. The use of farm attacks in the context of crime attends to the fact that white people are also victims of violence, by black people, because just as blacks are afraid of whites after “the Skierlik incident”, “there is a mutual underlying fear”, hinting that whites are also afraid of blacks. The use of “mutual” does the job of lessening the burden of stigma that only white people are violent and therefore only black people have reason to live in fear. The idea of Skierlik being a special case of racial violence is dismissed by putting it in the category of other criminal events like farm attacks. The use of “underlying” suggests that this fear may not be evident on the surface – we see this clearly in the preceding extracts, where fear of any sort is outright denied. This fear is “underlying”, not visible to an outside visitor; perhaps not even visible to each other.

The discourse of friendly tight-knit small town, where one does not even need fences around their shop (as in extract 1), is acknowledged but carefully managed: “It was simply a necessity to do this, *even if you don't want to*” hints at a resistance to put up safety features, drawing on known discourses of a safe small town. Despite this, his three-part list of “an electric fence, alarm systems and safety gates” is put up “for good reasons”. But it is ultimately in the phrase “This situation you will see everywhere” that the work of stigma

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Afrikaans to English. Indian and black male researchers were present during interview.

reduction is done most forcefully, because this normalises crime and the precautions one must take against crime. By seeing this situation “everywhere” the issues of crime (as introduced by the “Skierlik incident”) is made into a pervasive feature of life, regardless of the place one comes from, even a church. White criminals, then, like Johan Nel, should not be made exemplars of any sort of special violence. Farred (2002) makes this point by drawing on themes from J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*, to explore the ways in which the post-apartheid nation, the ‘disgraced’ state of Coetzee’s novel, “makes violence a mundanacity: an ordinary, everyday, ubiquitous, and commonplace occurrence...” (p.352). Despite the historical and moral cost, South Africans accommodate violence and its divisive effect on racial reconciliation (Farred, 2002).

The racialised description of crime is managed carefully at the end of this extract in lines 12-15: “You would maybe pass there, but you would not get out of your car there. We recently had a conversation with people who are staying in Borolelo where/ where they/ where they have especially middle aged women who doesn’t go out at night because they are scared”. He says that “during the nights you are a bit more careful to go to certain places” but does not mention these places immediately. When he finally cites Borolelo, it is only because *others* have provided evidence that Borolelo is unsafe. He is able to give an account of ‘black criminals’ without explicitly mentioning black people. His “conversation with people” that are from Borolelo serve as ‘insider evidence’ and corroborates his argument that certain places are unsafe. That these places happen to be black townships is a fact offered to him by others, not his own concoction. A sense of imminent danger that lurks at night is concretised in his statement “There are elements in the street”. That these elements prey on “middle-aged women” who come from Borolelo simply reproduces (implicitly) a discourse of ‘dangerous black men’. This latter discourse is quite prevalent in the media as well, and drawing on this discourse as an alternative discourse to the post-Skierlik one of ‘dangerous whites’, situates his construction in the broader narrative of the *swart gevaar* (Black Danger) that has been historically dominant in South Africa. While media sensationalism may have unfairly stereotyped white people as racist and violent in Swartruggens, he manages to undermine this by reminding the researcher of other dominant discourses in the media that serve as alternative foci of attention.

Verwey (2008) found similar rhetorical strategies being used by white Afrikaners in his study of post-apartheid identity. There was an attempt by participants to separate the Afrikaner identity from a broader African identity, essentially ‘othering’ black Africans and perpetuating a racist ideology that evaluates black people negatively. As one of Verwey’s (2008) participants remarks: “um they kill each other and murder and drink and fight, you know. Drinking and fighting with each other and... I know there are many white people who also do that, but I feel that with them it’s a lot more” (p.57). The ‘us’ and ‘them’ motif is clear. Similarly, in extract 3, despite attempts to remain politically correct, the process of othering is seen in his racialised constructions of dangerous “elements in the street”. The situated action that his talk performs is the job of stigma-reduction, which removes whites as the sole members of the category ‘violent criminals’ which laced media discourses.

Goffman (1963, p.14) asks: “Does the stigmatised individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them?” The above three extracts have been used to show that ‘whiteness’ in Swartruggens had become a publicly knowable mark of stigma, because it was extensively attended to in the talk of participants. White participants assumed their “differentness” was evident on the spot, i.e. they were *those* white people that had been publicly labelled as racist. These conversational interactions, then, were examples of “the plight of the discredited” (Goffman, 1963, p.14), who were trying to reconstruct their publicly shamed identities to fit the grand historical narratives of what it used to mean to be white and live in this town.

We now turn to the discursive construction of black place-identity. The construction of victim amongst black participants is also evident but is managed very differently. Unlike white residents who downplay or deny media versions of the event, black residents amplify media reports of this ‘racist small town’ and use it as rhetorical leverage in the construction of their place-identity. These discourses are used as proof that black people have always been victims of both a marginalised small town and white racism.

### 4.3 Amplifying black victimhood: *'this is a place of struggle'*

The defence of one's territory is at the heart of traditional constructions of place-identity, where people appeal to their sense of "residential entitlement" and "deserved belonging" (Hugh-Jones & Middal, 2009, p.607; cf. Korpela, 1989). So far, white residents' constructions have exemplified this. However, as this section will show, black residents defy traditional expectations. They make no attempt to positively construct Swartruggens. Extract four is quite lengthy (perhaps an example of the "autobiographical impulse" that Govinden (2008, p.14) referred to), but captures the reaction of many black residents in Swartruggens, who work hard at constructing the town as inherently victimising.

#### Extract 4<sup>5</sup>: Black female, 50s

- 1 P: Swartruggens is the smallest town (.) but it's a lot of apartheid here (1) the white/ the  
2 whites community of this place who are very rude (.) especially at our/ our/ at our/ at  
3 our nation the/ the/ they are too white (.) and at the/ the different places there's  
4 place of us and place of whites but you cannot see it if you are not from here  
5 R1: Ok  
6 P: Like we got a hotel at Swartruggens (.) we can go and pass there and see (.) but today  
7 it is closed (1) uh then its only white (1) then when the black people go there they (.)  
8 you know they make/they fight with them (2) so many things  
9 R1: ok  
10 P: uhh and they are using vulgar words to our community (1) it's how the/ the people of  
11 this town I/I/I don't know (.) maybe even the workers most of them you know (.) they  
12 are not working because they/they think (.) they think they are working at the  
13 dangerous place (R2: mmm) this side also is a (unclear) you can't see the black people  
14 its only white (1) if you can go there you will be punished because of your colour (.)  
15 that's what I know (1) I'm born here in 1960 but there's no development (.) its just the  
16 same (.) even at the police station most of them they are still like that (1) the/the/the/the  
17 white police men they/they are not treating our people well (R2: mm) this is how we live  
18 here in Swartruggens (1) eh (.) I think you my brother are the same as us (1) at  
19 Swartruggens they are just going treat you like us (....)

#### Extract 5<sup>6</sup>: Black female, 40s

- 1 P: I told them that if you have people that you wish to get rid of this is a place of struggle  
2 you must bring them here (R: mm Ok) (.) this is a place of struggle (.) it only  
3 accommodates people who are struggling (1) these guys are supporting what I was  
4 saying (.) (R: Ok) there is struggle here (.) it does not help to (unclear) people here are  
5 struggling and the struggle here I have never seen before in the whole of South Africa

<sup>5</sup> R1 refers to myself, the Indian researcher; and R2 refers to my Sesotho speaking research assistant, a black male. This interviewee spoke a combination of English and Sesotho. This extract was mainly in English.

<sup>6</sup> This interview took place in a group context. Both male interviewers were present.

