An analysis of a pre-election discussion on a Facebook newsgroup entitled *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President*, exploring issues of South Africanness and the potential of the new media for democratic expression.

by

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Signed -------------------------------------   Date------------------------

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Dedication

For my beloved parents and my darling ginger

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Abstract

South Africa, since 1994, has developed both politically and technologically resulting in an opening of communications both locally and globally. The 2009 national elections had been earmarked as a 'make or break' milestone for the political and social future of the young democracy. This election occurred amidst media analysts' concerns for the level of freedom of expression allowed to traditional forms of the South African media. New media, however, is not at present subject to the same regulations. Although a few cases of slander relating, for example, to Facebook have occurred, ephemeral cyber space appears to enjoy a greater degree of freedom of expression than the press and broadcast media. As a result the ability of these traditional forms of media to function effectively as a public sphere may be questioned, and some theorists claim that the Internet may offer an alternative medium for this function.

This thesis looks at the potential of online communities to facilitate democratic expression by analysing a Facebook newsgroup text at the time of the election.
In my exploration of the Facebook newsgroup *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming SA's next President* I have analysed the text using two qualitative approaches.
The critical discourse analysis traces competing South African discourses relating to the myths of *the inherent violence of black men* and *the inherent racism of whites*, the topics of crime and violence, Jacob Zuma and South Africanness. This approach's theoretical guidelines enforced a more objective view of the text, although interpretive methods in general grapple with subjectivity at a more observable level than do quantitative methods. The ethnographic hermeneutic component of the research is aimed at "making the obscure plain" (Blaikie, 1993: 28, cited in Neuman, 1997: 68) in the text, as well as documenting the inner workings of the online community and its relation to South African issues at the time of the national election. The findings are then measured against public sphere theory from Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere to revisionist accounts (Fraser, 1997 and McKee, 2005).

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Chapter One: Introduction

This section serves to provide background on the South African political and social situation, as well as introducing the workings of Facebook, as an example of new media communities. The concepts I will use in this study will also be explained in terms of their relevance to my topic and research questions.

South Africa, since 1994, has developed both politically and technologically resulting in an opening of communications both locally and globally. The 2009 elections had been earmarked as a 'make or break' milestone for the political and social future of the young democracy. This election occurred amidst media analysts' concerns for the level of freedom of expression allowed to traditional forms of the South African media, for example the legal issues incurred by political satire cartoonist Zapiro for his depiction of Jacob Zuma preparing to rape 'Lady Justice' (Van Hoorn, 2008).

New media, however, is not at present subject to the same regulations. Although a few cases of slander relating, for example, to Facebook have occurred, ephemeral cyber space appears to enjoy a greater degree of freedom of expression than the press and broadcast media. As a result the ability of these traditional forms of media to function as an effective public sphere may be questioned, and some theorists claim that the Internet may offer an alternative medium for this function. However, in common with the question of the Internet as a form of public sphere, post modernism is complicated by the "embracing of non-rational forms of knowledge" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2004: 309). In these virtual spaces individuals share their perspectives and are able to achieve a sense of community, despite the 'disembodied' nature of the medium. In terms of identity, participation in these virtual communities places the individual into the realm of social or civic discourse by allowing them a platform for expressing their views on matters of public interest.

1.1 Race and the Socio-Historical Context

The 2009 South African general election marks fifteen years of democracy since the fall of the apartheid regime. During apartheid, the National Party ruled the country and constructed the framework for the segregation of society along racial lines, to the advantage of white Afrikaans-speaking males in particular. After half a century this system of patriarchal, white Afrikaner supremacy fell and the new South Africa, under the rule of the African National Congress, adopted a constitution based on equality. How, though, was this equality to be facilitated? What did 'racial equality' mean to the average South African at the dawn of the democratic era? Did the franchise and the new constitution completely satisfy the promises of 'racial equality'? No swift and simple solution presented itself to transform the indigent majority of unskilled and semiskilled South Africans into economic equals with the (mostly white) middle to upper class South Africans in the suburbs. Affirmative action, Black Economic Empowerment and other development initiatives were adopted in an attempt to correct some of the historical injustices.

While these policies represent an 'about-turn' from apartheid laws in terms of the group that is advantaged, the emphasis in South African policy continues to be on race. As black South Africans (as the previously disadvantaged) are favoured in the job market as employers are legally required to meet transformation targets, the white ('formerly advantaged') group find themselves to be at a disadvantage in this regard. In other respects, white South Africans were catered for and their interests (as far as they coincided with those of the National Party) were set above other South Africans. Under the new dispensation, this was largely reversed to reflect the dominant (i.e. in keeping with ANC interests) group in South Africa. It is against this background that I will examine a South African online community and the extent to which such groups may, in certain circumstances, facilitate democratic expression.

1.2 Facebook and Facebook Newsgroups

The social networking site of Facebook has become a significant popular culture phenomenon which allows one to keep in touch with friends, as well as providing a platform (via newsgroups) for discussion on a range of topics, both local and global. In this study, which sets out to gauge the potential of a South African politically-oriented newsgroup - at election time - for facilitating democratic expression.

To join Facebook is free (that is, there is no membership fee) as one is simply required to create an 'identity profile' to join. A person's Facebook profile usually consists of a photograph of the individual, their full name, date of birth, city (if not full address and telephone number) and frequently includes their place of employment.

Facebook newsgroups are special interest groups, created by users, within Facebook. These newsgroups may operate in a number of different ways. While some newsgroups admit users by invitation only, the newsgroup that I am studying is open to anyone who wishes to join. These newsgroups provide a platform for text-based discussion of issues. This research project intends to explore the possibility that online groups such as these might be useful for extending democratic expression, by looking at the online environment of the newsgroup and the contibutors' use of this space in the discussion.

These newsgroups, unlike many other on-line discussion forums, do not openly encourage anonymity. However, in contrast to other facets of Facebook which allow the user to limit the accessibility of their profiles by means of privacy settings, the Facebook newsgroups allow any other Facebook member to read the discussions. With the degree of freedom of expression that is afforded by these newsgroups this dynamic may be seen as significant – for example prospective employers often search for candidates' names on the Internet and may access newsgroup texts, to which the candidate has contributed, in order to get more insight into their characters outside of the interview setting.

For those who would not otherwise have the opportunity of engaging in such debates – considering the social inequity present in South African society – online platforms such

as Facebook newsgroups provide a 'safe' (from repercussion and physical injury, considering the legacy of political violence in South Africa) space for the exchange of perspectives in the run up to the 2009 general election for a certain sector of the populace. The fact that the medium does not guarantee anonymity may promote a higher level of meaningful engagement, as the contributor is linking their names to the views they express there. This is important since anonymity and unstable identity "appear to be irreconcilable with the formation of a stable political community (*and are*) generally considered a prerequisite for social action" (Fourie, 2007: 401). This raises the question whether such groups may also be useful in terms of equipping contributors for more formal types of public debate.

When embarking on internet-based research in Africa, however, the concept of the digital divide cannot be omitted. This term refers to the fact that the gap between the rich and poor is accentuated due to the enabling potential of the new media, which is unaccessible to the poor.

Needless to say, the digital divide in this country excludes the majority from accessing the Internet and, by extension, Facebook. Nonetheless, significant numbers of South Africans do participate in discussions on the Facebook newsgroups and, with the perceived infractions on the freedom of the traditional media, this online product appears to be providing many South Africans with a voice for democratic expression. While some members of the previously disadvantaged groups are enjoying Internet access, it is still apparent that previously advantaged groups are more than proportionately represented on the Facebook newsgroups.

1.3 Popular culture and marginal discourses

Cultural studies has a tradition of investigating marginal discourses and aspects of 'everyday life', "especially popular culture" (Fourie, 2007: 274). In the run up to the 2009 general election, the victory of the ANC's presidential candidate was considered to be a foregone conclusion since that party has dominated the political scene since South Africa became a democracy. Those who do not support Jacob Zuma can therefore be considered as a marginal group. By exploring the popular cultural artefact of a Facebook

newsgroup that is in opposition to the dominant political thought in South Africa, I will be delving into potentially oppositional or 'deviant' discourses by documenting the social construction of meaning present in the texts.

1.4 Inclusiveness

While the digital divide constitutes a significant obstacle to the representivity of social research into South African online participation, the Internet seemingly has interesting potential in terms of identity construction (away from physical attributes) and democratic expression.

Facebook newsgroups are a typically postmodern medium. Whereas modernism "is characterised by an optimistic belief in the power and possibilities of … technology, science, rationality and progress"; postmodernism is characterised by the "blurring of traditional boundaries, fluid identity, intertextuality… furthermore, postmodernism embraces non-rational modes of knowledge" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2004: 307-9).

Modernism is associated with exemplified hopefulness for the solutions to humanities problems through the sciences and 'the rational'. Rationality was seen as impartial, and hence, key to the discovery of foundational universal truths. Postmodernism involves the interrogation of modern notions of objective truth, and can be seen as a shift from "universalism to relativism" (Lyotard in Fourie, 2007: 159).

Postmodernist thought, therefore "typically express[es] grave doubt about the possibility of universal objective truth, reject[s] artificially sharp dichotomies, and delight[s] in the inherent irony and particularity of language and life" (Kemerling, 2006).

Postmodern thought has also broadened the ways we conceive of rationality, the distinction between the private and the public realm and the ordering of discourses. This coincides with more inclusive notions of citizenship and is thus expressly relevant to the wider political participation realised in democratic South Africa.

By examining the text of the Facebook newsgroup *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President*, it becomes apparent that the space for public deliberation is opened in that the medium is informal and does not rely on the traditional conventions that dictated public discussions under modernist paradigms. Given these qualities of the medium, the topic 'name' of the newsgroup further signals that specialist knowledge of political intricacies is unnecessary for participation. This is significant as such formal political debate could be perceived as exclusionary since the level of engagement in that instance would necessarily privilege elite, sophisticated voices. Since Jacob Zuma as presidential candidate, rather than ANC policy, is the focus of the discussion, the widespread publicity that Zuma received in the run up to the election (interspersed with news reports and editorial commentary relating to the rape and corruption charges, of which Zuma was acquitted) all South Africans with any level of media exposure are acquainted with sufficient material to engage in such discussion.

When the contributors are discussing individuals rather than political dynamics, ordinary South Africans are sufficiently equipped to confidently converse on related issues of democracy, the image of the nation, the legacy of apartheid and its projected consequences for the future, to name a few. In the exchange of personal perspectives, topics like these relate to identity in South Africa, but the creative process of engaging in discourse may go further to constitute new formations of discourse which constitutes new ways of framing reality (Parker, 1992: 5).

1.5 The Public Sphere and Revisionist accounts of Public Sphere

When conducting an inquiry into discussions by a community relating to public deliberation of a topic of public interest, particularly when the topic relates to national politics, one of the relevant concepts is that of the bourgeois public sphere, as conceived of by Habermas. While Habermas' earlier works on the public sphere are firmly rooted in more exclusive definitions entrenched in the paradigms of modernity, revisionist accounts (Fraser, 1997 and McKee, 2005) are more embracing of contextual forms of rationality and present a dilemma for the requirements of this type of public engagement,

advancing the idea that in the postmodern context there are multiple public spheres, rather than a single over-arching public sphere.

Although I referred earlier to the perceived threat of media regulation for the press and broadcast media in South Africa and the limiting effect this would have on the media as an effective public sphere, I do not embark on this research on the pretext that these Facebook newsgroups constitute a form of public sphere simply by virtue of the apparent freedom of expression this medium allows. Rather, I am making use of public sphere theory as a theoretical resource to guide my investigation of these texts. From there I shall be able to evaluate the extent to which this medium may, or may not, potentially function as part of an alternative configuration of multiple publics for the postmodern context, or else pose the question whether this type of discussion may function as a training ground for its contributors, equipping them with skills to participate in more formal tiers of public engagement (by participating in these informal public discussions). This research, therefore, may be seen as contributing to academic debates surrounding the application of public sphere theory to less formal, 'low' cultural* branches of the media in South Africa, for example, in the case of tabloid newspapers (Viney, 2008).

1.6 Key Questions

- What do contributors – as South Africans – say about themselves in those discussions that could be construed as constructing a particular form of South African identity? Are there any attempts to articulate tensions around the concept of 'South Africanness'?

*i.e. "philistine culture" [Arnold in Turner, 2000: 39], as the working class are considered by elitist branches of academia as incapable of classical 'high' culture appreciation. Low culture is seen as synonymous with popular culture in mass culture theory.

- What cultural norms are demonstrated in this particularly South African online community? What tensions arise between the context of the referenced unfolding South African issues and that of the new media environment of the newsgroup?

MAIN OBJECTIVES:
- Identify whether the discussions on Facebook in any way represent a kind of democratic expression?
- If so, how is this potential used by contributors?
- To determine, in terms of equality, rationality and access, how does this Facebook newsgroup compare with public sphere theory?

It is hoped that this thesis might be of use to future exploration in the field by documenting this early stage of the Facebook newsgroups and their potential for democratic participation.

1.7 Approach for this study

Given the complexity of culture and the intricacies involved in the interpretation of text as a cultural product, a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach best suits this particular research project. With the benefit of 'thick descriptions', a critical discourse analysis combined with elements of an ethnographic hermeneutic research design will guide the analysis of the text. Critical discourse analysis stresses the importance of the historical context in the interpretation of text, and so the analysis has been contextualised drawing on relevant elements of South African events which occurred both during apartheid and since the advent of democracy. As a form of triangulation of research methods this research shall, in addition to a context bound approach, attempt to distance the researcher from the context in order to gain a more objective perspective, allowing for the interpretation of aspects of the culture which are 'invisible', unthinkable and perhaps 'unsayable' (in light of Foucault's [1972-77] work on discourse) from within.

This research will seek out textual occurrences to discover the picture of South Africaness that this text constructs. It will identify issues by means of open coding for

themes in the text that relate to issues of public interest and determine the nature of engagement with these discourses evident in the text. Public sphere theory will then be used as a guide for observing the possible potential and limitations of this medium for greater effectiveness as tool for public deliberation, aside from the question of access.

Since Facebook has not been widely researched to date due to the newness of the medium, there are few existing conventions or templates on which to base this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The theoretical framework and literature review have been combined in this chapter (since separation of the two would necessitate repetition to establish context). The questions central to this research are: To what extent could certain Facebook newsgroups be perceived as a tool for democratic expression? What issues of South Africanness are presented in the newsgroup text?

As a popular cultural phenomenon Facebook newsgroups are open to anyone who has Internet access. Debates within these forums do not subscribe to formal, academic and traditional rational processes, as might characterise discourse on similar issues in more traditional forms of media. In addition, the Facebook newsgroups are as yet not subject to the same laws and regulations as traditional media, in that racism, slander and hate speech in this online medium cannot be punished by law in South Africa.

The main theoretical areas of concern to this thesis are:

- The New Media
- Discourse
- Public Sphere (particularly Habermas' as well as revisionist theory)

By engaging in discussions of public interest on Internet sites such as Facebook newsgroups, this research enquires whether these discussions within newsgroups could in any way constitute a form of democratic expression. Embedded in this, is the investigation of whether it is possible that contributors might be acquiring skills which develop their civic identity, possibly equipping them to participate in other, more formal, types of democratic expression and public deliberation. Clearly this study alone will not be able to answer this question entirely. As Facebook is a relatively new phenomenon, more research will be necessary as these types of online platforms and their contributors evolve and develop, but this study may provide pointers in that direction.

2.1 New Media and Civic Identity

2.1.1 Online communities

Despite the relative newness of this field of research, a number of academics have contributed to the conception of online communities as tangible social places. Internet discussion groups, such as Facebook newsgroups, are ephemeral in that no physical space for meeting and discussion in the 'real' world is provided by the medium. Jones (1998) writes of "virtual settlements" and the title of Rheingold's book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (2000) both appear to present the notion that these online groups are providing a platform for significant interaction of members in such a way that makes the social interface facilitated by such online configurations 'real'. Other supporters of this position are Dutton (1998), Anderson (1992) and Caputo (1992) (all quoted in Nocera, 2002). However, 'online community' status cannot be assigned generally to online discussion platforms, as existence alone does not constitute a working community.

Jones (1997, cited in Abdelnour Nocera, 2002) established guidelines for virtual settlements as indicators of a community's life which include: interactivity, various contributors, a common public space and a sufficient level of continuous membership. The *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President* newsgroup does fulfil these categories and thus may be considered as an online community. Pierre Levy (1998) notes that in common with geographically based communities, online communities although not physically "there", their members are bonded and "guided by passions and projects, conflicts and friendships" (Levy, 1998 in Burnett, 2002: 156).

In the case of the online community under study here, the discussion is rooted in actual unfolding South African political and social events. In addition, the convention of named identities, which discourages anonymity on Facebook, contributes to the tangible nature of the newsgroup as a social setting, where the physically existent South Africa and its society are constantly referenced. This has implications for the types of research methodology that can be employed in the study of online communities. Both hermeneutic

study and various branches of discourse analysis of the textual imprint of such online communities are becoming established methods. However, I as a researcher consider that the conception of online discussion groups, which adhere to Jones' (1997) criteria as online communities, justifies the extension of ethnographic research methods – traditionally used in research of physical communities to uncover cultural practices – to the study of these new virtual communities.

2.1.2 New media, identity and democracy

"…although originally founded by government… the Internet's decentralised co-operative structure has been, ironically, the closest thing to a functioning large-scale anarchist society that human culture has ever seen" (Kinney, 1995: 94 in Tsagarousinanou, et al. 1998: 7).

In reviewing the theory relating to democratic participation and public sphere, particularly in the context of emerging democracies, one of the recurrent difficulties is that of finding the appropriate public space in which to facilitate discourse. New media 'gurus' frequently hail computer mediated communication as the 'promised land' for the expansion of democratic participation and identity beyond the traditional national and anatomic horizons (Maples, 2001, in Fourie, 2007: 400). This new frontier for civic identity arises amidst an increasingly apathetic and uninformed (about issues of public interest) society, according to research in the US (Berelson *et al,* 1954; Campbell *et al,* 1960 and Crizier *et al*, 1975, in Tsagarourianou, 1998: 3). Fishkin (1992, in *ibid*: 3) perceived a link between the progressively more superficial political coverage on American primetime television and this trend of apathy in the United States.

"Unstable and changing identities on the Internet, as well as the possibility of remaining anonymous, appear to be irreconcilable with the formation of a stable political community, generally considered a prerequisite for political action" (Fourie, 2007: 401). When Facebook newsgroups are considered in light of this statement, the insubstantial nature of online identity is, ironically, incurred by the fact that Facebook is not an anonymous user facility, but requests one's name and surname to join Facebook. Joining

Facebook involves creating a personal profile, and it is also usual for users to post a photograph of themselves on their profile. However, there is no guarantee that users will be truthful as to their name and physical identity, and any image can be placed as the portrait on one's profile.

In South Africa, with the emphasis historical forces have placed on race in particular, the possibility of a medium that allows one the freedom to construct one's identity away from physical traits opens up new avenues for individual expression and allows one to interact as black, white, Asian, male or female, as one is inclined to do at the time. While many Computer Mediated Communication (CMC - i.e. message boards or chat sites, where communication with other people is achieved via computers) sites do not require such indicators where a convention of nicknames or 'handles' is in place, Facebook newsgroups' convention of contributors using a first name and a surname does allow for the implication of ethnic and gender indicators in the construction of virtual identities through names.

The presented identities in terms of gender, race and ethnicity in the profiles cannot be always presumed to be accurate indicators of these demographics in the newsgroups texts. For the purpose of this research, this dimension will only be explored in the ethnographic component of the analysis and the critical discourse analysis shall rely on the ethnicity and gender *implied* in the names to infer the demographics of contributors. Chapter three will discuss the way that this approach to this study avoids *observer's paradox* (the tendency for research participants to behave 'unnaturally' when they are aware of the researcher's presence). Here this is relevance since contributors are not creating identity data for the purposes of the research, but simply for the purposes of discussion, which is the subject of this study.

Early studies in CMC research (Short et al., 1976; Sproull et al., 1986; and Kiesler, 1986, all cited in Burnett, 2002) found that the lack of physical presence had implications for presented identity in online spaces. Since non- verbal cues are invisible in text-based CMC, the sense of social presence is diminished and is considered to be a hindrance to

interaction (Burnett, 2002: 158). Another implication for the lack of physical presence is that users experience weakened awareness of themselves as socialised individuals (*ibid*: 158), which may be demonstrated by the break down of social norms. Since South Africa has a legacy of social conflict, in the analysis of the newsgroups this established trend in CMC must be borne in mind to avoid the simplistic conclusions based on the historical context, which underlines racial conflict in South Africa.

CMC has usually been associated with anonymity and thus has allowed "CMC users to experience a significant reduction of their awareness of themselves as socialized individuals" (Burnett, 2002: 158) in comparison with face-to-face discussions. In the case of Facebook newsgroups, where anonymity is not the norm, it will be interesting to determine whether contributors feel comfortable breaching social norms.

McLaughlin et al. examines patterns of behaviour on UseNet (one of the pioneering forms of online message board) and online community creation, in particular the development of standards of conduct that form the development of a moral code (McLaughlin et al. in Jones, 1995: 147). Often the founder (the individual who originally creates the newsgroup) of a new Facebook newsgroup will offer a manifesto for the group. It can usually be added to by other contributors and, in theory, acts as the *modus operandi* for the newsgroup. These may not always be adhered to. From my previous experience of the newsgroups, I have noted numerous incidences of hate speech, racism and incitements to violence (none of which would be tolerated in print or broadcast media by law), sometimes without penalty to the contributor. The usual 'penalty' for such infractions is expulsion from the community.

Jones (1998: 223-4) compares print-based discourses and computer mediated discourses and notes that, despite the immediacy of the latter, it remains 'disembodied', due to the perceived ephemeral nature of cyberspace, and lacks the authority of print media. Audience research relating to the experience of computer mediated discourse lends insight into the apparent disregard for social taboos (racism is perceived as particularly taboo in contemporary South Africa due to its historical significance). In the sharing of opinions, experiences and tactics a definite sense of community is evident in the

newsgroup, echoing Jones' (1997) reference to the search for "the communal, the social relationships we were seeking to foster via the Internet and CMC" (Jones, 1997: 9). This raises the question; in what ways might such online groups contribute to new formations, in terms of revisionist accounts, of public spheres?

Drawing on MacGregor Wise (n.d.), Jones (1997: 9-10) reflects

> "We have developed the belief that political, moral and social problems are the result of a lack of communication, and that if we improve communication we will also solve the various problems that plague modern life… it would construct that community from communication, rather than inhabitance and being, which do not guarantee communication."

From this perspective, online communities (such as the Facebook newsgroups) have the potential to address social problems. One must bear in mind that not all South Africans have access to the Internet, a luxury that a minority can afford at this stage of the nation's development. The digital divide will be taken into account, as the views of the more affluent will obviously be more prevalent, due to the nature of the technological nature of the medium. However, the newsgroups do provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and, in the context of a divided society, appear to facilitate dialogue and the construction of knowledge through communication.

The supposed goal for the newsgroup explored in this research is that of mobilizing through communication to prevent Jacob Zuma from becoming president, although it is difficult to imagine how the newsgroup might achieve this. In this sense, those who use the newsgroup may be considered a community, since "communities… are groups of people seeking to achieve particular goals" (Schuler, 1995 in Jones, 1997:10). With these notions of the online context of the study, the content aspect of this research is shaped according to discourse theory.

2.2.1 Discourse Theory

" 'Discourse' is … rather more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice" (Fairclough, 1992: 28). Given the social dynamics of contemporary South Africa, analysis of this type of social or discursive practise will be central to the research. Bearing in mind the technological dimension of the text, Fairclough (1990b) has suggested that the 'technologisation' of language is a "striking feature of contemporary society" (Fairclough, 1992: 5).

The work of Foucault on discourse primarily concerned the construction of knowledge "rather than just meaning" (Hall, 1997: 42) and the epistemology of "the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings" (*ibid*: 43) within a particular culture, at a particular historical moment. The poststructuralist perspective that permeates Foucault's work is epitomised in Hall's (1997) commentary in the claim that "nothing which is meaningful can exist outside discourse":

> "Is Foucault saying – as some of his critics have argued – that *nothing exists outside of discourse*? In fact, Foucault does *not* deny that things can have a real, material existence in the world. What he does argue is that '*nothing has any meaning outside of discourse*'(Foucault, 1972)" (in Hall, 1997: 45).

Parker defined discourse as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992: 5) and offered the argument that "discourses allow us to see things that are not 'really' there, and that once an object has been elaborated in a discourse it is difficult *not* to refer to it as if it were real" (Parker, 1992: 5). In a country which has undergone a radical shift in political system in the last two decades, conflicting residual, dominant and emerging discourses are at work simultaneously in South African society and these discourses will inform the analysis of the text since "Discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways" (Parker, 1992: 5).

In the South African context 'residual' discourse refers to rationales that would have been dominant or 'preferred' in the context of apartheid, reflecting the National Party's interests in justifying white (Afrikaner) supremacy and system of racial segregation that

was (politically) prevalent at that time. 'Dominant' discourse refers to ways of constructing reality that coincide with the status quo in South Africa under the African National Congress. 'Emergent' discourse can be identified as new and creative configurations of discourse that do not conform to either the residual or dominant frameworks.   In the study of this newsgroup text (which constantly references events in the physically existent South Africa), however, "It is possible to analyse the particular qualities of a 'realist' text as something that constructs a sense of the world outside as taken-for-granted without concluding that claims about the world can never be explored and assessed (Parker, 1998, 2002 in Parker, 2004: 153).

Laclau and Mouffe (1990) put forward the idea that "we use (the term discourse) to emphasise that every social configuration is *meaningful*" (Laclau et al. 1990: 100, cited in Hall, 1997: 45). This view has implications for the responsibility of the production, evolution and maintenance of meanings within society, which is complicated by the notion of 'decentering of the subject' prevalent in Foucault's work, as "Foucault denies human subjectivity the controlling status it has been granted since the time of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century" (Macdonald, 2003: 22). This would seem to preclude human agency in the realm of discourse.

2.2.2 Discourse and Agency

While the above mentioned conception of discourse "makes poststructuralist thinking appear devoid of political purpose" (*ibid:* 22*)*, the consequence for discourse analysis research is a move away from questions of production and political economy to those that ask of discourses '*what* is being communicated, and *in whose interests*'. Macdonald, however, suggests that

> "…even if we accept that the formation of discourse is often beyond individual control, the role of individuals in perpetuating or challenging already existing discourses, and in shaping those of the future, needs to be acknowledged more than Foucauldian approaches follow" (*ibid*: 23).

If discourse is to be considered, as Foucault appears to suggest, as omnipotent and omnipresent culturally engrained directors of thought and social action beyond the

control of individual human subjects, critics such as Eagleton (1991) have posed the question "If regimes of power constitute us to our very roots, producing just those forms of subjectivity on which they most efficiently go to work… what is there "left over", so to speak, to find this situation so appalling?" (Eagleton, 1991: 47, in Macdonald, 2003: 23). That is, the conception of discourse as entirely determining would appear to preclude the ability to escape from these forces in order to document and comment on them at all, given the blinding effect attributed to discourse.

Macdonald (2003) proposes that there is place for the concept of agency within discourse: "We are never, after all, for long the subjects of a single discourse, even if we accept a strong version of individual subjection. Choices have constantly to be made between competing versions of reality" (Macdonald, 2003: 24). Agency is therefore reflected in the creative processes of engagement with and selection between discourses. In the age of new media in particular there is a ménage of readily accessible discourses available and it is possible that "…our inherent need to make sense of our experiences drives us to negotiate a way through often incompatible discourses, aligning ourselves to some, rejecting or exhibiting indifference to others" (*ibid:*24).

South African research in the area of discourse analysis will be a valuable resource to illustrate similar case studies. One such source is *Culture, Power and Difference* (Levett et al, 1997), which considers social conflict in South Africa, from a South African perspective. Through critical discourse analysis of the discursive event (that is, the specific newsgroup text to be analysed) it is possible to get a sense of the nature of the discourses present and how they could reveal relations of power in South African society. Parker's (1992) "Criteria for Distinguishing Discourses" which is an extension of Potter and Wetherell's (1987, cited in Parker, 1992) work in that area, will also be useful in order to establish whether any emerging, as yet unestablished discourses are evident in the text. Discourse theory will also inform the construct of South Africaness present in the text.

2.2.3 Discourse and Silencing

In Foucault's conception of discourse, "publicly circulating discourses were both produced by … social institutions and systems of action, and in turn produce and continuously maintain them," (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 5). Given the fact that discourses originating from such social institutions have the purpose of maintaining the status quo, Thiesmeyer (2003) writes of strategies of silencing oppositional (or deviant) discourses through prohibition and exclusion of "categories of thought and knowledge and their forms of expression," (*ibid*: 5).

Despite the constitutionally enshrined right of freedom of speech in South Africa, there remains the possibility that certain categories of thought may be framed by dominant discourse in such a way that they are deprived a viable subject position. According to Thiesmeyer (2003):

> "In societies or polities that do not inhibit freedom of speech itself, there remains the problem that illocutionary power, the power to make oneself heard and to obtain an appropriate response, can still be 'circumscribed by someone else's speech' (Langton). When this type of silencing is at its most effective, it obscures both the realization that silencing exists as well as any awareness of its social and political uses (Eto, 1982; Jansen, 1991; Conklin, 1997)" (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 3).

A number of academics, including Van Dijk (1984, 1987, 1993); Garnham, 1990; Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996); Schiller (1995); Jansen (1991) and Mumby (1993) (all cited in Thiesmeyer, 2003: 9), have contributed to the study of institutionally engrained discourse practices that have consequences for silencing deviant discourses. Thiesmeyer states

> "the goal of using discourse to silence other discourse is to remove the potential for the audience to obtain unacceptable discourse. That is, the audience will be rendered incapable of hearing or noticing the existence of certain discourses because they differ too much from those normally used within the daily life of the community… This process is complemented by the circulation of acceptable speech and texts that express some things at the expense of others; it is thus a

discursive displacement. It's effect is to remove certain kinds of texts or speech from circulation but without necessarily censoring the texts or speech themselves" (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 9).

Bearing in mind the political theme of the newsgroup from which the text is selected and the fact that its name signals the newsgroup as being in opposition to the ANC's presidential candidate, it is likely that oppositional political discourses will be present in the text. If dominant discourse has successfully framed such perspectives as socially unacceptable, other contributors would possibly echo these discourse techniques in their responses, if not ignore deviant discourses all together.

2.2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

In discussing the establishment of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1995a) writes of the need to merge forms of social and cultural inquiry with those of linguistics and language studies in textual analysis "to make them 'operational', practically usable, in analysis of specific cases" (Fairclough, 1995a: 53). This mode of analysis is appropriate to the newsgroup text under exploration, since the newsgroup involves the use of language to communicate how contributors view national issues that are relevant to them at the moment of the election; thus the newsgroup is constituted by social and cultural dimensions articulated through language to convey meaning. This paradigm asserts that, while it may not be patently apparent on the surface, the link between the practice of language and dominance "appear(s) on closer examination to be vitally important to the workings of power" (*ibid*: 53).

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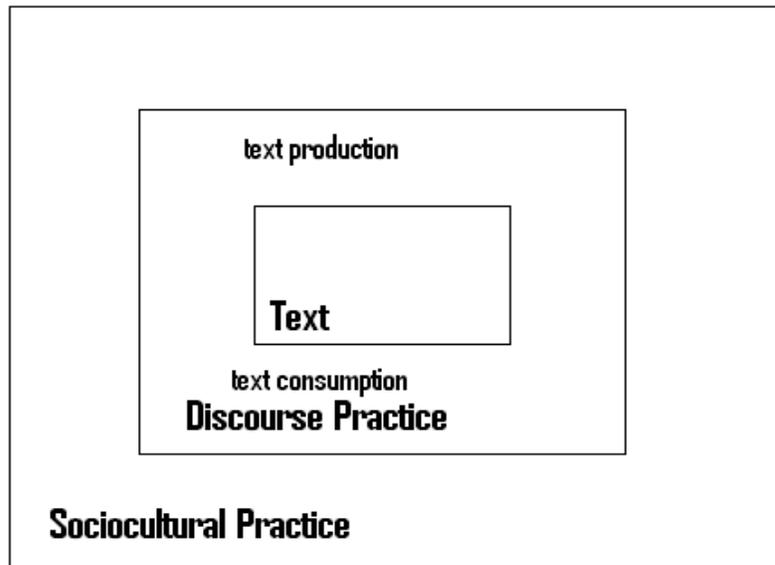
Fig. One *A framework for critical discourse analysis of a communicative event* **(Fairclough, 1995a: 59)**

Fairclough (1995a: 59, fig.1) provides a visual representation of a framework for critical discourse analysis of a text that illustrates the intrinsic links between text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. This (1995a) model requires some adjustment for its application to the Facebook newsgroup texts, however, the model's rendering of the layers within a communicative event make it the most appropriate to this research.

While the diagram represents the practices of text production and text consumption on opposite ends of the discourse practice block, in the new media this differentiation becomes blurred as Internet users are implicated in the process of production at the same time as that of consumption, as the interactivity of the medium allows (Marshall, 2004: 10). As noted in his later work, the cultural and political dynamics encapsulated in these three levels have significant social ramifications for discourse (Fairclough 2003: 11).

Discourse is defined and investigated in the fields of both social (particularly Foucault, 1972 and Fraser, 1989) and linguistic theory. While social scientists' conception of discourse relates to modes of articulation of socially significant phenomena, from a

linguistics perspective language *is* discourse and can be seen in itself as "a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 1995a: 54).

Since this research revolves around democratic participation in matters of public interest, the question is raised whether this type of newsgroup is in any way approaching the requirements of a postmodern alternative public sphere, as conceived of in revisionist accounts (for example in Fraser, 1997). One of the criteria to be considered in terms of public sphere is the question of *action* arising from public deliberation of pertinent matters. In the fields of linguistic philosophy and pragmatics however, Fairclough (1995a) reminds us, language as social practice has been established as a "mode of action" (Fairclough, 1995a: 54) when socially and historically situated (Austin, 1962; and Levinson, 1983 in *ibid*: 54).

This chapter has thus far looked at the online context and the theoretical framework to be used for the analysis of the new media text. In the next section I will discuss public sphere theory, against which the results of the analysis are to be measured.

Public Sphere

2.3.1 Habermas' public sphere

As this research question seeks to examine the potential of Facebook newsgroups to act as a form of democratic expression and participation, the area of public sphere theory has much to contribute. The reliance on this branch of literature should not be perceived as a claim on the researcher's part that the Facebook newsgroups fall within the realm of public sphere. Rather, the intention is to analyse these newsgroups to discover to what extent they may form part of a larger overarching public sphere, or if they may even, in the future, constitute an alternative form of public sphere. While investigating this possibility the study will also take note of the specifics in which the structure and practise of these newsgroups might be lacking.

Habermas' concept of the public sphere is an illustration of the historical moment in capitalism when the feudal system had been displaced and the newly empowered

bourgeoisie began a culture of regular meetings or journals to rationally debate issues of 'public' interest (Durnham and Kellner, 2002). This political public sphere was based on the literary public sphere in its form (*ibid*: 102) but was concerned with the "conflict between the interests of the bourgeois civil society and the interests of the state" (Duvenage, 2007: 329).

> "[A] public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both quality of discourse and quantity of participation… [Habermas] suggests that ultimately this inclusivity brought degeneration in the quality of discourse, but he contends that both the requirements of democracy and the nature of contemporary large-scale social organization mean that it is impossible to progress today by going back to an elitist public sphere" (Calhoun, 1997, ii-iii).

In the Facebook newsgroups, the quantity of participants is theoretically limitless. Admittedly, the medium is not universally available in South Africa and so access is mainly limited to the middle classes (presuming that the upper-classes would migrate towards more elite forms of debate), however considerable numbers are participating in discussions relating to social, political and cultural issues of public concern. In terms of quality of discourse, however, this depends on definitional meanings of 'quality'. While the quality of conversation on Facebook newsgroups is generally not in the form of well-reasoned rational debate, neither can it be said to be utterly devoid of significance.

The main tenets Habermas conceived of as central to the functioning of the 'ideal' modern public sphere were (from Duvenage, 2007: 331)

1) the bracketing of social positions, which, in theory, allows equality between members of the public sphere,
2) rational debate (an educated public is favoured in this regard) and
3) guaranteed access to any man* with access to cultural products.

(* this gendered account of the public sphere must be understood within the patriarchal historical context)

2.3.2 Revisionist accounts of the public sphere

While Habermas conceived of the public sphere as a single entity, revisionist accounts (Robbins, 1993; Fraser, 1997 and McKee, 2005 among others) observe that this view "overlooked the idea that multiple and intersecting publics could be operating within a culture and be developing new ideas and new political directions based on their smaller orbit of connection" (Marshall, 2004: 53). The Internet's elision of space and time divides has facilitated new means of connecting individuals and has challenged prior notions demarcating 'private' and 'public' discourses.

Since "One simply cannot understand Habermas' work as a whole without attending to his historical rootedness" (White, 1991: 5-6, in McKee, 2005: 90), these categories identified by Fourie (2007: 331) require reconsideration with the application of revisionist theory for application to the context of postmodernism and to this particular research.

1) In terms of equality in the Facebook newsgroups, South Africa's historical iniquities should be taken into account. During apartheid, as well as in the 'New South Africa', policy has been decided along racial lines, and this may have ramifications for relationships in the new media community. This is relevant for the application of the work of Fraser (1997), in the area of public sphere, to the research. However, as McKee (2005) points out

> "…You can do so without assuming as your starting point that the powerless masses, women, children or black people are being manipulated by the formally educated elites of society. And you can avoid the paralyzing discovery that every single identity group thinks that they are inaccurately represented - or misrepresented - in the media. We already know this. It's the condition under which the public sphere functions" (McKee, 2005: 204).

Hence, it is essential to note that the public discussion in practice is far from the Utopian public sphere portrayed in early Habermas (1984, 1989). Drawing on the findings and discussion, the conclusion of this research will gauge the extent to which equality among contributors is achieved in the medium of this Facebook newsgroup.

2) The question of 'What constitutes rational debate?' must be considered in the exploration of a Facebook group comprised of citizens of a culturally diverse nation. McKee (2005) and Fraser (1997) both consider the possibility of 'contextual rationality', whereby different rationales are formulated and expressed in differing cultures and social contexts. For Habermas, rationality (the formal Western conception thereof) is essential to the proper functioning of the public sphere: "Though mere opinions (cultural assumptions, normative attitudes, collective prejudices and values) seem to persist unchanged in their natural form as a kind of sediment of history, public opinion can by definition come into existence only when a reasoning public is presupposed" (Habermas, quoted in Durnham & Kellner, 2002: 103).

The type of rationality that accompanied the bourgeois public sphere was embedded in that society and the values it celebrated; "Rather, it was *society* that was bourgeois, and bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere" (Calhoun, 1997: vii). Hence, the quality of rationality displayed in the Facebook newsgroups is dependent on the context of that sector of society.

3) The issue of access is the third category for assessing the applicability of the concept of public sphere to the newsgroup. However, inclusion, by the prerequisites stated in Habermas' original 'ideal' public sphere, like the issue of Internet access in South Africa, was *not* universal, but depended on familiarity with the luxury of cultural products in the form of journals, literary works, access to the theatre and newspapers. In both cases, therefore, the lower socio-economic classes are effectively excluded, and the absence of their ability to voice concerns is notable.

Another factor that is necessary for contributors to the newsgroup is some experience of South Africa, whether by virtue of residence in this country or, in the case of emigrants, having once resided in South Africa. This said, any input from foreign nationals that may appear in the discursive event, may provide an interesting outside perspective.

2.3.3 The Decline of the Public Sphere

Habermas attributed the decline of the public sphere to the shift towards public consumerism (Habermas, 1989: 164). The press and broadcast media's content being influenced by bureaucratic and economic interests can be seen as part of the "manipulation of public discourse… to create a "social engineering" of voter behaviour and cultural consumption" (Fourie, 2007: 332-3).

The disadvantage for the public sphere was seen by Habermas as the fact that the mass media "place (their public) under 'tutelage', which is to say that they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree" (Habermas, 1989: 170-171). The fact that the newsgroups' sole purpose is that of providing a platform for contributors to express their views through written text appears to overcome this apparent failing in traditional media forms.

In keeping with this, the term *public screen* has been used by Deluca and Peeples (2002) to illustrate the characteristic "dissemination, images, hypermediacy, publicity, distraction and dissent" (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002: 125) of television and Internet-based activism. This is appropriate to the medium of the Facebook newsgroups and the expression of public interest it facilitates.

In no way do the set of amended tenets above set out to claim the designation of 'public sphere' for the Facebook newsgroups. The purpose is merely to illustrate the modern/ postmodern paradigm shifts and possible strains of commonality between them and the medium as relevant to this project, which will help to cast light on the areas where this newsgroup meets or falls short of the criteria associated with public sphere.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The previous chapter established the theoretical framework for this research, as well as contextualizing the theory in terms of the online text and the South African context. This chapter is concerned with the research methods used to approach the research questions. In overview this chapter contains the methodological framework, method of data collection, research design and analytical tools suitable to research of this kind, reflecting on the nature of this new medium and the users of this specifically South African newsgroup.