The fact that both interviewers were not from the town was used to advance argument in extract 4, because she emphasises her privileged insider perspective, which the researchers lack, and must therefore trust unconditionally what she has to say. She entitles herself to information and facts which only a long-time resident of the town will know and be able to "see", excluding even the possibility of the researchers finding out for themselves, because even if they look, "you cannot see if you are not from here". By starting her interview like this, it attributes any further disbelief the researchers might have to the fact that they are foreigners to the town, and immunises the rest of her story from scrutiny, disagreement, or alternative observations. These discursive techniques strengthen the identity she has created – a victim of place. She claims to be a victim in at least two ways.

Firstly, she lives not just in a small town, but the "smallest town". The geospatial marginality excludes her from participating in the sort of life a person in a bigger city might enjoy. Secondly, by referring to the informal racial segregation as "apartheid", the gravity of the situation is made extreme, because apartheid was an extreme form of racism. So while apartheid is officially no more, referring to the segregation as apartheid allows everything associated with it to be associated with Swartruggens. Being a black female, in a town practicing "apartheid" is thus victimising. The whites are "rude", "too white" and have an exclusive "place of whites" which she uses as justification for being a victim of place. She will be victimised, "punished" (line 14), if she dared go to specific places in the town, such as the hotel (lines 6-8). And the choices are limited because there is "no development", which she would have witnessed if there was, because her status as a born-and-bred insider since 1960 affords her privileged information about the town's transformation. She is trapped by place, and within this entrapment is further chained by racism.

She then appeals to me (the Indian researcher) in line 20-21, aligning herself with our shared non-whiteness. The familial sense of "my brother" tries to produce an intimate discursive bond between researcher and participant, so that a shared sense of struggle can be created. Fostering empathy helps strengthen her position that Swartruggens is a place of struggle. Helplessness, an aspect of being a victim, is conveyed by the resigned position of "this is how we live here", with no possibility of changing the victimising status quo. While the researchers might not be able to "see" this victimisation (line 4), it will at least be experienced in their interaction with the white community, "they are just going to *treat you*

like us”. This appears to both strengthen and make vulnerable her position that there is “a lot of apartheid here” (line 1) because ultimately there *will* be some way that the researcher’s can (dis)confirm this version of the town, if not through what they observe (which she claims is impossible for an outsider in line 4), then through their interaction (line 21). Ultimately, the confident prediction that whites “are” going to be racist towards both non-white researchers is an accusation that this awful place will *inevitably* reveal its true colours.

In extract 5, a lady speaks about a settlement just outside Swartruggens, where mine-workers and their families live. The use of *struggle* (four times) and *struggling* (twice) emphasises the difficult nature of living in this place, and by extension the burdened identity the residents carry because of this “place of struggle”. Though she mentions no specific reasons why this is a place of struggle, the construction of victim is accomplished by the emphasis of those words. This victimised identity is strengthened by constructing the residents as unwanted and undesired, as “people that you wish to get rid of”. The “struggle” is intimately linked to the place, and the place is a key aspect in the production of their identity. By comparing this “place of struggle” to the “whole of South Africa”, a unique victim status is created and made place-specific – it is only *here* that life is so difficult. By claiming to “have never seen before” such struggle, it constructs an almost first-hand account of someone who has in fact seen all of South Africa and is simply offering a (factual) observation. This interview took place in a group context, and so consensus for this version is gained by referring to previous speakers’ accounts – “these guys are supporting what I was saying” – which is cited as further evidence for her version of life in this town.

This construction is similar to Goredema’s (2008) argument that small towns in South Africa are ‘split off’ from the national imagination and used as discursive dumping grounds for everything that does not represent the new South Africa. The speaker says this town “*only* accommodates people who are struggling”. The rhetoric of the ‘new’ South Africa, as envisaged, for example, by the ideology of the ruling African National Congress’s (ANC) election slogan ‘*A better life for all*’ is perhaps one of the grand narratives against which this speaker is discursively railing. Even though the ANC-elected mayor of Swartruggens publicly drew on discourses of black victimhood in response to the Skierlik shooting (*The Times*, January 21, 2008), the ANC-appointed premier of the North West province visited Swartruggens for the first time during her term only after these shootings took place. The

point here is that disillusionment with political hope is part and parcel of the victimised place-identity of black residents, because it represents the broader ideological waves within which these discourses swim.

Unlike the above extracts, the following speaker accomplishes the task of constructing victimhood more subtly, first by comparing the township in Swartruggens to bigger cities, and then using this construction of place as a reason for its lack of change:

Extract 6: Black male, 20s (interviewed by black interviewer)

- 1 R: Why do you think there are not so many changes?  
2 P: I think it's because our township is far away (1) I think so (.) I think so  
3 R: It is far from?  
4 P: Maybe (3) I dont know (.) metropolitan like Joburg 'cause in Joburg when someone asks  
5 you where are you from and you say Swartruggens they will ask you/you better say (.)  
6 'between Rustenburg and Mafikeng' or 'close to Rustenburg' (R: Ok) It's then they  
7 realise that (.) ok (.) or you would say (1) oh and the other thing (2) maybe we are  
8 famous for that boy who shot those people in Skierlik (.) so if you say 'close to  
9 Skierlik' then maybe people will realise that where we are-- (.) otherwise our  
10 township is gonna wait a hell of a long time for change (.)

The construction of victim is done in four ways in this extract. Firstly, the “township” is far away from a bigger “metropolitan”, and this distance is discursively amplified by the use of these kinds of spatial categories, which stand opposed to one another. Townships have been historically underdeveloped places which black people were forced to move into due to the Group Areas Act (1950) during apartheid. There was mass displacement of people from their homes to unfamiliar and under resourced places. The continued use of the term township to describe a post-apartheid place is significant, because it attends to the lack of transformation and progress in living conditions, despite the end of apartheid and the end of formal policies that unequally distributed resources to non-white places. Secondly, the town of Swartruggens is constructed as so obscure and unknown that one must refer to it in relation to the bigger cities that surround it – “you better say ‘between Rustenburg and Mafikeng’”. Thirdly, its only claim to fame is a publicised murder spree that occurred in a place nearby which, while hardly flattering, is the one event that may make people realise “where we are”. The only detail offered here is the name of the place – Skierlik. The shooter, Johan Nel, or the deceased, are simply “that boy who shot those people”, which works to foreground *place* as

opposed to people, because it is place that was made “famous”. Govinden (2008) drives the same point in her analysis that places in South Africa signify certain well known events, such as Sharpeville or District Six. Skierlik now joins the list. The fourth technique he uses is one of doubt and uncertainty. In lines 2 he says “I think so (.) I think so”; line 4 begins with “Maybe (3) I don’t know”; and even in line 8 he says “*maybe* we are famous for that boy”. Edwards (2003) notes that “formulations of ignorance” or reluctance can be rhetorically advantageous by creating the impression that one is merely offering off-the-cuff observations with no specific axe to grind (p.45). Creating a sense of ignorance also manages to attribute blame for the town’s lack of progress to some unknown other, and therefore out of the hands of its citizens. He is thus constructing himself as a victim of this place, who must “wait” for this elusive “change” to come. But place, too, is a victim – of geospatial marginality and its continued sense of still being a ‘township’. Swartruggens (and by extension the speaker) “is gonna wait a hell of a long time for change” because small towns that are far away from big metropolitans are not on the transformational agenda.

The following short exchange manages to achieve similar interactional goals by drawing on discourses of ‘small town struggle’ and constructing the residents as victims thereof, helpless in an isolated geopolitical periphery. This piece of talk has similar objectives to the preceding extracts, but in the context of the youth’s future.

Extract 7: Black male, 20s

- 1 R: As the youth what do you believe your future is like?
- 2 P: to tell the truth (.) I do not think that it is good (1) unless if you strike them very hard
- 3 you see? It is not guaranteed (1) you see (.) with us the youth (.) if you try something
- 4 and it becomes difficult we give up easily (2) unless you get out of this place (.) but
- 5 home sweet home (.) you can't live away from home.
- 6 R: mmm:: Ok I see

By starting his response with “to tell the truth”, it implies that there is only one, true reality, which he access to, and he will merely objectively and innocently present. Victim status is created quickly because the future of the youth is constructed as uncertain (“it is not guaranteed”) and place is the sole reason why one would fail in an endeavour. Even though he lacks perseverance (“we give up easily”), even perseverance is contingent upon place, because success is only possible if “you get out of this place”. However, “home sweet home” allows the speaker to fall back on a popular everyday saying, which romanticises one's home

and makes leaving it difficult. Place, then, is constructed as inherently victimising, because despite the struggles and uncertain future that escort it, “you can't live away from home”.

In contrast to Gotham (2007) who argues that spatial metaphors help people in poverty to gain agency over their identity, this participant has constructed his place-identity as mostly hopeless. Gotham (2007) notes how residents of public housing projects often use spatial metaphors to distance themselves from potentially stigmatising places. Here, however, this participant uses spatial metaphor to continue a long history of victimisation, by using a popular cultural idiom about home (place) that is hoped to be recognised and agreed upon. Agency and responsibility is completely shifted from the individual to the place, with individual free will and determination omitted from this participant's argument. Place traps him. The socio-economic conditions of their apartheid and post-apartheid lives remain the same, and their experience remains that of marginalised black subject, with a past that is not materially differentiated from its present (cf. Farred, 2006).

Thus far, two analytic points have been made. Firstly, the construction of place-identity by white residents includes defensive discursive manoeuvres against media-produced stigma. This is done by undermining the grand narrative of ‘racist small town whites’ that exists in the media's public discourse, and by the discursive construction of themselves as victims of these media reports. Secondly, the parallel construction of place-identity by black residents amplify media reports of ‘victimised small town blacks’, in order to construct themselves as victims of racist whites and a marginalised place. The rhetorical battle for victimhood has exposed the racial fault lines. However, a significant third space exists on the discursive victim continuum. Shared discourses of Indian residents construct a place-identity that neither shares the strong stigma of white residents nor the strong marginality of black residents, but acknowledges the problematisation of the town. The following extracts flesh out this point.

#### **4.4 Indian place-identity: An ambivalent third space**

The following two extracts compare an Indian man and a white woman both arguing against the media's construction of the town as racist. However, each extract has different rhetorical effects and is trying to do slightly different things with their talk. This difference is examined in terms of an ambivalent third space that Indians occupy in the town, which is neither as

victimising as blacks construct it to be, nor as stigmatising as whites argue it to be. Still, their identity contains some elements of victimhood and stigma, but serves different ends.

Extract 8<sup>7</sup>: Indian male, 50s

- 1 P: It's actually a very friendly town  
2 R: Mmm ok (1) and it seems like race is a big issue in this town?  
2 P: Ja:: it's just/ it's just (.) there is (.) but racism (1) is there I guess you'll get it anywhere  
4 even in your big towns as well (1) It's just unfortunate that we experienced that big  
5 shooting in Skierlik you know/ you know that? (R: Ja) That labelled us big time racists  
6 but it isn't like that (.) you know what I mean? (R: Ja Ok)

Extract 9<sup>8</sup>: White female, 40s

- 1 R: How would you describe the people with each other? Is there any racism?  
2 P: No. You have probably recently seen the news about the shooting that happened  
3 here and the news going around that we are racists, that is not true! Well... I want  
4 to say it very clearly that it is big lies, all lies! The people here are very caring  
5 towards one another, we are united in Swartruggens. It upsets us when people are  
6 telling such lies! I want to say again, it is all lies!

The invitation by the researcher to speak about racism in both these extracts led both participants to defend their town (and in turn, their identities). The Indian man concedes that “there is” racism, “but” it is made a feature of everyday life, in every context, including “big towns”. This act of normalising racism – “you’ll get it anywhere” – suggests there is nothing unique or place-specific about the race-relations in Swartruggens.

Extract 9 explicitly blames the media (“the news going around”) as being unfair (“big lies, all lies!”). Extract 8, however, only alludes to the media: “that labelled us big time racists”. He makes no mention of who has done the labelling and the Skierlik shooting seems to stand for itself as stigmatising, regardless of what else the media has specifically said about the town. Still, his discursive build-up of Swartruggens as “friendly”, and racism as a normal part of life in any town, undermines the media’s discourse of ‘small town racism’. The “unfortunate” murders in Skierlik are described race-neutrally – “that big shooting” – and also serve to weaken more racially-motivated accounts of the murder which have been written in

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<sup>7</sup> All the Indian participants’ were interviewed by the Indian researcher in English

<sup>8</sup> Extract 9 was translated from Afrikaans to English and does not all contain the usual conventions.

newspapers. An alternate account is offered, which is a town that is “friendly” and “not like that” (extract 8) and “caring” and “united” (extract 9).

The important analytic point relevant to this section is that the “lies” in the media are more forcefully denied in extract 9, with the participant not even bothering to normalise racism, which was done in extract 8. The attack on place-identity is perhaps experienced more personally for the white participant than the Indian one, because the discourse of ‘small town racism’ in the media has portrayed whites as racists and blacks as victims of this racism. Indians, while being a clearly visible presence in the town, have been completely absent from media representations of Swartruggens (none of the news reports in the major newspaper articles or online forums make reference to an Indian population or quote Indian residents). This absence has perhaps been less stigmatising for Indian residents, who are able to construct themselves as innocent bystanders in a black-white racial battle, preserving their place-identity and thus giving them less impetus to undermine media versions *as forcefully* as white residents, as in the clear contrasts of tone between extracts 8 and 9, both of whom are nevertheless constructing a stigmatised place-identity and victims of the media.

Like the black/white discursive battle for victimhood, extract 8 also constructs a discourse of victimisation. However, in order to see how the social construction of the ‘Indian victim’ is done differently, we need to first re-examine the differences in the black and white construction of victimhood. The difference between the discourses of black victimisation and white victimisation is that the former emphasises a sense of hopelessness and resigned acceptance, while the latter emphasises resistance. Despite the construction of a stigmatised place-identity that relies heavily on a discourse of being victims of an unfair media, white ‘victims’ are railing against, quite forcefully, the versions of Swartruggens that they disagree with (as in extracts 2 and 9). There is white resistance via the many rival hypotheses being put forward. It is a place-identity that is both collectively shared and stigmatised *but* – most importantly – not historically constant (hence the resistance). It is an unwanted identity; one which only recently has replaced “friendly” and “caring” versions of the town and its people. On the other hand, the construction of the black victimised place-identity (extracts 5, 6 and 7) is not accompanied by resistance or situated in a broader narrative of historical incongruence. Black residents argue that this is how life in Swartruggens has always been. For example, in the analysis of extract 4, the resigned position that “this is how we live here in Swartruggens”

suggests acceptance and victimisation as a historical and present fact. There is also no mention of shame in the construction of black victim identities, unlike the stigmatised group who claim to be “upset” by the “lies” (extract 9).

In contrast, the construction of Indian victimhood does not rely on situating the rhetoric in any broader historical narrative of what ‘Indian life’ has always been like in this town (which distinguishes from black and white constructions). Instead, the “unfortunate” shooting that could happen “anywhere” is victimising *by being associated* with this town – “that labelled *us* big time racists”. But remember, Indians were never labelled racists in the media; they were omitted altogether. So when he refers to “us” he must be referring to both Indians and whites, thereby subtly aligning himself with the white residents. The stigmatisation of whites is thus stigmatising for Indians too, but only by association as joint residents of the town. Place incriminates his identity.

Extract 10 uses common discursive techniques to persuade the interviewer that life in Swartruggens is enjoyable, despite its problems.