3.1 Methodological Framework

Qualitative Research Methods

In order to address my central research topic, 'An analysis of a pre-election discussion on a Facebook newsgroup entitled *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President*, exploring issues of South Africanness and the potential of the new media for democratic expression', qualitative research methods are the most appropriate since a descriptive, rather than analytical, approach "…give(s) the reader a feel for particular people and events in concrete social settings" (Neuman, 1997: 328).

Since the text consists of a transcript collected from a Facebook newsgroup during the election period, the online space for this discussion can be considered in the light of a corresponding postmodern "concrete social setting" (*ibid*: 1997: 328). While the medium itself is by nature disembodied and the participants are remotely accessing the page from as far away as the United Kingdom, the newsgroup text is distinctly linked to actual unfolding political events in South Africa and respondents are discussing these issues in an environment that has a convention of named identities. This also locates my research within the critical realist perspective, since it is situated in this particular socio-cultural and political context.

Kelly (2002) explains that qualitative methodology represents a turn in research epistemology towards the 'contextual': "research which is less immediately concerned with discovering universal, law-like patterns of human behaviour… and is more concerned with making sense of human experience from *within* the context and perspective of human experience" (Kelly, 2002, in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 398).

Qualitative research is often perceived as being split into two schools of thought, i.e. the interpretive approach and the social constructionist approach, which can be described as empathetic and sceptical approaches respectively. Kelly (2002) rejects the complete separation of these approaches, and terms both 'interpretive research', suggesting that this general method, according to its research application, tends towards either the 'sceptical' or 'empathetic' side of the "fundamental interpretive continuum" (*ibid*: 399), but can rarely be exclusively classified as one or the other.

The exploration of these discussions can be seen as operating within the transcendent perspective, since the research does not impose questions on the respondents, but rather explores the perceptions put forward by contributors themselves. Neuman (1997: 330) writes of the transcendent perspective that "It's goal is … to treat people as creative, compassionate living beings, not as objects". In the study of South Africanness and new, more inclusive ways of understanding citizenship, this attitude to the text is perhaps more democratic than an approach that presumes to dictate to research subjects through questioning to elicit responses. This is reflected also in the terms used in the respective branches of inquiry to refer to the people whose responses are the basis of the research. While other branches of research may refer to 'human research subjects' or 'respondents', transcendent research would more often use the terms 'contributors' or 'participants', which emphasises their autonomy.

With this conception of interpretive research, a textual exploration of this kind requires careful deciphering of the textual event at the levels of social/cultural context, discursive practice and language. The amount of data that is yielded by qualitative analysis has necessarily curtailed the amount of text to be analysed in this research.

While mixed methodology – that is, the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods – has many advantages for textual inquiries, this study exclusively deals with qualitative methods since the richness of cultural meanings to be obtained thus have more relevance than positivist findings to this particular research topic. Also this research is more concerned with the relationships of discourses in the text and the subtle tensions between the online medium and the topics revealed in the contributors discussions, which is necessarily a discursive practice. To act as a counter balance to the subjectivity embedded in the textual event and in the ethnographic approach to research, components of critical discourse analysis and distanciation, which take a more objective stance to the analysis of a text, have been applied. This serves as a form of triangulation of research methods, since the types of data yielded by each method will be different yet complimentary, to obtain a more well-rounded perspective in the analysis of the text.

Despite the relative newness of this field of research, a number of academics have contributed to the conception of online communities as tangible social places. Jones (1998) writes of "virtual settlements", while the title of Rheingold's book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (2000) hints at a parallel with this view. Other supporters of this position are Anderson (1992); Caputo (1992); Dutton (1998) (all in Nocera, 2002); and Burnett (2002).

The fact that such groups of 'virtual' people (Bassett, 2002: 234) have been visualised in this way means that researchers can use similar research methods to those traditionally used in the study of physically existent communities. Ethnographic and hermeneutic research models in particular have been used in the context of new media communities. The fact that the Facebook newsgroup can be seen as a virtual community on one hand, and on the other that the vast majority of contributors are South Africans (therefore

constituting a cultural and relative physical proximity of contributors) gives rise to a scenario that is particularly well suited to an adaptation of ethnographic research models.

3.2 Research Design

This section contains the proposed application of the methodology theory that has informed my research design. In order to set about my analysis of the textual event, the techniques of critical discourse analysis and hermeneutic ethnography have been used in conjunction. This segment will outline the essences of these types of research and summarize the reasons for taking this approach.

3.2.1 Hermeneutics and ethnography in a new media environment

Drawing on the work of Kelly (2002, in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002), Neuman (1997) and Burnett (2002) in the field of hermeneutics, this research will involve detailed interpretation of the text and its elements' relation to the meaning of the newsgroup text and the environment it creates as a whole. As ethnography can be defined as the practice of describing and analysing cultural formations (Saville-Troike, 1989: 1), these fields are related and have been combined, for example in Nocera's (2002) study *Ethnography and Hermeneutics in Cybercultural Research Accessing IRC Virtual Communities*.

Hermeneutics is a branch of qualitative research, which Blaikie (1993) defines as meaning "literally… making the obscure plain" (Blaikie, 1993: 28, cited in Neuman, 1997: 68). Hermeneutics is a multidisciplinary approach to textual analysis which "emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text" (*ibid*: 68). The meanings which are revealed are explored through an ethnographic-type immersion in the text, and these findings are then related in such a way as to "develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the whole" (*ibid:* 68).

For the purposes of this research, hermeneutics should be understood as comprising of the full range of the 'fundamental interpretive continuum' outlined by Kelly (2002, in

Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 399), thereby including both the empathetic 'first person' perspective and the more critical 'third person' interpretations of the text.

Traditional ethnography, with its roots in anthropology and sociology, involves the researcher immersing herself completely in the cultural group to be studied, with the purpose of the "description and analysis of culture" (Saville-Troike, 1989:1). Time and financial constraints, however, place this type of genuine ethnographic research out of reach of most emerging researchers. The new media environment of the Facebook newsgroup that constitutes the social setting of my research, however, is more accessible as a site of cultural and linguistic inquiry than physical spaces of social interaction, offering a new and increasingly 'concrete' space for interaction and sharing of contributor's views.

In the early stages of this research, I had intended to engage with contributors on the newsgroup by going 'under cover' into the newsgroup and providing stimulus to generate responses to certain types of behaviour in the environment of the virtual community. On further reflection, however, I could not reconcile the ethical compromise such a course of action would require to the research ends that I wished to achieve, and without this justification I did not feel comfortable proceeding with such a means of data collection. If I were to approach the group as a researcher, this would be likely to have an impact of the naturalness of the discussion.

In *The Scattered Members of an Invisible Republic: Virtual Communities and Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics,* Burnett (2002) considers that "a virtual community is a cooperative, if inherently unstable, experiment in what it might mean to be a community in the absence of physical proximity" (Burnett, 2002: 157). Given the physical size and cultural diversity of South Africa as a whole, the fact that most contributors to the newsgroup are South Africans, means that in terms of physical proximity, the users can nonetheless still be considered as "scattered".

Levy (1998) states that "each new system of communication and transportation modifies ... the pertinent space for human communities" (Levy, 1998: 31, in Burnett, 2002: 157). Hence, Burnett (2002) argues that in order to explore the existence of a given community it is important to understand the "mode of interaction and … the conditions within which such interaction must take place" (*ibid:* 157). The aim of hermeneutic methodology in this type of study is that of illustrating "*how* language use both *reflects and influences* culture in a virtual community" (Burnett et al: 2003).

A great advantage for engaging in ethnographic research of an online text is that the effect of *observer's paradox* (elsewhere referred to as *observer effect*) does not taint the data. Since the contributors came to the newsgroup of their own volition and without the knowledge that their comments would become the subject of academic investigation, the communicative event unfolds naturally, as it would without the presence of the researcher to in any way influence what is said (written) in the discussion. Given the similarly heterogeneous origins of critical discourse analysis and ethnography, with the depiction and exploration of culture and language as their primary aims, these methods combine well in such a research design. Hermeneutics, as a branch of theory and research methodology, has been defined as "the basic human ability to interpret words, text, cultures and life itself" (Fourie 2007: 327), hence it may be conceived as a branch of ethnography associated with the in depth analysis of texts.

By exploring the language contributors use to express South African societal issues on this platform, which is strongly linked to the 2009 general election, this research aims to explore how the use of language and the airing of perspectives link to wider South African cultural systems. Since "the way in which language intersects with and reinforces phenomena like prejudice, discrimination, and racism (amongst others), goes by unnoticed, or at least remains underexplored" (Painter, 2010: 17), this research will attempt to build on existing work in the field. The picture of South Africanness which is built up in the text and the elements on which it is based, will offer a particular insight into the culture of the newsgroup. To the inexperienced ethnographic researcher, Saville-Troike (1989) cautions "This makes the ethnography of communication a mode of

inquiry which carries with it substantial content" (Saville-Troike, 1989: 3). For this reason, the full text of the analysis is reproduced in appendices ii and iii, while the summarised findings and discussion are presented in chapter four.

Ethnography is often associated with explorations of 'exotic' cultures, those 'foreign' to the researcher, however there are several practical advantages to engaging in ethnographic study of one's own culture. One of the challenges of this type of research, however, is to identify and limit the researcher's own subjectivity in the investigation. As discursive studies can never be entirely objective, this should be a self-reflexive exercise and the use of a journal to recognize and come to terms with certain aspects of the researcher's own culturally ingrained subjectivities is recommended in several ethnographic methodological guides. Hence, I have adopted this measure and the journal will be available in the additional resources at the MECS Department, Pietermaritzburg campus, UKZN.

3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

This research draws primarily on the works of Fairclough (1995a) and Parker (1992) in the field of discourse analysis. Both of these approaches stress the importance of the historical context to the analysis of a text. Since the contributors are mainly South Africans, the political and social shifts in this society play a role in the sharing of cultural codes implicated in language. Since this method is used here together with an ethnographic approach, culture-bound meanings and the social dynamics that emerge from the newsgroup text will be useful to establish an idea of the culture of the newsgroup.

Fairclough's (1995a) framework for critical discourse analysis of a communicative event (reproduced in Figure.1, Section 2.2.4) shows how a critical discourse analysis should comprise of text, discourse practice (divided into production and consumption practices) and sociocultural practice. The application of this framework to a new media text requires adjustment, however, in the case of discourse practice. This is because the distinction between production and consumption becomes blurred, and "in some cases makes the

distinction meaningless" (Marshall, 2004: 10). Marshall (2004) illustrates this aspect in *New Media Cultures* by using terms such as 'prosumers' and 'produsers' identified by Bruns (2002), which "acknowledge (the new media's) hybrid quality of both production and consumption" (*ibid*: 50). Thus, in experiencing the internet, neither 'user' or 'consumer' are seen as fully encompassing, as there is a creative element imbued in the interactivity which defines the medium. Internet surfers are consuming and producing simultaneously, making Bruns' terms more appropriate to the activity.

In the case of text-based online communities, such as the Facebook newsgroup I am investigating, Burnett (2002) explains the dynamics of consumption and production at play

> "This process unfolds in an ongoing public "performance" of writing texts, reading and interpreting those texts, and making those readings and interpretations explicit through the creation of further texts, all in an electronically mediated public setting accessible to all members of the community" (Burnett, 2002: 157).

With this conception of the discourse practice of online communities, the separation in the analysis of the categories of production and consumption is impracticable. A more nuanced approach, which considers both of these activities as explained in Section 2.2.4, to this complex relationship in discussing the works of new media 'produsers' (Bruns, 2002, in Marshall, 2002: 50) will be adopted for this research.

3.2.3 Data Collection

The process of selecting an online text as the object of research was guided by several dynamics that may be considered of interest. Firstly, I wished to explore a text that was written about, for and by middle class South Africans, situated in the World Wide Web. Secondly, I wished to find a text that constituted a platform for the articulation of ordinary citizens' views on a subject of significant public interest that is specific to South Africans – for which the election provided a suitable focus. This, I hypothesised, was likely to stimulate discussion about nationhood and elicit responses grounded, to some extent, on the lived experience of middle class South Africans.

Thirdly, when confronted with a number of on-line texts meeting the above criteria, I selected one from the social networking site, Facebook, which has emerged as a popular cultural phenomenon in recent years.

From the newsgroups relating to the election, I selected the one that adhered to Jones' (1997, in Nocera, 2002) established guidelines for virtual settlements as indicators of a community's life which include: interactivity, various contributors, a common public space and a sufficient level of continuous membership. The newsgroup with the largest number of members was then selected, because a large membership indicates that this particular newsgroup has found greater cultural resonance with this sector of South African society. By identifying and analysing the discourses such an online text carries, they may be situated in wider discourses circulating in the country as a whole, hence the frequent references in the analysis to press attention these topics have received. Another factor which guided my choice of this particular text, was that it is written in the English language (an international language) and that since English is my mother tongue I am more confident to engage with it than any other Southern African language.

The 2009 elections were seen by some analysts as a 'make or break' milestone for the political and social future of South Africa. The abrupt axing of Thabo Mbeki just prior to the election, as well as concerns for the level of media freedom – considered prerequisite to a healthy democracy – drew considerable attention to the political climate of the nation.

The data collection process involved downloading transcripts from the 23ˉ 26 April 2009. This time frame includes discussion just prior to the announcement of election results, as well as reaction from respondents to the results as they were announced. This slice of time is an ideal setting for this research as interest in the national political issues is at its highest pitch.

The text was then moved from its HTML file to a MicroSoft Word document. This allowed transcripts to be arranged into chronological order because this permitted the text

to be read as it developed and establish a sense of the timeline and causality of incidents in the text.

Note: in the original online text the contributions to the discussion appear in reverse chronological order, so that the 'first' comment that appears at the top of the page is the most recent post. This arrangement emphasizes the characteristic immediacy of new media in this platform.

3.3 Analytical tools

3.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis Tools

The blurring of boundaries between consumption and production in the new media supports the critical discourse analysis tradition of drawing from both structuralist and poststructuralist paradigms in the analysis of a text. While it is conventional in media research to work from a single view, these should not be seen as mutually exclusive standpoints, but rather as offering complementary stances of advantage to a holistically balanced, multidisciplinary analysis. Thus, the analysis of this new media text should consider both spectrums in a more integrated light than the original Fairclough (1995a) model represents.

Since this research focuses on a text written primarily by South Africans despite being located in the global new media, greater emphasis will be laid on the socio-cultural practice embedded in the text, than to linguistic complexities, as this dynamic is of greater interest to the field of media and cultural studies.

The social-constructionist aspect of the research focuses on how the discussions are "derived from (and feed into) larger discourses" (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 148). With this in mind, I will seek discourses at work in the text by referring only selectively (since the 20-point plan is too convoluted, and is not all relevant to the purpose of this research) to Parker's (1992) "Criteria for Distinguishing Discourses", which is an extension of Potter and Wetherell's (1987, in Parker, 1992) work in that area.

While Parker is more concerned with psychological discourse, these practical guidelines are helpful, particularly in identifying new discourses (that are not widely established) in the analysis of a text.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) developed a ten point plan for identifying discourses, each point resting on the ephemeral ground of 'intuition' and 'presentation' (cited in Parker, 1992: 5), but cautioned that "there is no analytic method" (Potter and Wetherell, 1989: 169 in *ibid*: 5), since discourse is hidden as 'fact' when it is successful.

Parker (1991) built on this work in an attempt to make the analysis of discourse more comprehensive, establishing a ten phase, twenty point plan for the identification and analysis of discourse. Steps in process include:

>(2) Exploring connotations through some sort of free association.

>(4) Talking about the talk as if it were an object, a discourse

>(6) Speculating about what they (types of persons identified as objects of discourse) can say in the discourse… (what rights to speak in that way of speaking).

>(7) Mapping a picture of the world this discourse presents.

>(12) Reflecting on the terms used to describe the discourse, a matter which involves moral/political choices on the part of the analyst.

>(17) Looking at which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse;

>(18) Looking at who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve the discourse.

>(20) Showing how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history   (Parker, 1992: 6-20).

Since not every text representing discourses would necessarily contain all of the data required for the identification of discourse by Parker's twenty point plan, I have narrowed my use of it to the applicable categories most suited to this study with the aim of identifying, documenting and mapping formations of discourses in the South African new media community to be explored. The points used here have been selected for their

appropriateness to the medium and the subject matter. The original Parker 1992 plan is extremely exhaustive, and these selected points contain minimal repetition. These points, in conjunction with Fairclough 1995a, allow for structured analysis appropriate to a new media text, allowing for the exploration of emergent discourses within the discourse and sociocultural practices in which the text is embedded.

By engaging in-depth with present discourses, the analyst is prevented from "regress(ing) to exactly those conceptions of individual culpability for social practices that discourse analysis attempts to avoid" (*ibid*: 21). However Macdonald's (2003) work on discourse and agency (discussed in pages 15-6) should be born in mind in relation to this statement.

Metaphor and social myth are devices that can be considered as rich sites of culturally-bound meaning. Seeking out instances in the text and analysing the political implications hidden by these devices will reveal aspects of South African cultural discursive practices. Myth is a particular site of inquiry since "myth masks the radically different social and economic conditions under which people are born, work and die" (Culler, 1983: 34, in Fourie, 2007: 253). Identifying metaphor and social myth at work in the text will function as a key to unlocking the social dynamics that they seek to mask.

Open coding will be used to identify prevalent themes in the text. Having located the dominant themes, the social dynamics between various perspectives and individual voices in the text will be explored, referencing socio-cultural practises in South Africa and, as far as possible, linking these to the historical context. This will provide a framework for the analysis.

Parapraxis is a useful tool in discourse analysis to uncover private attitudes that cannot be voiced in particular dominant discourses, particularly in the case of political correctness as "topics of race and to a lesser extent gender have been taboo in our society… What people say in public is not the same as what they believe in private" (D'Souza et al, 1992, in Van Boven, 2000: 267).

"In the same way that psycho-analysis makes use of dream interpretation, it also profits by the study of the numerous little slips and mistakes which people make -- symptomatic actions, as they are called ... I have pointed out that these phenomena are not accidental, that they require more than physiological explanations, that they have a meaning and can be interpreted, and that one is justified in inferring from them the presence of restrained or repressed intentions" (Freud, 1925)

In light of D'Souza's work on the effects of political correctness on public discourse, incidents of parapraxis may therefore make these "restrained or repressed intentions" (Freud, 1925) visible, and open an otherwise 'hidden' layer of meaning to the analysis.

Instances in the textual event that reveal discourses related to national identity and construct a map of how elements of the discussion construct 'South Africanness' will be explored. An additional element of the analysis will be to assess of how much of the discussion is focused on Jacob Zuma, as the title of the newsgroup (*Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next president*) would seem to imply that discussion would be dominated by the topic of 'Jacob Zuma'.

If this is not the case, it would be significant in that the contributors are creatively extending the parameters of discussion that the name of the newsgroup would seem to delineate, in a manner that is made possible through new media. This would have implications for the development of civic identity initiatives in the new media field.

3.3.2 Hermeneutic Ethnographic Tools

According to Saville-Troike (1989) ethnographic research should uncover the requisite knowledge for appropriately participating within the "speech community" under study. In addition to the linguistic conventions of the said group, the research should reveal "the cultural rules and knowledge that are the basis for the context and content of communicative event and interaction processes" (Saville-Troike, 1989: 2-3).

In keeping with the Cultural Studies tradition, this research aims to uncover the cultural processes existent in the text that shape conceptions of race (Turner 2001: 2-3 cited in Fourie 1997: 275) and national identity. The analysis of the text will therefore aim to uncover what Thompson (1990) terms "contestatory symbolic forms" (Thompson, 1990: 68, in Macdonald 2003: 30) illustrated by a definition by political philosopher Martin Seliger:

> "…sets of ideas by which men [*sic*] posit, explain and justify ends and means of organised social action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order." (*ibid*: 30)

As a South African engaging in this exploration into a South African popular cultural text, I commence this research conscious that "there is more to the understanding of an experience than can be ascertained from within the context of the experience" (Kelly, 2002, in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 400). Despite sharing cultural codes with the contributors to this newsgroup, by conducting this research I am necessarily inserting a level of abstraction from this group of my compatriots. In order to consider the text in a balanced fashion there are two layers of meaning to be documented: the context provides one layer of meaning, and the view of the text and context from a distance reveal aspects of the context which would be invisible and could not be expressed from within it (*ibid*).

This process of 'distanciation' reveals a 'surplus of meaning' and acts as a counter to the obligatory subjectivity of qualitative research. By exploring the text from within the cultural context and then consciously extricating myself from my own culture, I will thus be experiencing the text in two different ways, each bringing a different meaning to it. By comparing and contrasting these views of the text, an additional layer of meaning is accessed.

Given the subjectivity of interpretive research, particularly when the culture under study is the researcher's own, Geertz (1973, in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 139) recommends that a component of the research process is "an account of the researcher's role in constructing this description". To accommodate this element I will deposit the full

journal of the ethnographic component of the analysis, together with other rough research notes at the MECS office for perusal.