Extract 10: Indian man, 20’s

- 1 P: It’s alright (.) I enjoy life here (1) I got no complaints
- 2 R: Ok (.) and how’s life in your community
- 3 P: It’s alright (1) It’s too:: close.
- 4 R: Too close? (P: Ja)(Laughs) What you mean too close?
- 5 P: *Eish* it’s like too Indian (R: Ok) You know what I mean (R: Ok) Still like that (1) Indian
- 6 R: Ok (.) so there’s only Indian people living there?
- 7 P: No there are blacks and... there were a few whites staying there (1) And/But you know
- 8 whites (1) they come and move

Similar to extract four, my race as an Indian researcher was an important reference point to obtain consensus for the participant’s version of life in Swartruggens, even though here this strategy tries to legitimise a version that competes with the black resident in extract four. “You know what I mean” in line 5 suggests some shared understanding between researcher and participant of what “too Indian” might refer to. Despite this, he enjoys life in the town, and has “no complaints”, a comment that precedes a complaint about his community being “too Indian”. But it is this “systematic vagueness” (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.162), which continues throughout the interview, that is the rhetorical strategy used construct life in the

town as enjoyable and without complaints. As the researcher probes his responses, he retreats from expanding further by throwing the ball in the researcher's court, who should "know what I mean". Billig (1987) contends that what is constructed as 'common sense' is in fact the taken-for-granted ideology within which discourses are operating. These kinds of "appeals to intersubjectivity" (Edwards, 2003, p.136) make it self-evident what "Indian" should mean, because we are both Indian. This work of normalising what "too Indian" means also implicitly argues that Indians are the same no matter where we come from, thereby discrediting other discourses of 'small town people' or 'small town Indians'.

By doing this, an ambivalent place-identity is maintained: one which neither loathes nor loves Swartruggens (line 1), is aware of its shortcomings (line 3), but downplays them because of the link between place and identity. So while there is some sense of being trapped by place, even the shortcomings which he names still have positive side-effects, which are framed positively by others, i.e. being "united" (extract 9); "everybody cares for each other" and "people support each other" (extract 2). Victimhood, here, has an ambiguous property.

In addition, lines 7-8 mention blacks and whites who also live in Rodeonia, the largely Indian suburb. Despite their presence, he constructs Rodeonia as "too Indian" and tight-knit, implying differences between Indians and whites that are common knowledge: "but you know whites (1) they come and move". By assuming an intersubjective common understanding, he does not have to elaborate because his ideological premises are assumed to be familiar knowledge between us. However, while this participant is not explicitly accusing whites of being racist (as in extract 4), he is not shying away from making distinctions based on race. This third space of Indian life is characterised by an acknowledgement that race is a variable in the type of life one lives in this town, but does not forcefully rhetorically mobilise race as stigmatising or victimising.

Extract 11, like extract 10, downplays problematic aspects of life in Swartruggens, but draws on expected discourses of what life in a small town *ought to* be like to justify his construction of place-identity.

Extract 11: Indian businessman

- 1 R: And the town would you say they one community?  
2 P: Ja (R: Ok) Our Indian community is a very close-knit community  
3 (... )  
4 P: Ja everybody's there for everybody (1) If there's/ you know /I can have a :: (1) I can  
5 have a quarrel with you or a fight with you (.) tomorrow if there's an occasion ay ( ) the  
6 guys forget all about that (.) and they there for you  
7 R: Yes yes (.) ok  
8 P: (3) the other thing is everybody is very nosy, that's the only thing But you expect that  
9 in a small town [speaks to customer] you expect that in a small town you know  
10 R: everybody knows everybody's business (laughs)  
11 P: Ja everybody knows everybody's business (.) Ja you don't have to tell anybody they all  
12 know it you know (R: laughs) But uh:: (2) It's fine like that's (2) not a real problem

Like the Mizrahi in Israeli towns (Yiftachel, 2006), the Indians in Swartruggens preserve their cultural distinctiveness and identity through geographical separateness, living in Rodeonia that is majority Indian occupied. "Our Indian community" (line 2) conveys a sense of belonging and ownership. However, my original question asks about the town, and whether the *town* is one community. The town in a broad sense is not attended to. Instead, the "close-knit community" of Indians where "everybody's there for everybody" becomes the focal point. Lines 4-6 tell a narrative of interdependence that hinges on a "scripted story of what *generally* happens" (Edwards, 2003, p.38). The formulation of this script works by constructing a regularity in the way events happen in the community, making them "factually robust and also somewhat knowable in advance without having to wait and see for any specific instance" (Ibid, p.38). Even the introduction of a potential negative quality of this "close-knit community" is introduced as "the *other* thing" (line 8), which is not evaluative.

The construction of gossip as a known feature of small towns, something that one should "expect", normalises being nosy because it is what small towns are about. There is a subtle ambivalence influencing this participant's place-identity – he does not like that "everybody" is "nosy", but makes it tolerable by reducing it to an expected feature of the place. By suggesting that "it's not a real problem", downplaying his irritation that "everybody knows everybody's business", the main discourse of 'happy (Indian) community' is preserved. Similarly, when asked about crime in the town another participant responded: 'Ja you have petty crime:: (1) if you not there they break into your house (.) maybe eat a little food grab a thing or two (2) but (.) uh (1) that's the locals (.) They get caught very quickly you know'.

This trivial construction of crime (like the trivialisation of gossip) as “petty” and the almost blasé account of what criminals do, “maybe eat a little food, grab a thing or two”, serves to bolster a version of the town as peaceful and without serious problems. In addition, the speed at which “they” get caught – “very quickly you know” – undermines possible versions of crime in bigger cities, where it takes much longer for criminals to get caught. Even in naming them, ‘criminals’ are never used, for even that may be too strong a word for the “petty crime” experienced in Swartruggens. Instead, “they” and “the locals” euphemises the criminals.

The construction of “petty” problems in Swartruggens appears in a number of interviews and is often shrugged off as a feature of the place, which must be tolerated because it cannot be eradicated. The normativity around gossip, for example, trivialises it, thus limiting a negative evaluation of the participants themselves as gossipers, who are complicit in maintaining this culture of small town life. This construction of participant-observer (here, in the context of gossip) is not unlike the broader (Indian) project of discursively constructing an (Indian) third space, where participation and observation are situated at a critical distance from the rest of the town’s (non-Indian) citizens. In this final extract, the idea of a third space is perhaps best illustrated. The discursive creation of (an Indian) place-identity is performed by drawing sharp distinctions between whites, Indians and blacks, and placing Indians in some neutral (and privileged) space that allows them to engage in race-talk without being constructing themselves as racist.

Extract 12: Indian businessman

- 1 P: In all the /the (1) these little (1) what u call (1) little *dorpie*<sup>9</sup>s you know (1) uh:: (2)  
 2 There’s still very conservative whites here you know (1) You take Swartruggens (.)  
 3 you take Koster (.) I mean Ventersdorp (.) you must have heard of Ventersdorp?  
 4 R: Ja  
 5 P: That’s where Eugene Terre’Blanche comes from<sup>10</sup> (1) Ja so (.) the Boere he still (2) I  
 6 suppose they grew up that way and–  
 7 R: Ja  
 8 P: I suppose maybe not this (.) but the next generation (.) will come out with them ja  
 9 (1) you find they still using the K-word you know (R: Ok) I / maybe / not that we  
 10 won’t use it (.) we use it for fun you know

<sup>9</sup> Afrikaans word for *small towns*, generally used in an affectionate sense

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Eugene Terre’Blanche, leader of the Afrikaner *Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB) (the Afrikaner Resistance Movement) was later killed in early 2010. The white supremacist leader was murdered by two black men on his farm in Ventersdorp, reigniting racial tensions in the North West area and reopening up major debate in the public sphere on race-relations in post-apartheid South Africa. Relevant to this analysis, a similar discourse of victimhood emerged in subsequent political discourse and public responses (Mail & Guardian Online, 9 April 2010).

- 11 R: Ok  
12 P: We won't go around using it on people

The discourse of small town racism is introduced as a known feature of such places, but one that exists because of racist whites (lines 1 and 2). Blaming “conservative whites” from “little dorpies” absolves this Indian resident from any role in maintaining this known culture of racism, which he is well aware of but not implicated in. This third space is constructed in three ways. Firstly, there is an ‘othering’ process that takes place by referring to “conservative whites” (line 2), “the Boere” (line 5), “they” (lines 6 and 9), “them” (line 8), and making Eugene Terre’Blanche the exemplar of white (racist) conservatism. Secondly, there is the construction of innocent (Indian) bystanders who observe these racist whites “using the K-word”. Despite a frank admission that he also uses the K-word, the intentions are constructed as different, “we use it for fun you know” (line 11) and “won’t go around using it on people” (line 13). There is the creation of two separate categories of people who use “the K-word”, i.e. racist conservative whites like Eugene Terre’Blanche and Indians (“we”) who merely use it in jest and never direct it at a black person. His non-alignment with the first category (whites), and his non-alignment with the “people” whom the K-word is used to describe (blacks), creates an identity that is distinctly separate from both race groups in the town. A unique place-identity is delicately discursively constructed: one that is not the object of victimisation by white racism; not the perpetrator of racism directed at blacks; and one that is not stigmatised by virtue of being a resident in this conservative “*dorpie*”. The third space of critical detachment that has no part in the black/white racial tensions of the town serves to bolster a version of place-identity that is manageable to live with.

In summary, the dialectic of integration-separation that is at play with Indians in the town of Swartruggens moves between a flexible space of being both inside and outside, participant and observer, critically distanced but also implicated. Management of this ‘third space’ requires culturally shared discourses about identity in relation to place. The above extracts exposed the production of a shared sense of self that is linked to a place constructed neither as inherently victimising nor completely stigmatising. Instead, these discursively produced place-identities are somewhat ambivalent, constructed as neutral, but always more relaxed and less rhetorically forceful than those of black or white participants.

#### 4.5 Discussion: The ideological roots of victimhood

This analysis has thus far been a deconstruction of ‘taken for granted’ human dialogue, the very thing that creates and sustains collective constructions of identity and place. However, what purpose does victimhood and its parallel racialised constructions serve? What are the ideological roots of victimhood? Some possible answers (and questions) are offered.

First, is the elicitation of sympathy. In the interview context this cannot be ignored, as any methodology is implicated in its findings. Telling one’s story to a researcher who comes from a big city and who is well aware of the versions of the town in the news, is threatening. My own viewpoints were rarely made explicit; in fact, participants never bothered to ask me what I already knew about the shootings, or what my impression of the town was. All participants’ discourses were produced with the assumption that I was well aware of the town’s racist image. Blacks amplified this narrative, whites denied it, and Indians downplayed it. But one rhetorical purpose, certainly, was to elicit sympathy as part of the argumentative work they were doing with their talk, as they made their discursive constructions of place-identity credible. Mangcu (2008) argues that this is a frequent quality of white discourse in South Africa, naming it a “racialised mobilisation of sympathy” (p.103). He says this rallying cry of solidarity, to forgive or to understand, can be seen in other events of white transgression such as former cricket captain Hansie Cronje being caught for match-fixing. Cronje was initially vilified in the media, but later rehabilitated as a repentant hero of national sport, especially after his unexpected death. However, Mangcu argues that the same leniency is rarely offered by white citizens when the ‘perpetrator’ is black, but that this is consistent with the punitive, long held stereotypes of black incompetence and the need to punish black people. He comments:

Too often executioners are able to mobilize public sympathy by hogging media conferences, and calling an amazing array of sophisticated diversions and metaphors... before we know it, a reversal of roles has taken place... the original perpetrator has become the victim (Ibid, p.104).

This was perhaps best seen in the early post-apartheid years during publicly broadcasted Truth and Reconciliation Commission. White ‘perpetrators’ of apartheid atrocities became victims of their time, or victims of a cruel system where good people had to do bad things. However, though their confessional narratives concretised the ‘black victim’ in the national

psyche, public discourse could certainly not ignore the 'white victim' that had also emerged from the TRC. These discourses continue to be reproduced in contexts such as Skierlik.

Secondly, white interests and identity is preserved by claiming victimhood. Given an awful historical baggage, for whites, the maintenance of victim status absolves them from any collective blame for the actions of Johan Nel (who is a stark, albeit extreme, reminder of the political ideology which afforded them the privileges they still enjoy). They, too, can claim to be victims of the Skierlik incident, by being unjustly targeted by the media and stereotyped as racists. Taking any other position other than victim would not be in their interests.

Thirdly, and perhaps paradoxically, black people do not construct a discourse of agency and self-empowerment, which would be counter-hegemonic and to their benefit. They reproduce discourses of marginality, of victimhood, of helplessness and powerlessness. The reasons for this can only be assumed. Is it a form of learned helplessness that is created and maintained in everyday discourse and stems from years of failed improvement in the quality of their lives both under apartheid and after apartheid? Is it based on an expectation that after years of discrimination the government should (must?) implement policies or structures that ensure the betterment of their lives? Is it a culture of entitlement that is becoming a pervasive feature of post-apartheid life? Is it a fear that the little they have is still too much to risk in any project of political or social mobilisation, suggesting that there is risk that comes with being anything other than a 'black victim'? This risk might be an economic one, where railing against unfair treatment might result in being cut-off altogether from whatever meagre income they earn at the moment. Similar to Harvey's (1993) example of the small American town of Hamlet, that was geopolitically isolated and hence economically exploitative of its population, this kind of capitalistic exploitation may not be uncommon in small towns whose major economic activity is either mining or farming, and *black* manual labour. Discourses that disrupt the racial hierarchy may cut people off from limited employment options. The widening class differences simultaneously expose differences in wealth between race groups, but often hide the spatialities that allow these differences to exist. If workers are earning minimum wage and are trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation, escaping this cycle becomes difficult if government fails to see how small town *spatialities* are crucial factors in maintaining this oppression by, for example, marginalising these towns when it comes to service delivery or creating new opportunities for employment. Being trapped, however, still

means being part of the cycle (albeit an unfair one), which results in wages or a salary. But as long as this unjust material reality remains, discourses of black place-identity will probably remain resigned and hopeless (as extracts 4-7 show). One other possibility is the function discourse plays in acting as a form of protest, where these resistant discourses of life in the town as victimising actually precipitate larger acts of resistance, such as service delivery protests. Of course, these protests can only be justified if there is an ongoing narrative of victimhood.

Fourth, in the broader project of moving beyond racialism altogether (i.e. not even using racial categories for talking or analysing), Farred (2006) notes that “post-racialism cannot be achieved ‘without violating the precious forms of solidarity and community’” (p.51). This chapter’s analysis revealed quite clearly how place-identity and discourses of victimhood are always racialised. To get deracialised constructions would therefore be a ‘violation of community’, one whose racial character has become naturalised in a country where race has insidiously crept into every aspect of living. Ideology, after all, manifests as our everyday common sense constructions (Billig, 1987). That these forms of racial alignment and solidarity is “precious” is evident in the careful discursive work being done in Swartruggens. Residents not only construct themselves as racial beings; they further construct racialised and racist discourses of the ‘other’ in relation to the ‘we’. The resilience of ‘race’ is clear.