Both of these approaches stress the importance of the historical context to the analysis of a text. Since the contributors are mainly South Africans, the political and social shifts in this society play a role in the sharing of cultural codes implicated in language. As a piece of ethnographic research, this conception of discourse contributes to the possibility uncovering culture bound meanings and the social dynamics that emerge from the newsgroup text.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The primary ethical concern for this research is the question of whether the identities of contributors should be disguised for the purpose of confidentiality. There are a number of dynamics that should be taken into account when considering this matter.

Firstly, one must consider the fact that the medium of Facebook newsgroups is intended as an explicitly public space for individuals to proclaim their views and engage with one another's perspectives. Unless the particular newsgroup is one of the specifically members only groups (which is infrequent), these spaces might be described as a virtual equivalent of the Hyde Park Speakers' Corner, in that users may freely give voice to their own opinions – no matter how unformed – in a public platform. By participating in discussions via this medium the contributors are able to reach a potentially large audience and this allows for greater potential impact than in restricted closed discussion groups. As such, the contributors' remarks become part of the public domain and therefore may be ethically used as a source of research without breach of privacy. Bassett (2002) refers to the application of the human subjects research model in Internet research "There is strong argument for the use of this model when research is conducted into activity such as email between individuals and groups" (Bassett, 2002: 234), however unlike Facebook newsgroups, email is associated with a more 'private' type of exchange, and is addressed only to the recipient(s).

Secondly, as these newsgroups, and hence their content, form part of the online public domain, for research purposes one might consider the contributors (where they choose to write under their own names) in the same light as one would the by-lines of journalists in the print media, if one were engaging in textual research. It is conventional in such research that a journalist's name would be referred to, and I consider that the same procedure should be applicable in the case of public online discussions.

Thirdly, the nature of this research necessitates close reference to the text of the newsgroup, and the full text appears in appendix i. Even if I made use of pseudonyms for contributors, it would be very simple for the real names to be tracked down if one chose to search for the newsgroup by name, or by entering a string of text from the textual event. Therefore, protecting the identities of contributors by disguising names would only be a superficial level of protection in any case.

In addition, the names of the contributors are the only clues as to demographic information in the text and are important indicators of context. While the fluidity of online identity is acknowledged, for the purpose of the critical discourse analysis of this research I shall take as 'true' the sex and race attributes associated with the names given. Therefore the 'names' to which comments are attributed are a valuable source of information that would be lost were I to take measures towards confidentiality.

Since I have opted to retain the names of contributors, there are two considerations which should be noted about the text. One is that the contributors had no precognition that their discussions would become the object of academic inquiry, and as such were not written for that purpose. Secondly, that this research concurs with the view that "any manifestation of Internet activity should be regarded as a virtual person" (Bassett, 2002: 234). As such, while I may refer to a comment posted by John Smith, I acknowledge that with the fragmentary and schizophrenic nature of online identities, the identity of John Smith the Facebook newsgroup contributor and that of the physically existent John Smith as a person are not one and the same, and as such when the analysis refers by name to a contributor it is speaking only of this online facet of identity.

Given the historical context and the digital divide (Castells, 1997: 351 in Fourie, 1997: 404) it is unsurprising that this online discussion is comprised largely of members of the formerly advantaged 'white' race group. This also may be attributable to the fact that Jacob Zuma, the ANC presidential candidate who has a black-dominated support base and has been termed 'the man of the poor', is perceived by some as a threat to the interests of the (particularly non-black) middle class South Africans. By engaging in research of communication in a technological medium, the voices of the lower class are notably absent from the text, and those of the middle class, who have access to the Internet, are given precedence. In order to emphasise the one-sided nature of accounts of 'South Africanness', in terms of class, I refer to Castell's (1997) account of the digital divide and its consequences for class subjugation in terms of the possibilities for democratic expression in the new media.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the dual approaches of critical discourse analysis and ethnographic hermeneutic analysis that will be employed in the exploration of the text. The extent to which this research design achieves triangulation can only be assessed once the analysis has been conducted and shall therefore appear at the end of the findings and discussion chapter. As this research also aims to gauge the newsgroup in relation to public sphere theory, this can only be considered in the conclusion once the data has been analysed and the findings discussed.

Chapter Four: Analysis and discussion of data gathered from two qualitative methods

In order to explore the potential of the Facebook newsgroup for democratic expression I have used two interpretive methods in order to ascertain the culture presented in the online community (including its concerns, conflicts and cohesion) in the contexts of South Africa and the new media.

The method of critical discourse analysis was employed to code issues of public interest as they emerged in the discussion, as well as to highlight discourse structures and the consequences for power relations they demonstrate. The ethnographic hermeneutic analysis looked at the environment of the newsgroup at a more contextually-bound level, although the tool of distanciation was also used in order to gain a more objective perspective and reveal layers of meaning that may be invisible from within South African culture.

Interpretive methods necessarily grapple with subjectivity and research of one's own culture naturally extends this susceptibility. Drawing on Kelly (2002, in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002), I have attempted to turn this to some advantage by using two approaches which are more sceptical and more empathetic in their respective methodological stance, in order to gain a broader understanding of the text.

Since the comprehensive analysis of the text using these two methods is too long and detailed for presentation within the research report itself, this chapter contains a summary of the analysis and discussion. Only the most important aspects of relevance to this research are mentioned here; however the full transcripts of the critical discourse analysis and the ethnographic hermeneutic analysis are included in appendix ii and iii for further reference.

4.1.1 Demographics

In terms of social class, the contributors are likely to belong, predominantly, to the middle class. It is presumed that due to the cost of computer equipment and the Internet, the lower class that comprises the majority in South Africa, is effactually excluded from this medium. Hence, the analysis that follows cannot generalise the concerns of this sector of society as representative of South Africans in general.

Judging by the racial demographic information implied by the names of the virtual identities of contributors, the identities presented in the newsgroup comprises 20 'white' (of European extraction) members, one of whom writes from the United Kingdom, 10 'black' members (one of whom writes from Nigeria) and three 'Indian' members. When these figures are compared with Statistics South Africa 2010 population estimates (available in the critical discourse analysis, appendix ii page 194), it is clear that the predominance of white South Africans in this newsgroup is disproportionate to the actual numbers of whites in the country.

 The fact that blacks are under-represented on the newsgroup, considering that they comprise the majority in the country, may be attributable to historical forces that disadvantaged this group under the apartheid regime as well as the digital divide. Also, since this newsgroup is written in English, those who take part in this discussion are generally those with a comfortable command of that language. Another possibility may be that fewer black South Africans identify with the topic of the newsgroup, and hence choose not to join this particular group.

Of consequence also, is the amount of line space in the text occupied by comments from members of the respective racial groups. White contributors (20 of the 32 newsgroup contributors) take up 213 lines of text, which yields an average of 10.7 lines of comment from each white contributor. Black contributors (10 out of 32) account for 63 lines, averaging 6.3 lines per black contributor. The two Indian contributors accounted for two lines of comment, providing an average of one line each, indicates that not only are whites the numerical majority in this newsgroup, but also that compared to other racial

groups they express themselves with longer comments and thus dominate the line space of this newsgroup.

Of the 32 contributors active in the discussion on the newsgroup for the selected textual event, 20 of the identities are presented with typically masculine names and 12 are presented with feminine names. Taking this as representative of gender, it can be deduced that there are more male voices present in the newsgroup than female voices. However, female contributors accounted for 126 lines, compared to 155 lines by male contributors. Therefore the average number of lines for each female contributor is 10.5 against 7.8 lines per male contributor.

It is significant that only two black female contributors are present in the textual event, particularly given that for one of these (*Funmi*), her Facebook identity indicates that she is Nigerian. South African black women are almost entirely absent from the textual event. Despite institutional advances in the empowerment of black women in South Africa, this notable absence may reflect patriarchal African traditional cultural practices that discourage black women from participation in political concerns, where "in African traditional practice, women keep their eyes lowered demurely" (Manuh, 1998). Other explanations for this may be that the majority of black women support Zuma, and hence this newsgroup may not appeal to them.

White women, on the other hand, are represented by nine contributors who account for the greatest amount of content, comprising 121 lines. These figures are skewed by the fact that the most frequent contributor, *Tiffany*, who accounts for the most lines (57) in the whole newsgroup, is presented as a white female. Therefore, if she and her comments are removed from the equation, each white female would account for eight lines each.

The discussion in the text revealed the group's preoccupation with race, particularly notions of blackness and whiteness. Other central themes were democracy, Jacob Zuma, South Africa, violence and corruption.

4.1.2Themes and Myths

The analysis identified dominant themes in the conversation through the use of open coding. This was achieved by noting recurrent themes in the text with the purpose of exploring the relevance of discussions to matters of public interest and the quality of rationality displayed. This is necessary to exploring the potential of these newsgroups to facilitate meaningful democratic expression. I will discuss these in turn and then discuss the relevance of this data to my research.

4.1.2.1 Race

Both methods of analysis observed the ubiquity of the topic of race in the discussion and the way in which racial issues are embedded in virtually every topic, illustrating the a preoccupation with race. This may be a result of the racially segregated history. The issue of race in cyberspace in particular appears to have been notably sidelined even in international research (Nakamura, 2002) and, what little has been written is largely inapplicable given the complexity of the local context in relation to this topics. The reader is accordingly reminded that this research is *exploratory*, as it ventures into unfamiliar terrain with few theoretical compass points to guide the process.

The analysis revealed myths in the text relating to concepts of 'blackness' and 'whiteness', which are deeply inter related as they are binaries that were imbued with political significance in the apartheid era.

4.1.2.2 Notions of Blackness

'Blackness' in the text was proposed, by *Sanele,* as a stereotypical feature of violent criminals. In *Sanele*'s comment, "WE (BLKS) EITHER KILL EACH OTHER OR OTHER RACES," it is significant that victim-status is attributed to all races (including blacks), while criminal-status is attributed seemingly exclusively to blacks. However, later in the text it emerged that it is not black people in general that *Sanele* accuses of criminal predisposition, but it could be construed that to his mind the traditionally masculine trait of 'violence' is somehow enhanced in the case of black men.

This resonates with the construct of black masculinity in Fanon's work. Fanon was a black Algerian revolutionary philosopher who enlisted as, and identified as, a French

soldier, but was removed from the French forces when non-white soldiers were weeded out. Fanon's work presents psychological profiles of the coloniser and the colonised and endorsed violence as a tool for black emancipation.

"The black man's sword is a sword. When he thrusts it into your wife she has really felt something. It is a revelation. In the chasm that it has left, your little toy is lost" (Fanon, 1967b: 169). Here the largeness of the black phallus relative to that of the coloniser is symbolic of superiority of black masculinity. Fanon may be implying that the coloniser's class dominance is compensation for what he lacks in penis size. Conversely, Fanon's drawing attention to the alleged superior size of the black man's penis may be seen as a measure of comfort against this political situation.

Thus, although *Sanele* sees violence as negative, the power that is a by product of this trait is positive for those who are associated with it. In terms of labelling theory (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 200), this internalisation may have destructive consequences in terms of the way black masculinity is associated with violence. In the analysis it was found that some of *Sanele*'s comments may be construed as a reaction against black males who reinforce the negative criminal stereotype.

By representing black men as more prone to violent tendencies *Sanele* presents an over-simplified picture of the matter, although, on one level, he does present a 'truthful' (in terms of Habermas' culturally neutral criteria for rationality in his speech act theory, Duvenage, 2007: 341) account in that the majority of violent crime offenders in South Africa are black males. *Sanele* does not refer to the intricacies of the matter in terms of factors such as the majority population that blacks represent in South Africa, the cultural factors that produce masculinity in such a way as to predispose males to violence, or the influence of poverty, but this gap in *Sanele*'s logic may be seen to correspond to Tajfel's (1981) work on the cognitive function of stereotyping. To Tajfel stereotyping is seen as serving to "order, systematise and simplify information in order to make sense of a complex social world" (Tajfel, 1981, in Foster and Louw-Potgieter, 1994: 136), hence, a mental shortcut is created between two concepts linked by an association although they may not be fundamentally related. While the majority of violent crime offenders in South

Africa may be black, this theory of stereotyping would make it 'logical' that it would follow that most black men are violent criminals, even though this argument is obviously fallacious.

The responses to *Sanele*'s perspective are noteworthy in that his account is opposed by both *Tiffany* (a white female whose comments, on a superficial level, convey liberal views) and *Nzuzo* (a black male), both of whom have in some measure implied doubts about *Sanele*'s racial identity. *Sanele*'s comments are, however, affirmed by *Werner,* a white male who betrayed residual attitudes in his denial of the oppression experienced by blacks as a result of colonialism. Significant also is that *Werner* did not appear to regard *Sanele*'s comments as incongruous with his black identity. Considered like this, it may appear that given the generally polarised perspectives of the stereotypical "racist Afrikaner" and the stereotypical "black man", for *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo* it may seem impossible that *Sanele* and *Werner* can agree on any point, and hence presume that *Sanele* must be "a racist Afrikaner in disguise".

This illustrates how discourses of race in South Africa may determine racial subject positions, and deviance from these constructed perspectives is treated with contempt (*Nzuzo*: "read what you have just posted and tell me you are not a retarded") and suspicion by both in-group (other black contributors) and out-group (non-black) members alike. This type of reaction may further entrench these racially-determined subject positions by enforcing social stigma. This may be inferred from the replies by *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo*, which signal that *Sanele*'s attitudes are socially unacceptable. This form of punishment by social stigma may be seen as a form of pressure, attempting to demonstrate the inappropriateness of deviating from sanctioned perspectives related to racial identity. The sixth point of Parker's (1992) model for the identification of discourses involves "Speculating about what they (types of persons identified as objects of discourse) can say in the discourse… (what rights to speak in that way of speaking)" (Parker, 1992: 10). Here, the discourse regulates the point of view and manner of speaking permitted to black participants, and is 'punishable' by social pressure, as in the case of *Tiffany*'s and *Nzuzo*'s unreceptive responses.

Nzuzo requests a meeting with *Sanele* in person. *Sanele*, having recommended a meeting place in the CBD, in all probability feels comfortable there. *Nzuzo*, on the other hand, calls the CBD unsafe, most likely due to crime levels, and suggests the relatively affluent northern suburbs as a more suitable meeting place. This illustrates that *Nzuzo* may belong to a higher economic class than *Sanele*, and the implication of his statement is that he is somewhat lacking in 'street credibility'. This raises questions about the authenticity of the construct of 'blackness' presented by more affluent black people who are removed from the experiences of the poorer majority and may have ramifications for dimensions of black masculinity. The act of belonging to this newsgroup may be interpreted as symptomatic such of estrangement, in terms of the accessibility of the medium and the fact that Zuma is perveived as 'the man of the poor'. Note that this is one of infinite interpretations of this matter. I have chosen to illustrate this one because it relates to socio-economic conditions in South Africa, and therefore may provide insight into the sociocultural practice surrounding the text.

If *Sanele* is black in 'real life', it is significant that he dismisses socio-economic and historical forces (presumably that is what is encompassed by "CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES" – note: *Sanele*'s original capped) almost as irrelevant, since the results of crime for society are destructive whatever the cause may be. Given the fact that the Internet is a luxury that only a small percentage of South Africans enjoy, and that proportionately blacks are considerably under-represented in South Africa's online participants, it is probable that *Sanele* has had a more affluent up-bringing than the majority of black South Africans. This begs the question, to what extent, then, is he entitled to use the term 'we' when referring to black men. Assertions that in South Africa "racial apartheid has been replaced by class apartheid" (Bond 2008, cited in Saayman, 2010: 3), may have implications for black identity across social class.

In another strand of the discussion, *Mosa* rebukes *Sherene* for her misrepresentation of black ANC politicians as motivated by "personal gain" and violence. *Mosa* poses the example of Nelson Mandela, an international icon of peace who is also a black male. The

example of Mandela, therefore, stands in stark contrast to the stereotype of violent criminals as black men conveyed in *Sanele*'s prior statements.

Ongama's apparent perception that anti-ANC opinions, held by whites, are sentiments akin to anti-black attitudes, may have a further implication for black South Africans. The strong correlation between race and political allegiance is illustrated in the *Ipsos Markinor findings of political party support by racial grouping* table (Ipsos Markinor, 2009), which can be found in the introduction to the critical discourse analysis in Appendix iii. This study illustrates that the majority party, that won 65.9% of the national assembly votes (IEC, 2009), relied on black supporters for over ninety percent of their votes. This builds the perception that the ANC is the party 'for' black South Africans, which is supported by the popular notion of the ANC as the principle 'liberation party', despite political involvement in the Struggle by various other actors, of all races, who were not ANC members. In this way it is possible that for blacks, not voting ANC may implicate them as race traitors. In terms of the last point of Parker's plan for the identification of discourses (Parker, 1991: 20, which involves "Showing how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history"), this would appear to benefit the majority political party, and serve to crush opposition parties by ideologically aligning resistance with 'anti-black' discourse.

4.1.2.3 Notions of Whiteness

Since redress of past injustices, as well as the eradication of apartheid mindsets, has been a constant theme in democratic South Africa, there has been a political and social (and hence also in the media) awareness created around the issues of the wrongs of apartheid and the racism that, that political system entrenched both in law and in society. It is therefore unsurprising that the issue of government's attempts to rectify these wrongs should emerge from the analysis of the discussion on the newsgroup.

Clignet writes of the psychological stance attributed to the colonizer in Marxist terms:
> "The more privileges they derive from such a status, the more *all* individuals sharing such an experience will be obliged to construct similar sets of prejudiced

beliefs and expectations regarding the exploited categories of the population"
(Clignet, 1971: 296-7, emphasis in the orginal).

Tiffany's comment "it seems only whites are racist and no one else", therefore may express the perception that as a result of postcolonial reflection on this history, white South Africans in general are seen as racist perpetrators since white society was privileged by the apartheid regime. Generally black South Africans, therefore, are proportionately constructed as victims of racism. *Tiffany*'s comment appears to find fault with this attribution. To achieve distanciation, I have used race theory from outside of South Africa on the topic of reverse racism. As noted by Betts, there appear to be "wide limits of institutional toleration in Britain towards reverse racism in the name of 'good race relations'" (Betts, 2002: 242). Given that in the South African context racial issues are a prominent feature due to historical forces, it is arguable that the imperative of 'good race relations' may in this context also be valued above white claims of reverse racism. A number of white contributors' comments (such as those from *Werner* and *Tiffany*) may not be *overtly* discriminatory but symptomatic of the prejudiced ideology of apartheid, linking to works on 'New' or 'Cultural Racism'. This type of racism is characterised by naturalising racist comments, often by disguising racism as cultural differences. Racism is thus naturalised and rationalised. In light of this body of theory a racist inflection to *Werner*'s comment, which places inverted commas around 'freedom' and 'colonialism', may be observed since it "naturalises social functions in terms of a racial-cultural logic of belonging" (Solomos and Back 1996: 19). In this way, this type of discourse practice results in "racism without racists" (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 21).

Sociological thought, however, draws a distinction between attitudes and behaviour that may be applicable in this case. "Prejudiced *attitudes* should not be equated with discriminatory *behaviour*. Although the two are generally related, they are not identical, and either may be present without the other" (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 298). The fact that racism is taboo in South African society means that racist discourse is characterised often by subtlety and equivocation. In the words of Franz Fanon:

"The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence forms of racism… In the very heart of 'civilized nations' the workers finally discover that the exploitation of man, at the root of a system, assumes different faces. At this stage racism no longer dares appear without disguise" (Fanon, 1967b: 35-6).

Given this nuance, delicate yet thorough analysis of these complexities was necessary in the analysis to uncover its manifestations. Although one should bear in mind that given the subtlety in which racist discourse is often couched, and the sensitivity to racial issues in the South African context, if one analyses this South African cultural product closely it is usually possible to 'find' some thread of racism if one looks carefully enough.

Sherene's first comment, which relies on Biblical references, may be taken as partial evidence of an ideological link between her apparently racist rationale and her orthodox Christian beliefs (support for this assertion may be inferred from her 'pro-life' and anti-homosexuality comments, see appendix ii, ethnographic hermeneutic analysis), given the "strong negative connotation of 'black' in Christian colour symbolism" (Wetherell, 1996: 181).

Sherene Cooper wrote

at 12:48am on April 25th, 2009

so y was discipline nd religion taken out of schools?same sex marraiges nd abortion made legal?y is everything that is an abomination unto GOD made acceptable? wot morals can we possibly teach our children when everything that is wicked has become the norm these days.look further than ur nose mosa!

Sherene's statement seems to confirm conservative views. This cannot be explained simply in terms of her Christian faith, as many denominations of Christianity have more liberal policies regarding issues such as same sex marriage and abortion. In the context of the discussion, *Sherene*'s chain of logic seems somewhat flawed, as it appears she is implying that Nelson Mandela somehow experienced "personal gain" from the abolishment of corporal punishment, the recent (i.e. not during Mandela's presidential

term) legal recognition of same-sex marriage and the pro-choice stance of South African policy on abortion.