Finally, though speculative, race is perhaps persistent in post-apartheid South Africa due to the discourses of racialism inherent in the language of post-apartheid political discourse. Farred (2006) comments on the ideological roots of post-apartheid racialisation, arguing that through various public speeches given by Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, the public came to know that racial identity “when it is either affirmed or transcended, is always available as a first or last recourse in the post-apartheid democracy. Race is always, politically and philosophically speaking, in play in South Africa. In South Africa, to think politically is to think racially...” (p.55) He argues that the deployment of racial rhetoric, especially during Mbeki’s presidency, served as a potent ideological tool that insidiously made race an oppressive discourse for (poor) black South Africans, who were ‘punished’ for opposing white rule during apartheid, and now further punished if they criticize black rule under the ANC. Mbeki was able to concretise black (read ANC) political hegemony by ensuring that racial subjectivities remain strongly entrenched in South Africa. Escaping the discourse of

racial identity, then, would be a betrayal to ‘race groups’ that one belongs to. Ironically, as Farred notes, post-apartheid racial identities have actually “hardened discursively” (p.64). In the same vein, Mangcu (2008) argues that the conservative nationalism of Tony Leon’s opposition politics worked by invoking the shared fears of white South Africans who were struggling to form a new post-apartheid identity. The ‘discursive hardening’ was done through election campaigns that failed to help his “mainly white constituency transcend the fears of an unresolved past” (Ibid, p.109). Nation-building took a backseat in the political struggle for parliamentary seats. As Barber (1998, p.14) quips: “Liberals, ever wary, still preach: ‘Defend yourselves! The enemy is everywhere!’” (in Mangcu, 2009 p.107). If this is Tony Leon’s legacy for white South Africa, then this is the common sense ideology that allows discourses of white racism in South Africa to continue.

#### **4.6 Issues for further analysis**

The analysis of texts is an exercise in trying to understand it. But we can never fully understand a text, because meaning is contingent on a range of variables – speaker, context, language used, audience, ideologies and available discourses. To presume the possibility of complete understanding is to slide back into a realist ontology which the social constructionist paradigm rejects. Johnstone (2002) drives this point by remarking that discourse analysis is always partial, provisional, and incomplete. How far outward from the text one needs to go depends entirely on the goals of the analysis. This study has drawn sufficient instances of talk-in-interaction from the interview material to illustrate its main analytic points around the racialised constructions of various discourses of place-identity. But many discursive stones have been left unturned, and these can certainly become the topic of future studies and analyses. What spatio-embodied practices are involved in the reproduction of racialised subjectivities? (cf. Brown, 2008). How do people justify minimal efforts to racially integrate the residential areas? How would white residents who construct the town as friendly and supportive respond to direct accusations of racism from other black residents, thereby undermining the ‘media as a third force’ argument? What sorts of reasons do (white) residents offer to explain Johan Nel’s actions? How do black residents construct reasons for staying in the town despite calling it a place of constant struggle? Has the social construction of the Skierlik incident been used in any way to mend race relations in the town? How do class differences impact and influence racial polarities in the town?

## 4.7 Limitations of this study

Like any type of research, there are limits to one's conclusions. Four of these limits are discussed here.

Firstly, Stanley (2008, in Ruppel, Dege, Andrews and Squire, 2008, p.6) argues that social research must recognise “the importance of social structure but also of changing social and political contexts and the events occurring in this”. Certainly, this speaks to the limits of any kind of study that makes interpretive comments on a society: findings exist within a particular *zeitgeist*, which may not be relevant at the time of publication or reading. I do not wish to “reduce persons acting in social life to simple – or indeed complex – reifications” (Ibid, p.6).

Secondly, while these findings may be extrapolated to similar contexts, naming these contexts may prove difficult. It may be ‘problematized places’ at the broadest level, ‘small towns in South Africa’ at a medium level, or ‘small towns in the North West province publicly accused of being racist’ at an even more precise level. Following Silverman’s (2000, p.98) dictum of knowing “a lot about a little”, this study concedes to this fact, because the ‘whole picture’ can never be researched and it would be misleading to think that any type of research can accurately capture our complex social reality.

Thirdly, perhaps most importantly, is my own research bias, which Maxwell (1996) cites as a common threat to validity in qualitative research. Naturally, I declare that I have not overtly or consciously manipulated the data or findings. But qualitative analysis does contain an element of subjectivity that is perhaps inescapable, and for this reason Maxwell (1996, p.91) suggests that since we cannot eliminate some level of personal influence, our goal should be to “understand it and to use it productively”. This was done as much as possible throughout this write-up, and more explicitly in the section *On Reflexivity* in Chapter 3.

Lastly, the exclusive focus on spoken discourse has many limitations which have been extensively argued elsewhere. Suffice to note here that I acknowledge that “there is more to life than talk”; the “constructive power of the ‘bodily’ practices of race” are also significant analytic foci (Brown, 2008, p.143-4). Racialised discourses are materially deployed in physical bodily acts, which together facilitate racial positioning. This study can be taken a step further by dually focusing on how race is materially reproduced in Swartruggens.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

If we return to Dixon and Durrheim's (2000) definition of place identity, as a "collective construction, produced and modified through human dialogue, that allows people to make sense of their locatedness", acting also as a "resource for rhetorical and ideological action", the discursive roots of the place-identity link are made clear. This analysis has uprooted those rhetorical techniques that create, sustain, and perpetuate certain types of racialised discourses of self and place. In doing so, the contribution to the literature on place-identity is an understanding of discourses of victimisation, and how they are spacialized and racialised.

Place-identity threat often results in residents of a place to discursively reconstruct and preserve their beloved place as one worth living in (e.g. Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009). These kinds of analyses litter the place-identity literature. However, this study has shown that black residents of Swartruggens/Skierlik amplify disadvantage, with little stake in producing a positive version of the town. This amplification of disadvantage results in a discourse of victimhood, which serve (and stem from) particular political ideologies. White residents also construct victimhood, but differently. They amplify discourses of stigma, arguing that the media is spreading lies. Similar to other studies of threatened place-identity, white residents have a stake in downplaying negative discourses of the town and amplifying positive ones.

The construction of victimhood has been the key discursive battle being waged between black and white residents of Swartruggens/Skierlik. Some ideological reasons were considered that may help situate these discourses in the broader political climate of what was then a 16 year old post-apartheid democracy. The construction of an ambivalent third space by Indian residents was also considered, arguing that positive place-identity is preserved by keeping a critical distance from what the media has constructed as a black/white racial tension. Positive place-identity, however, was not at stake in black residents' discourses. Black participants were quite willing, eager even, to negatively construct place-identity. This counter-construction, defiantly different from the white participants, serves a protest function.

Through discourse, black residents were protesting the strained race-relations within the town, and the terrible material conditions they have to put up with in ‘this place of struggle’.

The intention of this analysis of spoken discourse was to further our understanding of the post-apartheid construction of place, race, and identity, particularly when a place becomes problematised in the media, threatening the place-identities of its residents. The role of media reporting of the Skierlik shooting was given a central primacy, because it was the media that essentially thrust the spotlight upon this small town.

The relevance to present day South Africa is seen in widely publicized events that have captured the national spotlight and public spheres. The town of Ventersdorp, in the vicinity of Swartruggens in the North West province, made international headlines following the allegedly racist murder of Eugene Terre’Blanche. The gruesome murder of this infamous white supremacist in early 2010 led political party the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and Afrikaner civil rights group AfriForum to claim that ANC Youth League president Julius Malema inflamed racial tension by singing an apartheid defiance song with the words *dubul’ibhunu* (shoot the Boer) prior to this killing. In an ironic twist, the ANC planned to take AfriForum and the FF+ to the Equality Court for making such claims, accusing them of running “a campaign of hatred” that racially polarises South Africa (*Mail & Guardian Online*, 9 April, 2010). ANC lawyer Siyabonga Mahlangu alluded to the analytic point made in this study: “Their (i.e. white Afrikaners) campaign is polarising our society. They’re saying Malema’s songs are causing the death of Afrikaner farmers, when the facts speak to the contrary. They’re *claiming sole victimhood* from the struggle that our country experienced” (*Mail & Guardian Online*, 9 April, 2010, my emphasis). The subtext of such a statement implies a need for racial ‘victim status’ to be (evenly?) shared, like a post-apartheid prize that no one race group must lay claim to.

The battle for victimhood continues to have resonance in contemporary South Africa and reverberates in the political discourses battling against each other in our public spaces. However, unlike the Dodo bird in *Alice in Wonderland*, who jubilantly exclaimed that “Everyone has won and all must have prizes”, the post-apartheid proverbial Dodo seems to be shouting, “Everyone is oppressed and all must be victim”.

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## APPENDICES 1-8

### Appendix 1: Statistical snapshot of Swartruggens

The information in this section is largely based on a 2006 municipal report of the Bojanala District (Motsepe, 2006). Some are observations made while in the town.

Swartruggens is in the North West Province, situated along the N4 highway in between the cities of Rustenburg and Zeerust, en route to Botswana. Administratively, it is part of the category B Kgetleng Rivier Local Municipality, which is one of the five local municipalities within the larger category C Bojanala Platinum District Municipality. The popular holiday destination, Sun City, is about an hour from the town. The two major towns in the District, Rustenburg and Brits, act as service centres to the nearby agricultural communities.

The larger District Municipality has a population of about 1.2 million and 323 000 households. About 40% of the population is jobless; 67% of the households earn less than R1 600 a month; and only 6.8 percent of all households earn in excess of R6 400 a month. Kgetleng Rivier is 3973 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 36 477, five wards, and 10 497 households. Swartruggens accounts for less than half of the Kgetleng Rivier population. Racially, the ratio of blacks, whites and Indians is similar to the rest of South Africa, with roughly 85% blacks, 10% whites, and 4% Indians.

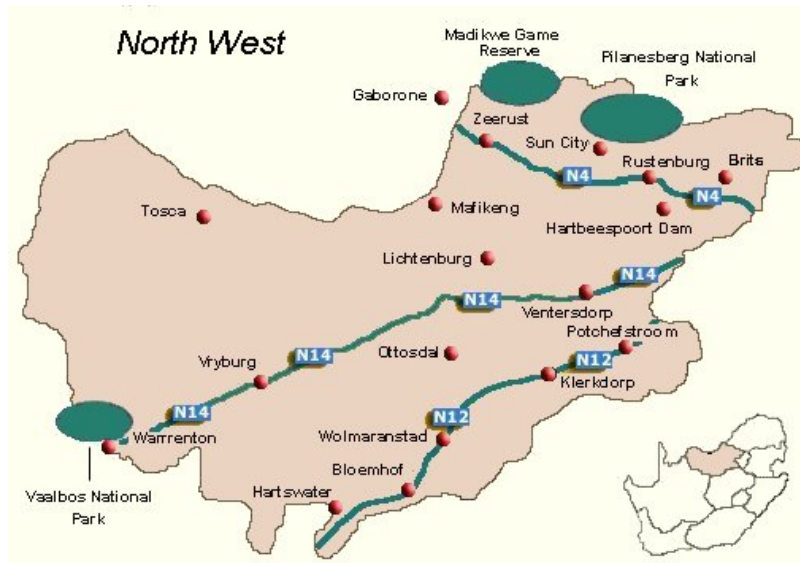
Almost 15% of the District population older than 20 years of age have not received any form of schooling; 19,7% only some primary education; 35% of the total adult population are functionally illiterate; 80% of the adult population have not completed their high school education; and only 5.5% have obtained some form of tertiary education. Almost 40% of the population is 19 years of age or younger. A total of 53.7% of the population falls within the economically active category of 20-60 years of age. Town-specific statistics are unavailable. In Swartruggens, there are three schools: a multi-lingual, mixed race primary school; a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking, mixed race (but largely white) high school; and a mixed race (but largely

black) high school. Most Indian learners (who only speak English) school in Rustenburg, 50km away, due to language barriers in the Swartruggens schools.

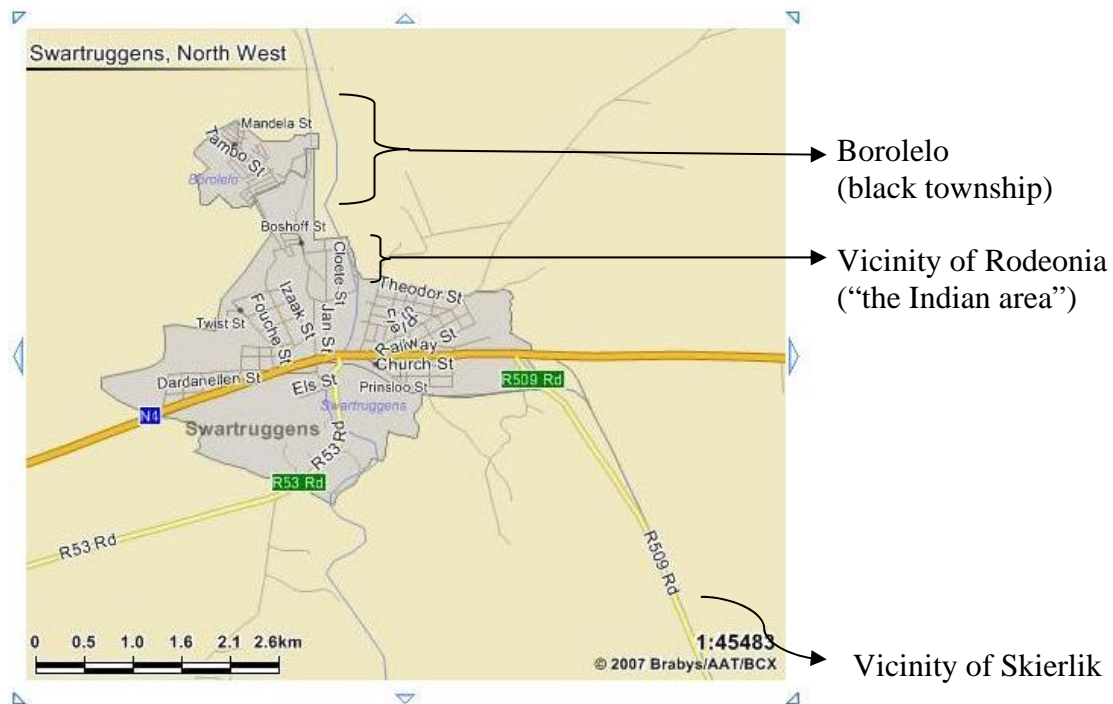
Mining is the dominant economic activity in the District and a major source of jobs. The region's climate limits agricultural activities to livestock (cattle and game) and small stock (normally poultry for egg production) farming, and the cultivation of citrus and irrigated crops such as tobacco and wheat, flowers and plant nurseries. Hartbeespoort Dam, Sun City Complex and Pilanesburg Game Park are the main tourist attractions. The recently built N4 freeway which runs across the District is likely increase the district's economy. Many rural areas in the District are difficult to access because of the poor roads network and the only source of information is the Ward Councillors who convey information on District matters at meetings, usually poorly attended. However, newspapers are available in Swartruggens.

Politically, the African National Congress (ANC) runs the Kgetleng Rivier Municipality. According to Statistics South Africa (2009), in the April 2009 national and local elections, the ANC took 73% of the vote (10 130 people), followed by about 2119 votes for the Democratic Alliance (15%), Congress of the People (5%), and the Freedom Front Plus (3%). The municipality had a 71% voter turnout, with the Borolelo community in Swartruggens having the highest number of individual votes cast – 1913 (73% voter turnout).

## Appendix 2: Maps<sup>1</sup>



Map 1: North West Province. Swartruggens is located in between Zeerust and Rustenburg, with the N4 highway running through the town's central business district.

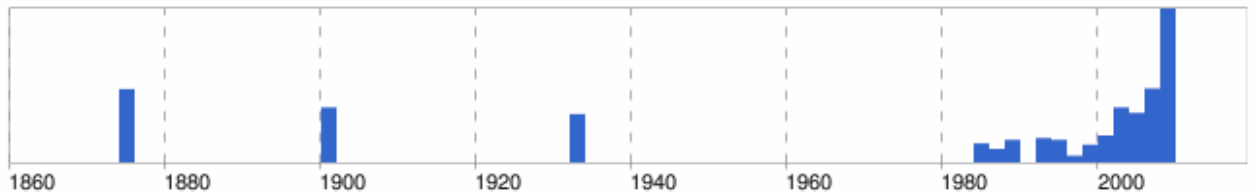


Map 2: Swartruggens, shaded grey. Above the yellow line (the N4 highway) is the 'black township' of Borolelo, distinct and separately demarcated furthest away from the CBD. The concentration of Indians is in Rodeonia, a little closer to the CBD. The CBD is clustered around the N4, with the majority of households and farms around the CBD being white owned.