The role of Christian doctrine in defining notions of whiteness is referred to by Steyn: "Reconfigured discourses about the cultural nature of Europeans as opposed to the black savage were important to the shaping of whiteness" (Steyn, 2001: 11). She further illustrates with the example that Noah's curse of Ham's son was often preached an received as justification for slavery.

Despite the veiled quality of *Sherene*'s comments, *Mosa* perceives these comments as racist. It is perhaps significant that the gender implications bound up in *Sherene*'s anti-abortionist stance, as well as the homophobic element of her talk do not receive censure at all, serving to illustrate (once again) that the issue of race is foremost in South African consciousness. It may also be that the category of race is more pertinent to the topic of politics in South Africa. It is significant also that *Mosa*, rather than saying '*Sherene*, your comments are racist', implicates all whites with the statement "u nid to think further than your skin colour", thereby implying that *all* whites subscribe to racist ideology, therefore concretising the myth of the inherent racism of whites, even while making a 'racist' statement himself.

Just as *Sanele* was asked whether he is "a racist Afrikaner in disguise" when he made less than positive comments about his own race group, *Sherene*'s comments (interpreted as being condemnatory of black leaders) are deemed, by *Mosa*, as being 'typical' of white (racist) mentality. *Sherene*'s response "my skin colour … has nothing to do with my statement", is interesting since it is probable that many black South Africans (particularly those holding either Christian or more traditional African values [Juschka, 2001: 338-350]) may also consider same-sex marriage and abortion as taboo. Further, statements by black contributors in the text also express disgust at corruption and violence in society; however, when a white contributor voices these sentiments it is diagnosed as racism. This indicates the difference in socially condoned racial subject positions on this topic for white and black South Africans respectively, in terms of point six (speculating about

what types of persons identified in the discourse are able to say) of Parker's (1992:10) plan.

In a number of posts, white contributors voice the opinion that dissatisfaction with the government's performance is ideologically crafted to appear as 'white dissatisfaction' (and thus further evidence of the 'inherent racism of whites' myth). *Tiffany* perceives this as a ruse to represent all black South Africans as satisfied with the status quo, which conveniently absolves the government of failure to develop the economy and better the standard of living for the predominantly black lower classes, which comprise the ANC's main support base.

Sherene at one point makes the remark, "(*a*)nd for the record-im proud of my skin colour". On the assumption that *Sherene* is a white South African, this has very different implications for a black person expressing racial pride. In the context of present-day popular understanding of the racial liberation struggles, particularly in the USA and in South Africa, 'White Pride' is associated with white supremacist atrocities and white oppression of other races, whereas 'Black Pride' is associated with hard-won emancipation from such historical subjugation. Where White Pride has negative connotations (for example Ku Klux Klan, the apartheid regime, etc.), Black Pride is generally defined in positive terms. Due to the sensitivity of racial issues that pervade South African media and society since apartheid, such forthright demonstrations of 'White Pride' are rare possibly because of the fear of the probable association with white supremacy and historical injustices.

A by-product, perhaps, of the myth of the inherent racism of whites is what is commonly referred to as the 'race card', whereby accusations of racism are introduced into discussions which have no explicit bearing on racial issues. As Cheng (1997) notes, "Indeed, it has acquired the peculiar status of a game where what constitutes a winning hand has become identical with the handicap" (Cheng, 1997: 49). This refers to the fact that when the race card is played arbitrarily, refutations of such allegations are futile, as the sensitivity of racial issues determines the position of whites as untenable. African-

American academic, Shelby Steele (2006), puts forward a related view in his work on white guilt:

> "Whites … must acknowledge historical racism to show themselves redeemed by it, but once they acknowledge it, they lose moral authority over everything having to do with race, equality, social justice, poverty and so on. ... The authority they lose transfers to the 'victims' of historical racism and becomes their great power in society. This is why white guilt is quite literally the same thing as Black power" (Steele, 2006: 24).

In reply to *Ongama's* assertion that, due to white racism, "all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille," *Steven* says:

> "If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right to state that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist."

This comment bears similarities to *Tiffany*'s earlier statement ("i think its a fairly correct estimation to say most whites want to maintian our standard of living right. i also know loads of people of colour who want [*to*] maintain our standard of living …so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here?"), in that both comments betray an awareness that whiteness is perceived as being synonymous with an anti-ANC stance. A month after this exchange on the newsgroup, Helen Zille made reference to the fact that her party's 'Stop Zuma' election campaign was "accused… of 'negative' campaigning and—outrageously and illogically—racism" (Zille, 2009), quoting comments that echo *Ongama*'s apparent perception that anti-ANC opinions, by whites, are sentiments akin to anti-black attitudes. Therefore, according to the rationale of this discourse, for whites the act of not voting for the ANC (or the PAC as *Ongama* recommends) is perceived as racist.

For purposes of distanciation, from outside of the context this situation appears to bear similarities to Schaefer and Lam's (1992) definition of the structural component of racism, where:

"Societies develop social norms that dictate – for example – not only what foods are desirable (or forbidden), but also which racial and ethnic groups are to be favoured (or despised). These norms are often reinforced by the social institutions of a society's social structure, such as government, religion, education and the economy" (Schaefer and Lam, 1992: 297).

Therefore, from within the cultural framework of South African society, structural racism against whites is 'invisible', by virtue of the perceived debt whites owe to blacks for their economic dominance, which was created by the racially oppressive apartheid regime. Such terms as 'affirmative action', 'black economic empowerment', 'the previously disadvantaged' rely on this history to present the justified enforcement of equity (as opposed to 'equality') policies and justify the fact that white males are the only group to score zero in Affirmative Action points. When viewed from outside of the cultural context through distanciation, however, these practices assume a different meaning and can be seen as evidence of structural racism in society.

In a society that is saturated with memories of the atrocities the apartheid regime inflicted on blacks for the advancement of white interests and the accompanying sensitivity to white-on-black forms of racism, such criticisms of the status quo are frequently branded 'racist' in the newsgroup. For example, the comments by *Ongama* ("why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? ... Our fight against Zuma should nt be racial bt on merits") and *Mosa* ("sory to say dis bt maybe u nid to thnk further than ur skin colour"). As noted by Cheng (1997), this argument "constitutes a winning hand" (Cheng, 1997: 49). In this way "a major function of silencing" is achieved by "contain(*ing*) this potential for opposition by identifying categories of persons and ideas about which speech and texts will be unacceptable, that is, categories of forbidden speech and 'forbidden reading'" (Thiesmeyer 2003: 9).

Hence, white resistance to equity policies at the macro level, and their articulation of experiences of discrimination *as whites*, are overpowered by discourse in the service of black power, in a process of discursive displacement (*ibid*: 9). 'Black' interests, as I have argued in the critical discourse analysis, may be more strongly linked to ANC identity

than, necessarily, racial identity. This 'discursive displacement' may be evidenced in the reaction to such deviance from ANC-allied discourse, which in the text culminates in accusations of racism.

McKee (2005) refers to the opposing views on equity in relation to modernity's tenets of "equality, justice, freedom and comfort" and the definitional problems these terms invite: "When people disagree about facts, they can be checked; but when people disagree about attitudes, this isn't so easily done" (McKee, 2005: 15-6). In the ideals of democratic functioning, the ability for citizens to "ensure that their opinions and ideas contribute to the forming of general agreement" (McKee, 2005: 16) is of importance. Therefore, when sectors of society have their ability to voice concerns limited by such factors as cultural norms and discursive displacement, the democratic balance is thrown out of kilter.

Tiffany's final quip "(*O*)bama is hot!" may be evidence that she is distancing herself from the 'inherent' racism she feels accused of. This may therefore have political intent, especially in light of Rooney's analysis of South African black writer Can Themba:

> "Can Themba writes of how the flaunting of relationships with white women by black men therefore can become a political strategy against apartheid logic… This could be heard to assert: she desires me" (Rooney, 2000: 129).

In this light *Tiffany*, with her presented liberal identity, uses the words "obama is hot", as complete rejection of racist white identity. However, the Kenyan born president of the United States is probably more culturally Westernised than most South Africans of European descent. While Obama has physically dark skin, he is probably culturally more akin to 'white' (English) South Africans perhaps than he is to the majority of poorer black South Africans. If Obama is *Tiffany*'s platonic (i.e. ideal of a) 'black' leader, this vision appears to bear similarities to the 'coconut' (dark on the outside, but white on the inside) analogy.

4.1.3 Violence
Sanele ascribes victim status to all races while limiting his stereotype of criminals to blacks, presenting the perspective that this violence is not simply the just retribution of the formerly-oppressed on the former-oppressors, but is indicative of a culture of violence beyond political motivation.

Frantz Fanon, however contests that such violence *is* linked to the political. Fanon, whose work may be interpreted to advocate violence against the coloniser as instrumental in the reinstatement of the colonised, nonetheless acknowledges the accompanying "programme of complete disorder", in which black-on-black violence is perhaps an extension of the "absolute violence" (Fanon 1963: 36 in Alessandrini, 1999: 237) necessary to reversing the master/slave relationship.

Aside from political motivation, in a country with a vast black majority it is unsurprising that the majority of criminals belong to this racial group, indicating that it is not so much a question of the inherent violence of that group, but rather that any race group will have certain criminal members, and therefore that the majority group will contain a corresponding proportion of criminals (for further information see Silber and Geffen, 2009 and Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 213-4).

Some branches of ANC Struggle rhetoric framed violence in the cause of political emancipation as justifiable means to attaining freedom. For example, Winnie Mandela's well-known speech delivered in Munseville on the 13th of April 1986, where she said "with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country" (quoted in Beresford, 1989). Given this background, the South African national psyche appears, to some extent, to perceive political violence as more acceptable than other forms of violence. Harris (2002) notes South Africa's culturally engrained violent propensity:

> "This is a culture in which violence is proffered as a normal, legitimate solution
> to problems: 'violence is seen as a legitimate means to achieve goals particularly
> because it was legitimised by most political role-players in the past' (Hamber and
> Lewis, 1997: 8, quoted in Harris, 2002, in Hook, 2002: 180).

It is interesting, therefore, that most of the white contributors frame their comments relating to violence in references to political grounds, in light of the sensitivity to racial issues and the myth of the violent predisposition of black men. The perceived relation between race and violence in South Africa may limit what white contributors feel

comfortable saying on this issue since "the topics of race and to a lesser extent gender have been taboo in our society…What people say in public is not the same as what they believe in private" (D'Souza et al, 1992, in Van Boven, 2000: 267). Hence, while white South Africans may have thoughts on non-political forms of violence, they may be discouraged from free expression on the topic since it may lead to comments being construed by other members as racist. This can be seen as an illustration of the limits placed on the condoned white subject position for the topic of violence in South Africa, since the fear of being labeled as 'racist' channels white discussions of violence into the less perilous course of specifically political manifestations of violence.

Tiffany, as a white South African, is able to speak about black crime only from a position which emphasises mitigating factors and (pretends to) dissolve(s) the racial dimension from its relationship to criminality. As a probably black South African, however, *Sanele* is not limited in his subject position by racial sensitivity and is able to disregard such justifications ("AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD") in order to condemn instances of black criminality.

Yet for black contributors, free expression is also limited in this topic. As has been illustrated in the section on *Notions of Blackness* Section 4.1.2.2, *Sanele*'s statements about the stereotypical criminal being black and male, earns him censure for the negative racial implication his statements have for black South Africans. He is misinterpreted, by *Tiffany* in particular, as meaning "EVERYONE who is black is a criminal" (*Tiffany*).

4.1.4 Jacob Zuma

When one considers that the newsgroup was established under the title *Help Us Stop Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President*, it is noteworthy how comparatively few comments directly relate to Zuma, with only twelve comments referring to him by name. Discussion relating to Zuma revolves around four major themes: Allegations of Rape and Corruption, Democracy, HIV/AIDS and Reactions to Zuma as President.

A large proportion of conversation about Zuma in the newsgroup text related to Zuma's rape and corruption trials. For full discussion see the analysis section in Appendix iii Section 7.3.3. Briefly summarised, the case presented in that section is that some Afrocentric philosophers (Madlala and Druza) have claimed that Zuma's rape allegation in particular is evidence of white racist judgement of normal aspects of Zulu tradition in relations between men and women. This has been refuted however by some black feminists who claim that using culture as "an excuse" (Kadalie, 2010) discredits Zulu culture and angers many black people.

Speaking generally about Zuma's corruption charge, Afrocentric philosopher, Madlala, states that even if Zuma is corrupt, the Afrocentric perspective would not see this as rendering Zuma unfit for presidency since "Africans look at the bigger picture, not because they condone corruption, but because they weigh other things in balance" (Madlala, 2005, quoted in Sesanti, 2008: 365). The term 'African' here is problematic and has been dwelt on by a number of intellectuals and social commentators (Nakasa, 1964; Mda, 1999; Nesbitt, 1999 and Granelli, 1999, cited in Fourie, 2008: 289-290). However, if Madlala means 'black' by "African", the text illustrates that opposition to Zuma and aversion to corruption originates from both black and white South Africans. A response to this may be that as blacks have been swamped by Eurocentric ideology in the media and in schools, they too may have internalised 'foreign' attitudes.

The most striking feature about the discussion in the text regarding Zuma's rape and corruption allegations is that contributors' comments belie serious conviction of Zuma's guilt, despite his acquittal on the charge of rape and the fact that the corruption charges were dropped. The contributors' statements appear to justify statements by ANC spokesperson Jessie Duarte at the time of Zuma's trials, that "Mr Zuma has been found guilty in the court of public opinion" (Duarte, cited in SAPA, 2008). The comments which refer to Zuma as a "a corrupt-rapist" may also indicate that these contributors perceive Zuma's acquittal as evidence that the judiciary is not free from political interference, which may account for *Michael*'s comment "When the justice system fails what else is there?" Since the separation of powers is considered prerequisite for

democratic functioning, such comments may also imply contributors' doubts as to the future of democracy in South Africa under Zuma's presidency.

In-keeping with the second point of Parker' plan for the identification and analysis of discourse (Parker, 1992: 6-20), I looked for synonyms for the word "hysterical", used by *Michael* to describe Zuma's supporters. When unpacked like this, the word's connotations construct an image of this (mostly) black group as 'crazed', 'demented', 'frenzied', 'frantic', 'irrational' and 'out-of-control' (Spooner, 2001: 440, and MicroSoft Office XP Thesaurus). If "objects of thought are constructed in and through discourse" (Louw and Potgieter, 1994: 161), the uncovering of attitudes to other groups embedded in language constructions in casual discussions can be useful in exposing the discourse practices which form the basis of discriminatory action (Billig, 1985, in *ibid*: 161). Since black ANC supporters form the political/numeric majority in South Africa, *Michael*'s mental picture of this group and the fear such perceptions give rise to, may reveal a cycle of prejudice that such discourses could generate.

It is worth noting however, that *Michael*'s comment about Zuma's supporters "threatening (indirectly) militant action", is not simply a fabrication to portray ANC supporters in a negative light, nor is it simply a fictitious statement stemming from white paranoia. For example, Julius Malema declared, in the run up to the election, when Zuma was facing allegations of corruption, "We are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma" (Malema, 2009, quoted in Ndlovu, 2010), a statement anathema to democratic principles.

With the exception of the somewhat ambiguous comment by *Brian* ("There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists have been saying that since 94... The people have spoken. Long Live the President"), the newsgroup's reactions to the election results express disappointment and dismay. It is significant, given the discourse identified earlier in the analysis linking anti-ANC sentiments to white racism, that both black and white South Africans are upset by Zuma's victory when it is officially announced.

Mandilakhe's reaction to election results, "KILL ME FAST SUM1!!!!!!," may be considered as the most hyperbolic negative reaction to the news of Zuma as president elect. The fact that this comment originates from a female contributor may link this excessively pessimistic comment to the gender implications involved in the election of a man accused of rape as president of the country. Women's Rights Division executive director of Human Rights Watch, Liesl Gerntholt, said, "Mr. Zuma's comments about women during and after the trial, including about how women should dress, clearly indicate that he holds very problematic views about the roles of women and men in society," (Gerntholt, 2009, in Human Rights Watch, 2009). Zuma's appeal to Zulu culture in his legal defense may be a contributing factor in *Mandilakhe*'s apparent fear, since from her name it can be deduced that she is probably Zulu speaking.

4.1.4 South Africanness

The very act of participation in this distinctly South African online community from the innumerable array of international websites available, could be taken as evidence of patriotism via the level of interest in national affairs it illustrates. This appears to support Fourie's claim that "Globalisation leads (contradictorily) to the revival of local cultural identities," (Fourie, 2007: 358). Farquar, drawing on Wellman (2002a, 2002b) reflects on the extension of offline social ties to the virtual world: "The movement of this network to online realms does not change it; the only difference is the lack of physical boundaries" (Farquar, 2009: 39). In relation to the online community under study, the members may be geographically scattered within South Africa (and thus unlikely to meet offline for this kind of discussion), but their identification with South Africanness extends into the types of online participation they choose.

Despite the ambivalence which characterises South Africanness in the text, contributors do not present a picture of apathy, but rather one of celebrating the positive aspects of South Africa and while they may bemoan certain social and political concerns, the text contains enough hopeful remarks that the newsgroup does not read as a jeremiad. "I think that this election points to a need 4 the country to come together to stand 4 what is right. The battle is not lost, we've made so many cracks. This is only the bgning," says

Zethu, presenting a dimension of South African discourse reminiscent of those associated with 'the Rainbow Nation' on South Africa's emergence into the democratic era.

The topic of crime and violence emerged as the second most prevalent theme, after race. This may be linked to the "culture of violence" (Hamber and Lewis, 1997: 8, cited in Hook, 2002: 180) that is implicated in South African identity. An extension of this culture of violence into the virtual realm may account for the measure of racial conflict that is present in the text. I have argued that these spats may have "playful, symbolic and ritualistic" (Conely, 1999) functions for working through wider issues of dominance in the South African social and political context. These instances of conflict may also cater to the lust for 'spectacle' observed by Baudrillard (Terranova, 2004: 135) that has been particularly documented with regards to television.

Despite the 'white scepticism' alluded to by some black contributors, the majority of whites in the newsgroup displayed loyalty to the nation, if not to politicians, and took great umbrage at a statement by *Ongama* suggesting that they should "mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA". Their apparent indignation may be interpreted as confirming their identification of themselves as South Africans. Despite this, one of the most active contributors, *Tiffany*, does not appear to include herself as 'African' in one of her comments, despite her other assertion that national priorities (alleviating poverty and combating crime in particular) are the same for all South Africans.

4.1.5 The Significance of Tone in the Newsgroup

Tone is a crucial element in determining the meaning of the spoken or written word. As text does not have the same richness of cues as spoken language, it is sometimes more difficult to gauge. In this section I have attempted to interpret tone according to clues within the text.

Sanele, only writes in capitals. Although emphasis is traditionally indicated by the use of italics, the use of capitals is more attention-grabbing, thereby producing an effect of forceful emphasis. Whether this consequence was intentional on the part of the

contributor is not clear, as it is possible that the caps lock function of the wordprocessing program used 'just happened to be' activated at the time of writing. For some readers of the text, however, the implication of this for the tone may be likened to that of shouting. However, since *Sanele* only uses capitals the effect is to some extent lost as all his comments are equally emphasized in this manner.

The relationship between *Sanele* and *Tiffany* is complex. *Tiffany*, even while apparently holding similar views to *Sanele,* persists in taking an argumentative line with him. Even though she is argumentative, *Tiffany's* remarks are not aggressive, and there is a degree of friendliness and familiarity between the two identities. While Smith and Kollock have referred to the "prevalence of hostility on the Internet" (1999: 18), Burnett (2002) states that the case may have been exaggerated. He draws on Joseph Walther (1994 and 1996), who "further suggested that the lack of traditional physical and social cues in CMC can lead participants to form more positive images of their online interlocutors than they otherwise might" (Burnett, 2002: 158). Walter's work however, focused on online communities where membership was intended to be long term, where positive social behaviour was seen as an investment in future group relations. Since the election largely depleted the relevance and activity of this particular discussion group, this type of 'vested interest' in friendly behavior may not be the central factor here. Given the disparate perspectives from which *Tiffany* and *Sanele* engage with the myth of the violence of black men, the lack of hostility and the general tone of friendliness that pervades their discussion is noteworthy.

"An economist cudnt make our economy grow. I wonder how people expect a person who has a third grade to help our economy," is *Mosa*'s response to the news of Zuma's presidency. *Brian*'s comment, "There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists have been saying that since 94... The people have spoken. Long Live the President," is perhaps ambiguous, and derives intended meaning from which part one reads as ironic.

If the first, then *Brian*'s response is the only pro-Zuma reaction to election results in the text. In this case, "bloody pessimists" may refer to white pessimism since *Brian* specifies

"since 94", which is when South Africa came under black rule. If the racial implication was intentional, the fact that *Mosa*'s (the name implies a black male) comment was 'pessimistic' too, would appear to detract from the validity of *Brian*'s implied racial dimension of pessimism for the economy. In this case "the people have spoken… Long Live the President" is a celebratory comment relating to the outcome of the democratic election.

If one lays the ironic stress on the second part of *Brian*'s comment, the meaning is opposite and may be interpreted as scornful of those who labelled ANC detractors as 'bloody pessimists'. The fact that the Human Development Index for South Africa has slipped from 90th in the world to 120th since the ANC came into power (Seekings, 2006: 4), may be interpreted by some as illustrative of the ANC government's failure of the poor. With this reading of *Brian*'s comment, the latter part may be construed as expressing doubt over the judgement of the masses in determining leadership in democratic processes, since the ANC remains popular despite its shortcomings. In this case, *Brian*'s statement "Long Live the President" could be seen as drawing parallels between South Africa under Zuma, and countries such as Zimbabwe, where a democratically elected leader becomes a dictator and often rules the country till death.

4.2 Discussion of the Relevance of the Data to my Research

4.2.1 New Media Culture in the Newsgroup Text

In order to gauge the potential of this medium for democratic expression, it is necessary to have some understanding of the culture of the community it serves. Drawing from the analysis, I will now discuss my findings with examples from the findings. For further discussion refer to the ethnographic hermeneutic analysis (appendix ii).

Michael is presented as an anachronism in this newsgroup. Here is evidently a relic of the 'old school' of late modernity (and the white supremacy of apartheid). He appears appalled at the poor grammar and spelling, the *ad homonym* and expletives that he is confronted with in this postmodern, new media environment, in which familiarity with

language conventions is symbolic of membership (Saville-Troike, 1982, in Smith and Kollock, 1999: 39). It is unfortunate (perhaps) that his air of superiority is marred somewhat by his own spelling errors ("eminate" and "balck" *sic*) as another contributor, *Mike,* is quick to point out.

Smith and Kollock note that "the hostility that exists on the Internet is a common… complaint. The puzzle to be explained is not the prevalence of hostility in online interaction, but rather how it is that there is any significant cooperation at all", (Smith and Kollock, 1999: 18).

In-fighting in an online community, such as in the case of the argument between *Tiffany* and *Michael* (who both oppose Zuma, and are both presented as disillusioned white liberals), may be linked to the tensions between individual rationality and collective rationality. It is in the interests of the participants engaged in this newsgroup to be cooperative (those who oppose Zuma's presidency), however, individual rationalities on the part of contributors may lead them to disagree on the 'reasons' for rallying their opposition to Zuma. Thus "behavior that is reasonable and justifiable for the individual leads to a poorer outcome for all" (Smith and Kollock, in Herring, 1996: 109), which in this case means reduced social cohesion in the group. This relates to the ethnographic component of the research design.

However, the clash of anti-Zuma paradigms in the exchange between *Tiffany* and *Michael* may also be framed more positively for the health of the community. "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence," as Blake declared in *Proverbs of Hell*. By publicly giving vent to their opposite views, *Michael* and *Tiffany* are both expressing their arguments to illustrate, according to their individual rationalities, as to why they would not vote ANC. As the text is addressed "potentially to whoever knows how to read" (Ricoer, 1976: 31, in Burnette, 2002: 165), this may allow other undecided voters to see – for both sets of reasons – why Zuma would make a poor president (i.e. the newsgroup's professed goal).

The racial exchange between *Ongama* and several white participants, the most heated of its type in the newsgroup text, may reveal aspects of the cultural product of this particular newsgroup. In reference to Baudrillard:

> "… one should bear in mind that the masses have never been on the side of reason, to which they always preffered the seductive power of spectacle – whether of gladiators' fights, public executions, sports, games, ceremonies, fireworks or special effects"(Terranova, 2004: 135).

Given the cultural imperative of racial matters embedded in the South African psyche due to historical circumstances, is it possible that racial spats like those within the newsgroup text may serve a similar function to such "gladiator fights" or "public executions"? In racial spats like these black and white contributors have their identities invested in the conflict and therefore may be seen to invest as much, if not more, in these as identities as soccer fanatics in the teams that they support in the Soccer World Cup held in South Africa in 2010.

Conely (1999)'s article *The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting*, highlights the "playful, symbolic and ritualistic" functions of conflict, which I argue could be applicable to virtual conflicts, despite the fact that contributors themselves are not physically at risk in the online situation. Therefore, if "For Baudrillard it is not the media that manipulate the masses, but it is the masses who 'envelop the media' because they are themselves already a medium" (Terranova, 2004: 136), then in the case of this manifestation of the new media, the appeal for 'spectacle' fused with conflict is met with its appearance in the newsgroup through online arguments.

In South Africa in particular the present economic, social and political contexts informed by racially divisive history may render racial conflict the most apt form of spectacle to appeal to these contributors. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the enveloping of a medium's content in their capacity as "prod-users" (Bruns, 2002) this online community should use racial spats for recreational and symbolic purposes.

The text also contained a xenophobic exchange. Given earlier racial tensions in the newsgroup text, it is interesting to observe the solidarity displayed in this instance of white and black male contributors together repelling this comment by a Nigerian woman.

Funmi Sangodeyi (Nigeria): I want Zuma to win and I want South Africa to fail. You know why? Because I am Nigerian and if South Africa fails then the most important country in Sub Saharan Africa will be Nigeria.

Arthur Tsimitakopoulos: Aaaah shuddup you Nigerian wench. Even if SA 'fails', your cesspool of country Nigeria will still be a stinking mess filled with drug dealers, crack whores, pirates, monkey lovers, thieves and losers. So get of your high horse and get back to selling your cocaine at the street corner...mampara!

Kagisho Phoku: Well said Arthur..nothing else can be said to this...oh you said it, Nigerian Wench.

Harris proposes that xenophobia is constructed as the "scapegoat for the intolerance and disunity that threatens the health" (Harris, 2002, in Hook, 2002: 174) of the New South Africa. In this way, *Kagisho* and *Arthur*'s verbal attack on *Funmi* may also be perceived as socially cohesive in their hostility, since in the wake of the racial tension earlier in the newsgroup, *Funmi* is a socially acceptable 'other' to serve as scapegoat and preserve the construct of national unity.

The references to "Nigerian wench" and "crack whores" implicate gender in this assault on *Funmi*, sexual forms of insult are utilised. This has power implications since the authors of this barrage are male, because "of the social actions those descriptions

accomplish" (Edwards et al., 1992: 2-3, quoted in Painter, 2010: 240). The social action arising from these sexual terms resonates with Dworkin (1979):

"In practice, fucking is an act of possession – simultaneously an act of ownership, taking, force, it is conquering…" (Dworkin, 1979, in Dever, 2004: 113). In discourse practise, therefore, the sexual nature of the language used denigrates *Funmi* as 'conquered', and since the words refer to prostitution, it is implied that *Funmi* is thus 'defeated' not once by one man, but often by numerous men. This finds resonance with hooks' (1990) work on the phallocentric identification with the coloniser in black resistance discourse:

> "The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and their white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus." (hook, 1990: 66-7, quoted in Alessandrini, 1999: 207).

Therefore, despite the cosy camaraderie displayed between a black and a white member of the newsgroup in this instance, this unity is underpinned by the fact that as males and as South Africans, *Arthur* and *Kagiso* are in this context 'in group' members and, as a female and a Nigerian, *Funmi* is defined as belonging to an 'out group'. Therefore, in the context of external discord, black and white South Africans may bond together in the common cause of defence of South Africa and South Africanness, however they still rely on the principles of exclusion and stereotyping to achieve this. These discourse apparatuses however are the same as those which fuel interracial conflict within the local context. Social tensions such as this illustrate the relevance of the in-depth analysis of the text community allowed by the method of ethnographic hermeneutic analysis.

It is also possible that this xenophobic incident may be interpreted as serving an entertainment function in light of Conely and Baudrillard discussed above. After all, "Xenophobia is a form of violence and violence is the norm in South Africa. Violence is an integral part of the social fabric, even although the 'New South African' discourse belies this" (Harris, 2002, in hook, 2002: 181).

Although the newsgroup does have an administrator, i.e. the person who began the group, who is able to remove inflammatory comments, there is only evidence of one instance that text has been removed. However, it is also possible that the contributor himself (*Reinhart*) may have decided to delete the comment. As this occurred only once, it is probable that the administrator does not wantonly resort to censoring the newsgroup, and appears to take a noninterventionist stance.

The analysis also revealed culturally ingrained expectations as to the stances particular racial groups should take in relation to particular issues. These prescribed subject positions frequently incur conflict and limit the voice permitted to those who deviate from raced identity bound attitudinal norms. Although some contributors are challenging these norms, in the online community the question of fluidity of virtual identity is sometimes used in order to undermine comments 'unbefitting' a particularly raced contributor.

Having returned to the newsgroup more than a year after this text was first created, I was somewhat surprised that it is still functioning despite the objective outlined in the title of the newsgroup is clearly defeated by the fact that President Zuma has been in office for over a year. As the topics of the discussion have since shifted away from a focus matters of national interest towards more individually relevant matters, the 'health' of the community has declined as weeks elapse between posts (despite the fact that membership remains high). This would appear to correlate with Nocera's (2009: 7) theory of community cohesion with reference to Simmel (1910), whereby sociability is seen as the primary function of an online community. As time has elapsed since the election, it may be that this discussion is less conducive to sociability as it is no longer a current concern. It also may be that the topicality embedded in the title of the newsgroup means that this discussion is 'dated'. The fact that Zuma ultimately won the election may mean that users consider this a 'lost battle'.

4.2.2 Virtual Identity

As stated earlier, Facebook has a convention of named profile identities. There is no guarantee, however, that these given names are necessarily the true names of the people who use them. Identity profiles may therefore be fictitiously constructed personas experimenting with racial and gender demographics in the online medium. This fluidity of identity has particular implications for meaning in the analysis of the text, particularly given the South African fixation on racial issues demonstrated in the text.

Although it is possible that any of the contributors may be writing under pseudonyms, I only explored this aspect of new media identity in the ethnographic hermeneutic analysis, and then only when it arose in the discussion. This occurred when *Sanele* was asked by *Tiffany,* "are you a racist afrikaner in disguise dude? Your comments seem a bit odd?"

Here *Tiffany's* comment appears to indicate that the myth of the inherent violence of blacks is one that is known to her, but associated with the views of "racist Afrikaners". Since *Sanele* is presented as black by virtue of the virtual identity marker of a traditionally black African name, such views expressed by a black person seem to *Tiffany* to be incongruous. *Tiffany*'s reference to "racist Afrikaner" mindset makes it appear that she considers the myth of the inherent violence of blacks to be a perception warped by racism and therefore irrational. Her last question, "your comments seem a bit odd?", could also be interpreted as signalling that *Sanele*'s comment seems odd because it does not fit the conventional subject position one would expect a black person to hold. In other words, the meaning behind *Tiffany*'s words might also be read as 'given your comments, your racial identity seems a bit odd'.

Since "[i]n online interaction racial identity springs from a participant's perspective on racial issues rather than from physical cues" (Burkhalter, n.d., quoted in Smith and Kollock, 1999: 11). If 'Sanele' really is a construction by a white racist attempting to revile other whites with his portrayal of what a black man is, this presents an insight into how this (for arguments sake white male) contributor sees blackness and tries to re-present his interpretation of this notion.

While Burkhalter suggests that attitudes on racial matters are the greatest clues as to identifying the race of UseNet contributors, "there is often disagreement about whether a particular signal is inherently or conventionally tied to the trait" (Dawkins and Guilford, 1991, in Smith and Kollock 1999: 33). This introduces the possibility that *Sanele* really is black and is voicing his frustration at the violence and crime committed by black perpetrators because such individuals reinforce negative racial stereotypes.

Drawing on Nakamura (2004), Farquhar (2009) states that "Race and gender stereotypes thrive online, especially when individuals "play" with identity… for instance, stock gender roles get exaggerated when individuals switch gender online" (Farquhar, 2009: 40). The exaggeration of certain traits that may be inferred from *Sanele*'s discussion, therefore, may indicate that *Sanele* is a fantasy construction. The fact that black masculinity is often associated with superlative masculinity may make this identity type particularly appealing to white male South Africans, who may feel emasculated by their reduced political power and such policies as BEE and affirmative action.

4.2.3 Rationality and Civil Society

Rational debate, being one of the key principles associated with public sphere theory, has been subject to definitional debates in revisionist theory (Hohendahl, 1992; Fraser, 1997; McKee, 2005 and others). The way rationality is defined has political implications for eligibility of citizenship as well as in the challenging of pervasive Western cultural norms.

This research has attempted to engage with this ephemeral concept, looking at the way 'contextual' rationalities (Fraser, 1997) play out within this multicultural South African new media text. As rationality is culturally bound and intertwined with notions of citizenship, the South African and new media contexts present interesting conditions for investigating the concept.

In the analysis, I was particularly interested to observe the ramifications of South African discourse practice in light of the contextual nature of rationality, in which "*Rational*

debate is possible without the presupposition of demonstrative universal norms"
(Hohendahl, 1992, in Calhoun, 1995: 107).

In her heated discussion with *Mosa, Sherene* makes the following comment: "(*wh*)y is
everything that is an abomination unto GOD made acceptable?" In terms of types of
rationality and public space, such an appeal to 'God' does not conform to late
modernity's standards for formal, rational public debate, as this is highly subjective given
the plethora of differing opinions held by vastly disparate religious groups. For this
reason, among others, religious views are traditionally kept out of formal public debates
and are reserved for the private realm. However, the postmodern nature of this informal
online debate does not obey the same rules as Habermas' ideal public sphere, and if
religious references are found to be convincing by other members, the validity of such an
argument is sufficient to this forum.

Mosa cites Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratically elected president, as a
case in point to disprove *Sherene*'s claim that "not one leader had the country's interest at
heart as "(T)hey all were out for personal gain". *Mosa* has such confidence in Mandela's
irreproachability that he adds "(*and I am*) sure everybody wud agree wit me".

 As Nelson Mandela has become a world icon, representing 'peaceful struggle' against
oppression, in South Africa he is sacrosanct. Jacob Zuma's biographer Jeremy Gordin
controversially proclaimed, "The whole Saint Mandela thing has obscured the history of
the ANC and the relationships between people. He's not a saint, he's a human being"
(Gordin, no date, cited in *Mail and Guardian*, 2009). This use of Mandela's name as a
'sacred cow' may have relevance to *Mosa*'s use of it in the text. This could be linked to
discursive displacement of deviant discourses, which Thiesmeyer (2003) sees as limiting
illocutionary power. "When this type of silencing is at its most effective, it obscures both
the realization that silencing exists as well as any awareness of its social and political
uses (Eto, 1982; Jansen, 1991; Conklin, 1997)" (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 3).

Thus, although *Mosa* may not have consciously circumscribed *Sherene*'s speech, in the context of contemporary South Africa, *Mosa*'s appeal to Nelson Mandela, has greater impact than *Sherene*'s appeal to God. After this reference to Nelson Mandela and, by virtue of association, the ANC, anything *Sherene* responds that appears to detract from this icon is culturally tabooed, and therefore denied of a subject position that can make "an appropriate response" (*ibid*: 3).

In another instance, *Ongama* wrote

> "why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? Why? I dnt like the character of the man bt he is a S.A and soon to be our president. Our fight against Zuma should nt be racial bt on merits. If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites"

This comment underlines the perceived racist rationale of whites who choose to vote DA rather than ANC. *Ongama*'s insinuation may be that whites who are opposed to Zuma only dislike the idea of him as president because he is black. However, *Ongama*, as an established member of the newsgroup, has had access to all the prior posts in which many reasons are raised as to why Zuma would apparently make an unfit president. Not a single one of these has stated race as a criterion for Zuma's shortcomings. This is further evidence of the prominence of race issues in the national psyche, and this statement is informed by the myth of the 'inherent racism of whites', which is strongly implicated in the 'white flight' from South Africa.

Ongama could be interpreted as meaning that voting for a presidential candidate who is not black shows allegiance to the defunct apartheid regime. *Ongama*'s perception of political parties appears to be somewhat skewed. He apparently does not enter into account that while the DA may have a white presidential candidate it is multiracial as a whole, whereas the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) is black dominated because of its focus on black interests, thus alienating non-black voters (see also the IPSOS

Markinor (2009) table in Section 7.3.2 showing race against political party affiliation). Also, for voters who are not in favour of the ruling party it makes sense to vote for the next largest official opposition party rather than for one of the multitude of minor parties – for example, PAC received only 0.27% of votes cast and only one seat in parliament (Independent Electoral Commission, 2009). In terms of rationality, it appears that *Ongama* does not see these facts.

The barrage of white 'self-defence' that this comment provokes may make it appear that such a comment is, perhaps, unwelcome to a number of the active participants in this newsgroup. However, in terms of the process of pushing the boundaries of the community, *Ongama*'s comment is constitutive of extending the axis from which contributors can speak in the community. Since online communities provide "people with the means to make meaning ... [and also provides] them with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them" (Cohen, 1985: 16, quoted in Burnett, 2002: 159), *Ongama*'s comment can be seen as extending these means for the newsgroup. Thus, evidence of opposing forms of rationality may be beneficial in that mutual interrogation could lead to the articulation of richer and more diverse meanings.

In online discussions, "It is the spirit rather than the letter of a message which is seen to be significant, and earlier phrasing can be adapted to suit the new writer" (Crystal, 2001: 147). A case in point which illustrates the implications of this in the newsgroup text is the exchange between *Tiffany* and *Sanele*. *Sanele* at no point says (as *Tiffany* ascribes to him) "Oh well i am black so i do crime…" and so it is strange that she chastises him thus: "not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)".

This tendency to 'adapt' and hence appropriate prior comments, involves a dimension of power. This, however, may not be a conscious process and may not be limited to online communication. According to Cohen:

"What passes as understanding is often based on interpretation, and the interpretation is generally accomplished by reconstructing other people's behavior as if it was our own: in

other words, by attempting to put ourselves in their shoes, our minds in their bodies. Hence, when other people use words that we use, we interpret their intended meaning by assuming that it corresponds to ours. Sometimes it may; sometimes it may not...." (1985: 16, quoted in Burnett, 2002: 159).

Therefore, *Tiffany*'s interpretation of *Sanele's* comments as meaning "EVERYONE who is black is a criminal," may indicate that she holds corresponding attitudes.

In discourse theory "variability in terms of specific contexts" (Low and Potgeiter, 1994: 161) is documented in face-to-face interaction, where no permanent record of conversation is available to 'prove' such variability. In the case of online discussions, however, record of discussion is "accessible to all members of the community" (Burnette, 2002: 157) and it would seem likely that other members would take *Tiffany* to task for her apparent inconsistency, but this breach of constancy is unchecked in the newsgroup. This variability is characteristic of permissible conventions of rationality in the newsgroup.

4.2.4 Democratic Expression

Drawing from the analysis, I will now discuss the issues pertinent to democratic expression. I will return to this discussion in the conclusion, where I will weigh the findings of this research in terms of public sphere theory.

Despite the title of the newsgroup signalling it to be a group *about* Jacob Zuma, this subject *per se* was not predominant in the text. The issue of race emerged as the primary concern of the text, which echoes South Africa's history of racial segregation and the post-apartheid project's ideal of multicultural democracy.

The allegations made in the text that a contributor saw Zuma taking ARVs illustrates the relative freedom the new media enjoys at present compared to press and broadcast media, but this is also linked to the comparative lack of authority this medium commands.

One of the difficulties regarding discussions of race in online communities generally, is that "participants rarely discussed race directly. Instead race issues emerged only

indirectly around discussions of social events with racial implications" (Kendell, 1998, in Grasmuck et al, 2009: 160). This newsgroup facilitated dialogue on the topic of race since South African political issues necessarily incur racial dimensions, particularly within national discourse practices (as demonstrated in the analysis) and yet does not impose the subject on contributors. As the topic of race in South Africa is a sensitive one, South Africans appear hesitant to directly discuss the matter and thus are more likely to engage with the issue via another topic, such as that of Zuma's presidency.

The fact that only one contributor is presented as a South African black woman illustrates that this demographic group is under represented in this online political discussion. This may be partly due to economic inequality that this group in particular are subject to as a result of apartheid. The fact that the cost of computers and Internet are beyond the reach of the vast majority of black South Africans, means that they are denied of participation.

Taken with the fact that black women are also severely under represented as news sources (MISA, 2003 in Fourie, 2008: 327), there may be other factors which prevent black women in South Africa from making use of democratic expression, beyond that of the digital divide. The patriarchal nature of traditional Zulu culture, in particular, views political participation by women as a violation of gender norms (Manuh, 1998), and this may serve to discourage South African black women from practicing their civic identity.