<sup>1</sup> Graphics from [www.brabys.co.za](http://www.brabys.co.za)

## Appendix 3: Swartruggens in the media

1860-2009



The above graph, produced by internet search engine Google, provides a dramatic and telling illustration of the surge in public interest following the Skierlik shooting. The presence of a blue bar indicates the presence of an article on Swartruggens which cites that specific year. These articles are contained online and found by either Google (in a general, unfiltered search) or Google Scholar (a filtered academic search). The higher the bar, the more articles citing that date.

Prior to the mid-1980s, Swartruggens was rarely, if ever, cited in popular or academic articles. In 2008, there is a major rise; a peak unseen before in this town's history. Suddenly, Swartruggens is catapulted into the media spotlight and an innumerable amount of articles are written about the Skierlik shooting. However, this rise is limited to findings on a general Google search. The Google Scholar search produces no results. Thus, while public discourse has zoomed in on this once unknown small town, academic papers had yet to emerge. Searches on established and reputable engines such as PsychInfo and EbscoHost confirmed this.

This graph supports the premise of this study, that Swartruggens had become a problematised place only after the Skierlik shooting in 2008, largely owing to the media's frenzied production of articles problematising this town (and potentially threatening the place-identities of its residents).

## Appendix 4: Pictures of Swartruggens and Skierlik<sup>2</sup>



Picture 1: The entrance to the small informal settlement of Skierlik, site of the shooting.



Picture 2: A house in Swartruggens, situated closer to the central business area.

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<sup>2</sup> All pictures © Suntosh Pillay, 2008. Available for use with permission: [suntoshpillay@gmail.com](mailto:suntoshpillay@gmail.com)



Picture 3: A plusher house, typical of the Rodeonia area. Most of the Indian families in Swartruggens own a business in the town or occupy financially secure positions.



Picture 4: The only Mosque in Swartruggens, situated in the predominantly Indian suburb of Rodeonia. With the exception of a few families, all Indians in Swartruggens are Muslim.



Picture 5: The slate quarry, with a view of the typical North West landscape just outside of Swartruggens. The quarry is a large source of employment for people.



Picture 6: Living quarters for men who work in the nearby mines. Many of their families also live with them.



Picture 7: A dilapidated sign, pointing to Borolelo. The newer adjacent sign points to a new hospital, on the footstep of Borolelo. This is the first district hospital ever to be built in the town, and services the entire Ketleng Municipality. It was opened in June 2005.



Picture 7: The entrance to Swartruggens, and its central business district, through which the N4 highway runs. Liquor stores/bars far outnumber any other type of shop. There is one petrol station; one post-office; one of each bank; a police station; a small library; a pet shop; an electronics shop; a few clothes shops; and a Wimpy (which is the only franchise restaurant in the town). A number of general grocery stores are also available.

## Appendix 5: Transcription codes

These transcription conventions are loosely based on the Jefferson method, used frequently in studies employing discourse analysis, e.g. Durrheim (2000).

**/ indicates a correction or stumbling speech**

e.g. P<sub>A</sub>: Ja/well/well/not really

**(4) Numbers in parenthesis indicate elapsed time in silence in seconds**

e.g. P<sub>C</sub>: Ja (2) well (1) it's hard being black in this town (2)

**(.) A dot in a parenthesis indicates a tiny gap, no more than half a second.**

e.g. P<sub>A</sub>: Ja (.) Us whites were (.) stigmatised

**\_\_\_ Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch or amplitude.**

e.g. P<sub>D</sub>: We struggle really struggle

**:: Colons indicate the prolongation of a sound. The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation.**

e.g. P<sub>A</sub>: Um::::: Maybe I don't know

**(( )) Double parentheses contain the author's descriptions rather than transcriptions**

e.g. P<sub>B</sub>: Ja ((laughter)) you know what I mean

**( ) Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said.**

e.g. P<sub>C</sub>: You get used to the ( ) and stuff

**(3 words) or (2 turns) indicates the amount of speech that is inaudible**

e.g. P<sub>C</sub>: Everyone said that about (2 words ) but I don't feel like that

**(probably) Speech that the transcriber is unsure of should be placed in single parentheses**

e.g. P<sub>A</sub>: You know (when I mumble like this) it's difficult to hear me

## Appendix 6: Initial interview schedule

This interview schedule formed the basis for the interviews in the initial phase of data collection. It was designed by the Rural Transformation Project team. As the research became progressively refined, additional questions were asked about life in the town after the Skierlik shootings, and specifically about race-relations in the town. The interviews were carried out in the preferred language of the participants, i.e. English, Setswana, or Afrikaans. Some interviews were mixed language.

1. Tell me about this town. What is it like to live here?
2. Has anything changed in this town since 1994? If so, what has changed?
3. How is Swartruggens coping with this change?
4. Is this town one community, or are there clear divisions?
5. Have relationships between groups in this town changed in the last 14 years?  
If so, how?
6. Is there conflict in the town?
7. Are things better or worse in this town than it was before 1994? In what ways?  
Is it true for all parts of the town?
8. Can you tell me one or two stories that would illustrate some of the things we have spoken about regarding change in Swartruggens?
9. Mention some places in your town where you feel most/least comfortable in?  
Why is this so?
10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small town?
11. How is this town connected to other places? Do you feel more attached to this town than others?

## Appendix 7: Informed consent

The informed consent of participants was obtained verbally. However, if participants wanted to read and sign an informed consent form, this was available. It was written in a friendly, easy to understand style. No participant opted for both verbal and written consent. Verbal consent sufficed in all 42 interviews.

### Informed Consent Form

My name is Suntosh Pillay. I am a Psychology Masters student from the University of Kwazulu-Natal. I am conducting a study on what life is like in Swartruggens. I would appreciate it if you would participate in this study. It will not take long, only fifteen to thirty minutes of your time.

I'm going to ask you some questions about your town. You are encouraged to answer the questions as honestly and openly as you can. It should feel like you are just having a normal, casual conversation with someone. You do not have to answer all the questions, and if you feel uncomfortable you can stop the interview at anytime. You will not be prejudiced or discriminated in any way for not participating, or for stopping the interview.

Your participation is voluntary and no identifying information will be used when I write my thesis. You will remain completely anonymous. I will never use your real name. The data collected from the study will be safely stored and nobody will have access to the information other than the researchers involved. All of us will respect confidentiality.

There are no immediate benefits to you personally by taking part in this study, but it will allow me to gain more insight into in this town, and offers you a chance to have a say about what you think this town is like.

Your consent to participate in the study means that you have understood the requirements of the research.

The research is being supervised by Professor Kevin Durrheim. If any problems arise he can be contacted on 0332605348 or emailed on [durrheim@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:durrheim@ukzn.ac.za). My email address is [suntoshpillay@gmail.com](mailto:suntoshpillay@gmail.com)

If you agree to participate in this research and are fully aware of the consequences of doing so, please sign below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Thank you.

## Appendix 8: Breakdown of sample

Total sample size: 42

### **Non-graphical breakdown of sample by:**

#### **1. Language of interview:**

English: 20 (14 Male; 6 Female)

Afrikaans: 10 (3 Male; 7 Female)

Tswana: 12 (6 Male; 6 Female)

#### **2. Race:**

Black: 23 (13 Male; 10 Female)

White: 12 (4 Male; 8 Female)

Indian: 07 (6 Male; 1 Female)

#### **3. Sex:**

Male: 23

Female: 19