If the absence of this section of society is typical to online discussions of this nature, this factor would be detrimental to the functioning of the the new media to reach its democratic potential in South African generally. This is because if black women are unable to add their voices to shaping the virtual environment, they may experience future disadvantage since they have not participated in shaping its evolution. Nakumura (2002) argues that black people internationally are disadvantaged in this manner since "people of colour were functionally absent from the Internet at precisely that time when its discourse was acquiring its distinctive contours" (Nakumura, 2002: xii).

The critical discourse analysis illustrated that this white subject position appears to be frequently limited in subjects that have a racial dimension. Frequent recourse to 'the race card', feelings of 'white guilt' and the wish to be politically correct may curtail what white subject positions are able to express in terms of D'Souza & MacNeil's (1992, in Van Boven, 2000: 267) work on the silencing of discourses. Drawing on McKee (2005:16), it can be inferred that this may have a negative impact on democratic functioning. The perception, particularly held by white contributors, that South Africa's democracy is threatened may be related to the fact that they feel deprived of a voice to express their concerns and to contribute to reaching national consensus.

Notwithstanding, the data did reveal some instances of white contributors defying cultural conventions of condoned white subject position. This form of deviance may be facilitated by the "decrease in social and physical 'presence' [*which*] causes CMC users to experience a significant reduction of their awareness of themselves as socialized individuals" (Burnett, 2002: 158). In this way the online nature of the community may benefit users by eroding culturally ingrained forms of self-censorship, leading to a greater degree of freedom of expression.

4.3 Limitations

This research project has revealed several key limitations. Following on from the triangulation report in Section 4.3.1, one of the primary limitations is the extent to which interpretive methods reveal the inescapable subjectivity of the researcher. The ethnographic analysis, however, attempts to derive positive value from this unavoidable pitfall by exploring issues from within the context, allowing for a level of meaning to be extracted that would not be possible from a truly distanced perspective.

The focus of this study on the text neglects structural elements of the experience of participation in regard to the technological apparatus of Facebook newsgroups. Further research is required in this regard to extend this field of inquiry.

The advantage gained in the avoidance of *observer's paradox* by this non-intrusive study of the online community may be outweighed by the fact that the researcher's participation in the newsgroup would have facilitated the ability to ask probing questions at significant junctures in the conversation. Since I did not enter the newsgroup discussion, I was unable to further explore a number of interesting statements in the text. Although ethical considerations would make this activity hard to justify, research undertaken where the researcher deceptively poses as an ordinary contributor would overcome the difficulty of *observer's paradox* and facilitate probing.

The lack of reliable demographic information that research of this medium incurs means that either the researcher must abandon any use of such data to the detriment of identity and its social dimensions in the research, or they must risk the credulity of accepting presented online identities. In the dual analyses I have tried to encompass both of these approaches, however, the lack of solid demographic data means that comments cannot be decidedly analysed in terms of the historical context, which in the South African context is crucial to meaning.

4.3.1 Triangulation

The extent to which triangulation was achieved in this study can be assessed according to guidelines by Kelly (2002). According to Kelly's conception of the "fundamental interpretive continuum" (in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 399), interpretive research can be located by degree between the 'sceptical' and 'empathetic' poles.

The critical discourse analysis and the practise of distanciation in the ethnographic component of the study extend this research towards the more sceptical range of this continuum. At the same time, however, the interpretations which the critical discourse analysis elicits are nonetheless rooted in the researcher's subjectivity, however rigorously the researcher may resist this, and therefore infuse the stance of the research. As researchers cannot 'see' this dimension of their own work, I can only presume that the same tendency is present in my work. This means that the location of this study on the fundamental interpretive continuum is certainly at a distance from perfect objectivity.

The ethnographic hermeneutic aspect of the research is more contextually bound, and the familiarity of the researcher with the culture offers some insights which may be missed by 'foreign' eyes. The other side of this coin however is that from within the context, certain power structures may be invisible, since cultural rootedness may conceal certain norms behind the veil of ideology. The impoverishment of studies that are firmly empathetic are thus clear. The contrast between the views presented between the in-context and beyond-context (distanciation) approaches illustrate that this study has encompassed empathetic as well as sceptical dimensions of the continuum.

I therefore locate this study as being towards the centre of the fundamental interpretive continuum, although the use of distanciation and critical discourse analysis as more objective approaches, may perhaps incline the study slightly towards the sceptical range. I therefore conclude that triangulation was achieved to a certain extent in this study.

4.3.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is required to identify cultural and economic barriers to black South African women's participation in online discussions of political issues. Since this group's voice is virtually absent from the text, this study may suggest that a major portion of society has no impact on this sphere of public discussion, and therefore the findings of the analysis cannot be considered representative.

The need for further academic inquiry into South African identity construction in relation to race and political affiliation is necessary, particularly in relation to the extent to which ANC identity is implicated in blackness. In addition, South African research is needed to investigate the extent to which culture and race are intertwined in discourse practice, and the complexity of differing cultural formations of black identity in particular. While this research was prevented from meaningful engagement with class issues due to the technologised nature of the medium, the social class aspect of identity in South Africa also requires further research.

Chapter Five. 5. Conclusion

"The civic culture concept does not presuppose homogeneity among its citizens; it in fact assumes that there are many ways in which citizenship and democracy can be enacted. It does, however, suggest the need for minimal shared commitments to the vision and procedures of democracy, which in turn entails a capacity to see beyond the immediate interests of one's own group. Needless to say, this is a challenging balance to maintain. However, different social and cultural groups can express civic culture in different ways, theoretically enhancing democracy's possibilities" (Dahlgren, 2005: 158).

In my exploration of the Facebook newsgroup *Help Us Stop Jacob Zuma From Becoming SA's Next President* I have analysed the text using two qualitative approaches.
The critical discourse analysis traced competing South African discourses relating to the myths of *the inherent violence of black men* and *the inherent racism of whites*, the topics of crime and violence, Jacob Zuma and South Africanness and democracy. This method's theoretical guidelines enforced a more objective view of the text, although interpretive methods in general grapple with subjectivity at a more observable level than do quantitative methods.

The ethnographic hermeneutic component of the research aimed at "making the obscure plain" (Blaikie, 1993: 28, in Neuman, 1997: 68) in the text, as well as documenting the inner workings of the online community and its relationship to South African issues at the time of the national election. While this component of the research is more contextual and therefore more subjective in nature, the persuit of distanciation provided a more distanced perspective from which to look at my own culture.

In relation to the potential for democratic expression afforded via this Facebook newsgroup, I have identified two societal groups which are denied aspects of voice in public discussions. This can be seen as blemishing the democratic ideals that "wants all citizens to be free, and to be treated equally and justly" and is exercised via "a functioning public sphere to ensure their opinions and ideas contribute…," (McKee, 2005: 16) to a common consensus.

The fact that only one contributor is presented as a South African black woman suggests that this group is under represented in this online political discussion. The fact that the cost of computers and Internet are beyond the reach of the vast majority of black people, may mean that they are denied the opportunity to participate in new media forms of civic engagement such as the newsgroup analysed in this research. Taken with the fact that black women are also severely under represented as news sources (MISA, 2003 in Fourie, 2008: 327), there may be other factors preventing black women in South Africa from excercising democratic expression, other than that of the digital divide. The patriarchal nature of traditional Zulu culture, in particular, views political participation by women as a transgression of gender norms (Manuh, 1998), and this may serve to discourage South African black women from practicing their civic identity.

The other group that is perceived as having a restricted voice in contemporary South African discourses is white South Africans. In this case, silencing is not due to absence from the online community, but rather due to discursive displacement (Thiesmeyer, 2003) which serves to dismiss their concerns. The analysis illustrated that white contributors may experience this as the failure of the ideal of inclusive nationalism proposed by Mandela at the inception of the new democratic South Africa. This feeling of exclusion may account for the perception demonstrated by many white contributors that the judiciary is failing, due to eroding separation of powers (considered prerequisite to successful democratic practice). Another factor related to this is that white contributors, knowing that they are burdened by association with historical racism and often acknowledging the justice of this association, may refrain from publicly voicing their views to conform to cultural norms of political correctness.

The advantage of the virtual community in this regard, however, is that the lack of physical presence and the associated social norms (Burnett, 2002: 158) appear to allow contributors to express themselves more 'honestly', whereas in face-to-face encounters the desire to be politically correct may lead to deceitful, if polite, attitudes being voiced (as is evidenced by statements by *Tiffany*, in response to *Sanele*, in the analysis). This aspect significantly advances the newsgroup's ability to facilitate democratic expression.

The factors which limit the extent to which black women in particular and to lesser extent white contributors are able to feel part of the negotiation of issues of national interest impoverish the democratic ideal of universal participation. This may threaten the extent to which these groups feel part of a cohesive South Africa and thus may result in feelings of alienation. On platforms such as the newsgroup studied here, however, the space for these groups to participate could be realised where internet access is possible.

The critical discourse analysis also revealed that black identity is often regarded as synonymous with ANC identity. This has implications for the tolerance of criticism of the ruling party, since in South African discourse Anti-ANC rhetoric is frequently labelled as 'racist' by virtue of this association. This is particularly significant for black South Africans who are sceptical of the ANC since such discourse formations implicitly label these individuals as traitors to the interests of their racial group.

One of the aims of this research is to assess the potential for online communities to become platforms for democratic expression. Drawing on the findings and discussion, which appear to indicate that this newsgroup cultivated civic identity and democratic participation, the question of the applicability of public sphere theory (Habermas as well as revisionist accounts including Fraser and McKee) can now be discussed.

The primary obstacle to meaningful development in this regard is the Digital Divide. The high cost of computer equipment and Internet connection in South Africa means that the poor are denied access to the advantages the new media may offer. Nakumura draws attention to the injustices presented by this situation "…those people who were run over,

routed around, or simply denied access to the Internet are characterized as "roadkill" on the information superhighways. This roadkill is quite simply the poor and people of colour" (Nakumura, 2002: xii).

Since access is one of the three central tenets of public sphere theory (Duvenage, 2007: 331), the fact that the majority of South Africans are not able to access the medium would appear to preclude further comparison with public sphere theory. However, neither Habermas' original conception of the public sphere, nor the Facebook newsgroups, extend the right of participation to everyone. Access is thus limited in both cases through qualification.

For Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, access was limited to those who had access to cultural products, such as journals, which were a luxury beyond the reach of the poor, in the same way that Internet access is out of the reach of most ordinary South Africans today. In terms of gender, women were effactually excluded from Habermas' bourgeois public sphere (Fraser, 1997, in Calhoun, 1997: 114). In the text of this Facebook newsgroup, however, although fewer women than men were active contributors, their comments were longer on average than those penned by male contributors. In terms of gender, therefore, access to the newsgroups is less exclusionary than Habermas' public sphere.

The second tenet of public sphere theory relates to the principle of equality. For those who are participating in Facebook newsgroups, equal opportunity is afforded to contributors to express and represent themselves. While this may be the case, it does not follow that all comments receive equal attention and therefore it is the independence afforded by this medium that facilitates a form of 'equality'. The newsgroup's structure does not enact interruption and therefore all contributors can write as much as they feel inclined to without being cut off. This resonates with the 'syndrome' of interruption in face-to-face business meetings that Fraser (1997) refers to in Calhoun (1997: 119). In this sense, equal opportunities to advance one's opinions are better guaranteed to newsgroup contributors than in most real-life, face-to-face deliberative meetings.

Due to the high cost of computer equipment and Internet connection, anyone who participates in the Facebook newsgroups is likely to be relatively well off in economic terms, or at least employed at a level where Internet access is mandatory. In the case of university students, where Internet access is available in Linked Area Networks (LANS), this also indicates a level of social privilege. In this respect, the contributors can be seen to share at least a superficial equality, since other symbols of financial wealth (car, bank balance, etc) are not visible via this medium.

Many people who use Facebook may not have access to the Internet at home, but (whether their employers approve or not) log on from their place of work. This illustrates that for the middle class, who are likely to be the majority in this popular cultural medium, employment is a key issue with regard to access. In terms of apparent equality in the realm of the Facebook newsgroup however, this is immaterial since it cannot be detected by other regular members of the newsgroups community. Therefore the superficiality of this type of 'equality' matches the Habermasean bracketing of social position since the primary qualifier for participation, in both cases, is access.

The point is emphasised by Fraser (1997)'s comment "Let me remind you that the subtitle of *Structural Transformation* is 'An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society'" (Fraser in Calhoun, 1997: 111). Those who *did* have access to newsletters and cultural products in Habermas' public sphere were afforded this privilege of "bracketing social position" (Devunage, 2007: 331), just as those who do have Internet access share a kind of equality within the online community. Neither Habermas' ideal public sphere, nor the Facebook newsgroups, however, extends the right of participation to everyone and it is the poorer sector of society that is effectively excluded in both of these instances. Therefore, Internet access in South Africa can be seen as creating a category of society, separating the 'haves' from the 'have nots' in much the same way as the public sphere of Habermas.

While in Habermas' conception of the public sphere, the privilege of disincorporation of rhetoric (i.e. the ability to speak 'as humanity' rather than 'as' a specific identity group based on their physical traits) was "implicitly, even explicitly, white, male, literate and propertied" (Warner, 1997, in Calhoun, 1997: 382). Due to the South African preoccupation with race and the fact that racial identity is complicated by new media forms, this position of privilege may be complicated. The vested interest respective race groups are 'suspected' of having in any given discussion of public interest leads to greater interrogation of identity's relation to power discourses, thus rendering this process more discernible in this particular newsgroup.

An obsession with race in the South African context has possibly displaced gender as a locus of national attention. While this may grant female contributors the space to speak without being referenced as subordinate by gender, the same principle may be construed as a factor in the virtual absence of South African black women from the newsgroup, which is not remarked upon in the newsgroup.

In terms of the third principle of the public sphere, the quality of rationality displayed in the Facebook newsgroups is dependent on the context of that sector of society. This is demonstrated in relation to Habermas' public sphere, as Calhoun points out "it was *society* that was bourgeois, and bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere" (Calhoun, 1997: vii). The hermeneutic and ethnographic elements of the research set out to identify the nature of the online community, and the critical discourse analysis looked at the form and content revealed in the text to uncover political tensions within the community. The fact that the content of the newsgroup (i.e. the comments of contributors) is generated by private individuals means that the community is to some extent sheltered from the negative consequences for civic engagement resulting from "manipulation of public discourse where bureaucratic and economic interests use advertising, marketing and 'public relations' to create a 'social engineering' of voter behaviour and cultural consumption" (Habermas, cited by Duvenage, 2007: 333).

The question of rationality is implicated in broadened contemporary notions of citizenship and the postmodern shift from "universalism to relativism" (Lyotard in Fourie, 2007: 159). Hohendahl (1992) states that the

> "…opposition between reason and irrationalism is problematic insofar as it underestimates local and particular rationality… In other words, *rational* debate is possible without the presupposition of demonstrative universal norms" (Hohendahl, 1992 in Calhoun, 1995: 107).

The risk that is incurred to the public sphere with this conception of contextual rationality is that

> "an appeal to higher principles instead of traditional norms has no higher power of moral rationalization. Appealing to abstract universalizable principles as a privileged way of rationalizing actions is simply one possible strategy of creating a hierarchy of justification" (Sedgwick, 1999: 38).

In the South African context, where apartheid segregated racial groups, a multiplicity of cultural perspectives exist which are frequently in opposition to one another. The black and white racial groups in particular, as numerically and economically dominant groups respectively, often take conflicting positions on a particular topic – although, as has been demonstrated in the analysis, individuals do not necessarily subscribe to the views held by the majority of their race group. This research speaks of race in this way since in South Africa culture and race are deeply intertwined, and so 'atypical' comments (such as in the case of *Sanele*) may be accounted for in terms of cultural hybridity, arising from the fact that South African identities contain an infusion of a number of cultures. The difference in the context that each culture brings to a discussion can perhaps be seen as healthy in this regard, since interrogation from an opposing cultural or contextual standpoint may serve as protection against the creation of "a hierarchy of justification" (*ibid:* 38).

In public sphere theory, revisionist accounts propose the concept of multiple publics rather than a single public sphere. Fraser (1997) contends that in stratified societies, social inequalities inherent in the structure of a society will present themselves in the

power structure of public deliberations and "that these effects will be exacerbated where there is only a single, comprehensive public sphere" (Fraser, 1997, in Cahoun, 1997:123). Hence, if *the* public sphere does not entertain the interests of certain sectors of society, these groups would be better served by "alternative publics" which "help expand discursive space" (*ibid*: 123-4). South African society is characterised by social inequality within a multicultural context. The analysis has identified discourse structures which alienate certain voices within more official configurations of public sphere and has shown that, for some alienated groups, this Facebook newsgroup may facilitate the extension of discursive space.

The melting of distinctions between public and private realms that has been associated with the Internet has further broadened discursive space. This means that topics confined by such distinctions, due to cultural norms, are able to escape the intrinsic power relations these norms maintain, in online discussions. In South Africa, certain topics may be disqualified from official manifestations of public sphere as 'private' concerns according to political delineations, thereby sidelining 'deviant' discourses. The analysis has inferred that the dissolution of the private/public division allows for the articulation of concerns that might otherwise be repressed. In this sense, the *Help us Stop Jacob Zuma from Becoming SA's Next President* Facebook newsgroup may be seen to expand discursive space.

Drawing on Terranova's (2004) observations based on Baudrillard and the work of Calhoun, the tendency for the users of a particular medium to 'envelop' that medium and suit it to their needs required investigation of this process in the research. As the contributors do not display traditional conceptions of the practice of public reason and the fact that this popular cultural medium is less likely to attract the elite of society due to the limited impact such online formations have on the higher echelons of decision making processes, the types of rationality displayed do not conform to Habermas' (1989) conception of public sphere, as explained by Duvenage (2007).

Duvenage writes that Habermas attributed the decline of the public sphere to "a shift to a public driven by consumption", where "the free debate of general interests, was from then on undermined by the state's and other interest group's intervention" (Duvenage, 2007:332). Fraser (1997), however perceives that

> "…the bourgeois conception of the public sphere supposes the desirability of a sharp separation of (associational) civil society and the state. As a result, it promotes what I shall call *weak publics*, public whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not encompass decision making" (Fraser, in Calhoun, 1997: 134).

The Facebook newsgroup I have studied here can therefore be said to match Fraser's definition of weak publics since, in common with the bourgeois public sphere, the state has no role in the discussions. At the time of election however, the newsgroup may, within its limited capacity of 68 000 members, sway voters away from the ANC and in this way exert some marginal measure of influence on the state.

While the informal nature of the debates may undermine traditional Western conceptions of rational deliberation, this may counter the "refeudalisation" (Habermas, 1989:142, in Fourie, 2007: 332) that led to the decline of the public sphere.

> "Discussions, now a 'business', becomes formalized; the presentation of positions and counter positions is bound to a certain prearranged rules of the game, consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by that concerning form" (Habermas, 1989: 164, in *ibid*: 332).

Although perfect consensus in the newsgroup is elusive, the deferral of this moment of agreement is conducive to interrogation and constant re-evaluation by contesting contextual rationales and I argue that this is healthy in the democratic negotiation of issues. Not being beholden to state authority, the lack of direct influence of the newsgroup means that there is no imperative to reach perfect consensus. This may allow discursive space to be broadened, despite the 'weakness' this signals in Fraser's terms.

While there is little direct impact on government arising from such online discussions, this allows such online discussions to limit the impact of "social engineering" (Habermas, 1982: 202) which may direct public discourse. The forces, economic and cultural, that prevent certain sectors of society from contributing their voice to such discussions, however, restrict the potential for this medium to extend democratic participation.

The informal nature of the newsgroup medium, taken with the contextual rationalities that constitute discussions, creates at times an impression that contributors are using the facility to vent frustrations rather than engage in meaningful debate. An (admittedly long) extract from *Crime and Punishment* however may cast a different light on the nature negotiation of meaning assumes by this style of online conversation:

> "Do you suppose I'm going on like this because they talk nonsense? Rubbish! I like it when they talk nonsense! …It's by talking nonsense that one gets to the truth! I talk nonsense, therefore I'm human. Not a single truth has ever been arrived at without people first having talked a dozen reams of nonsense, even ten dozen reams of it, and that's an honourable thing in its own way; well, but we can't even talk nonsense with our own brains! Talk nonsense to me, by all means, but do it with your own brain, and I shall love you for it… We're all of us, everyone of us without exception, when it comes to the fields of learning, development, thought, invention, ideals, ambition, liberalism, reason, experience and every, every, every other field you can think of, in the very lowest preparatory form of gymnasium! We've got accustomed to making do with other people's intelligence – we're soaked in it! It's true, isn't it? Isn't what I'm saying true?" (Dostoyevsky, 1866 translated by McDuff, 1991: 251).

Thus, I conclude that South African online discussions, such as the Facebook newsgroup I have studied, may constitute an alternative public space for democratic expression in relation to the three major tenets of access, equality and rationality, in the postmodern context. The fact that recognition of racial identity in particular is problematised by the medium is constructive in the South African context and may widen discursive space. At the same time, the implications for meaning that are assumed in the South African

context in relation to racial identity and the struggle between economically and politically dominant racial groups, serve to interrogate "hierarchies of justification" (Sedgwick, 1999: 38) that may otherwise flourish in discussions denoting contextual rather than traditional rationality.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix i Newsgroup Text

Text of *Help Us Stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's Next President*
Newsgroup

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:29pm on April 23rd, 2009
U RIGHT TIFFANY SOME OTHER THINGS AS EXPECTED DID HAPPEN AND

CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY WHO LOST GERALD....I GUESS KILLING ITS

IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:31pm on April 23rd, 2009
sherene...talking about racism or apartheid is useless on this forum....despite numerous

anti-white or derogatory remarks to other race groups, made by black ppl let me add. it

seems that only whites are racist and no one else. but yes you're right...skin colour is a

poor reflection of who's better..in fact its not a reflection at all. men should be judged by

how they live their lives, and how they treat other ppl. and sadly, no one specific racial

grouping comes up trumps as far as i can tell by reading this board...

Nzuzo Chiliza (South Africa) wrote
at 12:31pm on April 23rd, 2009
....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)... read what you have just

posted and tell me you not a retarded!

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:32pm on April 23rd, 2009
AS IT HAPPENED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS....PPL GOT KILLED AND I

ALWAYS ASK MYSELF...WHAT DO KILLERS GET IN RETURN OF KILLING

THAT PARTICULAR OFFICAL OF A CERTAIN PARTY? HOW HE ALONE POSE

A THREAT IN AN ORGANISATION IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE HAS TO BE

KILLED?

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:35pm on April 23rd, 2009
sanele i disagree...if killing was in our blood...then by that statement alone we give free

reign to all the racist afrikaaners in Orania to kill all the blacks they see. that type of

statement is dangerous. besides, do we not choose whether we kill or not? sure early

developement may well affect neurological developements and thus affect our ability to

rationalise, but i don't accept that blacks/africans are blood hungry murderers with anti-

social behavioural issues. i take it you meant africans by " we" or have i mistaken your

meaning?

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:35pm on April 23rd, 2009
MNCIM NZUZO ITS A TRUTH....BLACKS KILL MORE..HAWU...WE (BLKS)

EITHER KILL EACH OTHER OR OTHER RACES...SO CALL MI A RETARD I

DONT GIV A FUCK

Werner Smit (South Africa) wrote
at 12:38pm on April 23rd, 2009
Sanele, it's true! SA is a killing country and the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that

killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from

"colonialism". It was sad to hear that this poor man was killed because of politician.

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:38pm on April 23rd, 2009
sanele are you a racist afrikaner in disguise dude? your comments seem a bit odd?

Zethu Cakata (South Africa) wrote
at 12:42pm on April 23rd, 2009
Tiffany, thanx for restoring order. Its sad that we had to be subjected to outdated

arguments. Moving forward, i think that this election points to a need 4 the country to

come together to stand 4 what is right. The battle is not lost, we've made so many cracks.

This is only the bgning.

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:43pm on April 23rd, 2009
I MEANT A BLK MAN...GO AROUND, READ THE PAPERS...U'LL SEE A BLK

MAN HAVING BEEN CAUGHT ROBBING, BOMBING ATM'S, RAPING

ETC...AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN

CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:45pm on April 23rd, 2009
IM ZULU, SANELE KHANYILE. NGIHLALA E THEKWINI (LIVING IN DURBAN)

Nzuzo Chiliza (South Africa) wrote
at 12:46pm on April 23rd, 2009
Sanele you said you from Durban right! Ill be thr on Saturday , see you at Harvey's

Durban North Broadway, we need to talk buddy.

I'll be there at round 12H00...

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:48pm on April 23rd, 2009
IM JUST STATING FACTS HERE LOVELY PPL, THE COUNTRY IF FUCKED

AND I JUST HOPE THE NEW ANC WILL TRY AND RESTORE ORDER SO I CAN

WALK FREE WITH MY CELLPHONE IN MY POCKET KNOWING I WONT GET

MOCKED BY MY OWN BROTHERS...NX ITS SO SICK IT IRRITATES ME

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:50pm on April 23rd, 2009
Sanele,this huge propensity for crime by blacks in SA is, I feel, driven by poverty.

outside of SA crime is not as hectic amongst black ppl. i feel confident that if our

government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a

drop in crime. ppl can either sit back and say Oh well i am black so i do crime (which is

so ridiculous a notion anyways) or we can choose. and we can choose a better future.

zethu is right...we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one

step at a time and we can see change. not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets

not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:51pm on April 23rd, 2009
LOL I'LL BE AT THE GYM (VIRGIN ACTIVE) AT THE WORKSHOP CBD.

MAYBE WE CAN MEET THERE

Sherene Cooper wrote
at 12:52pm on April 23rd, 2009
its in the humans blood to kill,no matter wot race or skin colour.cain killed abel because

of jealousy.moses killed an egyptian out of anger.herod killed all the baby boys,because

he was threatened by another ruling party.david killed his half brother for raping his

sister.so wot makes this nation so different?

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:53pm on April 23rd, 2009
sherene we made it through our first electionin 1994 without too much trouble...that's

what makes us different :)

Nzuzo Chiliza (South Africa) wrote
at 12:53pm on April 23rd, 2009
The CBD no bro, its not safe lol, come to the North.

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 12:54pm on April 23rd, 2009
aah sanele,....now you see i've just left durbs...too bad. think we'd have lots to talk about !

Sanele Khanyile wrote
at 12:54pm on April 23rd, 2009
OK TEFF :) HOPE IT AINT TOO LATE. LETS HOPE WE AINT JUS PUTIING

THEM THERE TO CHOW OUR MONEY AND BECOME FAT CATS THAT CANT

EVEN CHASE THE MOUSE.

Sherene Cooper wrote
at 10:37pm on April 24th, 2009
not one leader had the countrys interest at heart.they all were out for personal gain.even if

it meant killing-june 16,raping or fraud-zuma-,they dont deserve that seat in

parliament.not an honest person left nowadays.

Abhay Charan (Spain) wrote
at 10:55pm on April 24th, 2009
Are you a mxit addict yes or no if so join this group

http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=82560212525#/group.php?gid=82560212525

Mosa Moamogoe (South Africa) wrote
at 11:59pm on April 24th, 2009
Sheren u talkin isht. Nelson mandela! He had the countries intrest at heart n am sure

everybody wud agree wit me so stop puttin up isht u dnt knw.

Sherene Cooper wrote
at 12:48am on April 25th, 2009
so y was discipline nd religion taken out of schools?same sex marraiges nd abortion made

legal?y is everything that is an abomination unto GOD made acceptable? wot morals can

we possibly teach our children when everything that is wicked has become the norm

these days.look further than ur nose mosa!

Sven Finkeldeh (South Africa) wrote
at 2:46am on April 25th, 2009
Sorry to interrupt your conversation...

But not everyone shares the same beliefs... I think people should respect one another

regardless of their differences..

(And I agree with you Mosa)

Brian Mpumelelo Sithole wrote
at 3:13am on April 25th, 2009
There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists have been saying that since 94...

The people have spoken. Long Live the President.

Mosa Moamogoe (South Africa) wrote
at 5:06am on April 25th, 2009
sherene u said mandela was in office for personal gain. Wat does same sex marriages n

arbotion being made legal have to do wit that? Hmmm let me see im thnkin u sayin

mandela had sumtin to gain frm dis thngs? Again u talkin isht. sory to say dis bt maybe u

nid to thnk further than ur skin colour. N i agree wit u 100% on ur last statement cos it

doesnt say anyting bout wat i was initialy arguing bout.Mwah

[Mosa Moamogoe](#) (South Africa) wrote
at 5:11am on April 25th, 2009
An economist cudnt make our economy grow. I wonder how people expect a person who

has a third grade to help our economy

[Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote
at 10:25am on April 25th, 2009
reinhardt what exactly did you not understand? maybe i should clarify? i think its a fairly

correct estimation to say most whites want to maintian our standard of living right. i also

know loads of people of colour who want the maintain our standard of living and in fact

develope it further. but what i am asking is this: why is it that when we argue the point

that the ANC has done jack for SA and we are declining into a third world mess, the

answer seems to be that this is africa and if we want europe we need to go to europe. so is

it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority

here? and yes...obama is hot !

[Sherene Cooper](#) wrote
at 10:35am on April 25th, 2009
i dont recall singling out anyone? and as for my skin colour well that has nothing to do

with my statement nd for the record-im proud of my skin colour.nd as for ur language,i

think just maybe u must learn how to spell shit!or how to spell for that matter? nd wen u

read a statement in future,just try to look a bit deeper,that is if u know how!

[Michael De Villiers](#) (Witwatersrand) wrote
at 10:50am on April 25th, 2009
Good grief the lack of literacy in South Africa eminates through the shocking language

people use to convey their points. Learn to spell and communicate effectively, otherwise

you are just as bad as the president with a 3rd grade education. People need to awaken

their minds to the fact that the ANC hasn't actually done SUCH a bad job for the past 14

years. The economic policy of South Africa has seen a vast amount of growth in balck

and white middle classes. Granted there have been many short comings of the

government, and for a large part the standard of living for the middle class has been

fantastic. Quality of life is a completely different matter. However, the fact that a

president can make comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating

against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 11:08am on April 25th, 2009
Michael sadly you are wrong wrt how poorly the ANC government has performed. you are correct in saying the middle classes have enjoyed a fairly stable standard of living, but then that is not the challenge that was posed to the party. the challenge was the poorer portion of society and service delivery in those areas is abysmal at best. so no they never rose to that challenge. furthermore, little to no work has been done in respect of maintaining vital areas such as water and electricity supply. i have friends who work for the water dept in SA. new equipment was installed shortly before the new regime took over, the average life exoectancy of this equipment is 18 years...we've gotten 15 years so far. 3 more to go and no skilled labourers to maintain and no budget to replace...the same is happening with electricity. no provison was made for generators so we now have french companies coming in to build generators, but at what cost? i do believe that the true extent of poor planning

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote
at 11:13am on April 25th, 2009
will become apparent within the next 3 - 5 years. Healthcare is a true shocker. Our universities are being insructed (i have exoerienced this first hand) to downgrade the quality of our qualifications so that we are not acceptable in the rest of the world, all in an attempt to prevent the brain drain becoming worse. the trend is that of poor planning. crime is at an all time high and there is little hope of this improving. and the most worrying is the fact that our government seems to be unwilling to acknowledge these problems. in much the same way that zuma (and his cronies for that matter) refuse to acknowledge his guilt. this is ostrich behaviour...just pretend it's not happening. furthermore the ANC is aligning themselves with China, who has a poor track record of human rights offences....can you see how this is in DIRECT contradiction to the policies that are being " sold" as ANC objectives/policies?your points are correct though in that zuma has little regard for democracy :(

Mike MacKenzie (Sheffield) wrote
at 11:38am on April 25th, 2009
Granted there have been many poor spells under this government Mike, but 'eminates' is

spelt with an ·a·.

Main Entry:em·a·nate

Pronunciation:\ˈe-mə-ˌnāt\

Function:verb

Inflected Form(s):em·a·nat·ed; em·a·nat·ing

Etymology:Latin emanatus, past participle of emanare, from e- + manare to flow

Date:1756

Steven Bales (South Africa) wrote
at 12:33pm on April 25th, 2009
Mike you want to tell me they haven't done SUCH a bad job? I witnessed 2 of my close

friends die due to improper safety measures with regard to construction/roadworks. So

"not SUCH a bad job" is not fucking good enough, and before you tell me that this isn't

the government's fault, the roadwork companies are part-owned by the government, and

safety measures weren't properly implemented due to a lack of planning and cutting costs

so they can all get their massive bonuses. Not "such" a bad job is not, and will never be,

good enough. The ANC doesn't care about anyone, middle or lower class. They care

about themselves alone.

Debra Ann Landman (London) wrote
at 1:14pm on April 25th, 2009
JACOB ZUMA SHOULD BE PROSECUTED - SUPPORT THE DA'S APPLICATION

TO REVIEW NPA's DECISION

http://www.mypetition.co.za/index.php?page=sign_petition&petition_id=338

Debra Ann Landman (London) wrote
at 1:16pm on April 25th, 2009
In support of the application to have the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution

of Jacob Zuma reviewed:

We, the undersigned, believe that the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution of Jacob Zuma was taken on political, not legal grounds.

As the NDPP conceded, Zuma has not been acquitted. Only a court of law can do that. Only a court of law can examine and cross-examine the evidence that the NDPP submitted in mitigation of the decision to drop the charges. And only a court of law can determine whether the decision itself was lawful or not.

We, the undersigned, therefore support the application for a judicial review of the NDPP's decision to drop the charges against Zuma.

http://www.mypetition.co.za/index.php?page=sign_petition&petition_id=338

Lorimar Campbell wrote
at 2:38pm on April 25th, 2009
It's still early but 'ANC just fails to get two-thirds majority':

http://www.news24.com/News24/Elections/News/0,,2-2478-2479_2507085,00.html

Halbo De Beer wrote
at 3:50pm on April 25th, 2009
Stompie must be so PROUD about Winnie's "victory" for the masses! Viva the Mother of

the Nation. Stompie salutes you were ever hy might be...

Roxy Rodrigues wrote
at 6:24pm on April 26th, 2009
No0o0oo0o0o0o0o0o0!!!!!!!!!!! I dont want zuma 2 become president!!!!!!

Tracey Chananie (South Africa) wrote
at 7:19pm on April 26th, 2009
And the tragic comedy begins. Don't forget to shower at least once a day.

Carel Steenkamp (South Africa) wrote
at 7:34pm on April 26th, 2009
OOOooooh hell, no we have a corrupt-rapist for a president. Only in our banana

republic!!! Our politic's are a JOKE damnit!!!

Garg Unzola (South Africa) wrote
at 7:47pm on April 26th, 2009
Guys, things are getting much better. The ANC missed its 2 thirds majority and we now

have Cope. 2 opposition parties are better than one! We're no longer in danger of turning

into a one party dictatorship. Plus, we can always move to the Western Cape and

consolidate the Godzille...

Mogamat Zaid wrote
at 7:53pm on April 26th, 2009
Dats a cool id evry1 jus move 2 WC best prov in da country

Reinhardt Botha (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) wrote
at 8:03pm on April 26th, 2009
Great idea! Hopefully it spreads to other provinces as well so that we can hav a better

country. Zille is my hero. Haha!

Ongama Ntloko wrote
at 9:09pm on April 26th, 2009
why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? Why? I dnt like the character

of the man bt he is a S.A and soon to be our president. Our fight against Zuma should nt

be racial bt on merits. If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK,

AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a

multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites

Roma Puckaree wrote
at 9:21pm on April 26th, 2009
Its a lil too late now dontya think

Mandilakhe 'Orange-blossom' Siyongwana (Port Shepstone High School) wrote
at 9:46pm on April 26th, 2009
WE'VE FAILED.....WE'VE REALLY REALLY FAILED.

HERE COMES THE DOWNFALL OF OUR OH SO BUTIFUL COUNTRY,ZUMA IS

CLOSE, HE'S HERE TAKING OVER...KILL ME FAST SUM1!!!!!!

Steven Bales (South Africa) wrote
at 9:54pm on April 26th, 2009
Ongama perhaps it ISN'T based on race, white people not voting for Zuma is because

they are of the opinion that he will not be a good president. The same goes for the black

people who voted against him. Saying that "all white people worship Zille" is in itself a

huge generalisation, and as we know racism falls under the category of generalisation. I

myself do not agree with Zille purely because I believe the DA's campaign was an

attempt to slander Zuma, and they offered no alternative. It was as if they were defined

by Zuma.

If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right to state

that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because

they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist.

Adrian Rainier wrote
at 10:21pm on April 26th, 2009
Agree 100% with u thr mate!

Think this racist bull is gettin really really Old, u guys gotta start sparkin cuase that shit is

old!

Have u eva asked urself why the ANC has lost thr 2/3 majority and are losing thr

supporters???

I beleive that this is the begining of the end for the ANC, so im happy with this result, we

all knew they wud win it but by how much is what counted...

they did 1 or two good things in thr time of power ill give them that much, but not much

more, lol!

what a useless bloody government!

maybe this will make them pull thr socks up, doubt it though!

[Adrian Rainier](#) wrote
at 10:34pm on April 26th, 2009
Ongama Ntloko, another thing u shud keep in mind is that thr whr whites in the battle

against aperteid too!

And just for the record you sound very racist for even thinking that way!

Just use common sense then maybe u'll understand whr we comin from, this has nothin

too do with race!

Hell i wish Obama cud be our president, damn shame!

[Andrea Kühn](#) (South Africa) wrote
at 10:53pm on April 26th, 2009
Ongama: How can you be such an idiot? The reason why anyone, including some white

people, dislike Zuma has EVERYTHING to do with his character and NOTHING to do

with his skin color. That should be obvious. And he has NO merits. He's uneducated, a

liar, a rapist and corrupt. That spells disaster for our already meager economy. Some of

us don't want to immigrate, because we love the country, that's WHY we hate to see it

falling into the hands of such an imbecile. How can you not see that????

[Tina Kapoutsis](#) (South Africa) wrote
at 10:58pm on April 26th, 2009
thank-you Andrea!!!!!! that was a really great response! Its Zuma's character we

hate!!!!!!!

[Jaco Veldsman](#) wrote
at 12:24am yesterday
Ongama, dont be an idiot. Go look at the people leading the different party. ANC and

COPE have alot of criminals running their parties. You wonder and want crime to stop in

SA? Start by putting the corrupt leaders in prison. And PLEASE, grow up and stop

making everything about race! Thats why Zimbabwe is where it is, because of a corrupt

president... and guess what? HE BLAMES IT ON THE WHITES!

[Funmi Sangodeyi](#) (USF) wrote
at 2:53am yesterday

I want Zuma to win and I want South Africa to fail. You know why? Because I am Nigerian and if South Africa fails then the most important country in Sub Saharan Africa will be Nigeria

Arthur Tsimitakopoulos (South Africa) wrote
at 6:28am yesterday
Aaaah shuddup you Nigerian wench. Even if SA 'fails', your cesspool of country Nigeria will still be a stinking mess filled with drug dealers,crack whores, pirates, monkey lovers, thieves and losers. So get of your high horse and get back to selling your cocaine at the street corner...mampara!

Tiego Mogano (South Africa) wrote
at 9:48am yesterday
I saw zuma taking nevirapine- anti-retroviral drugs from forest town pharmacy

Tiego Mogano (South Africa) wrote
at 9:49am yesterday
Dnt worry he'll vanish.

Kagisho Phoku (South Africa) wrote
at 11:39am yesterday
Well said Arthur..nothing else can be said to this...oh you said it, Nigerian Wench..

7.2.1 Appendix ii: Ethnographic Hermeneutic Analysis

The hermeneutic ethnographic component of the research design covers a more empathetic approach to the analysis of the text, but also makes use of distanciation as a tool for uncovering meaning outside of the context, which is intended to balance the subjectivity associated with in depth investigation of one's own culture. While the tool of distanciation is useful tool in this regard, this type of analysis necessarily relies on the researcher's interpretation of the text and therefore may be unconsciously influenced by preconceived notions. This chapter is therefore supplementary to the critical discourse analysis and should be regarded as aiming to provide "thick descriptions", ethnographic-type investigation into the culture of the online community, and in-depth accounts of the virtual personalities that make up the newsgroup. As a self reflexive exercise to trace my own subjectivity in this part of the analysis, I have kept a journal detailing the process of my interaction with the text. This is available upon request from the MECS department of the UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus with the additional materials (in rough form) of this research.

The ethnographic hermeneutic chapter relies more on the chronological ordering of events in the text, than did the critical discourse analysis chapter. While this was not entirely possible for the purpose of coherence, the discussion of the text follows as close to chronologically as possible.

Since this approach to studying online communities is in its infancy, for many intricacies occurring in the text no existing theory quite matches. The issue of race in cyberspace in particular appears to have been notably sidelined even in international research (Nakamura, 2002), and given the complexity of the local context in relation to these topics what little is to be found is only of limited applicable value. I therefore remind the reader that this research is *exploratory*, as it ventures into unfamiliar terrain with few theoretical compass points to guide the process.

Given the subjectivity this type of research inevitably incurs to some extent, the exploratory nature of this field and the sensitivity to racial issues that is embedded in the collective conscious of South Africans, I am aware that I undertake a certain risk

engaging with this racially charged text. The act of interpretation inevitably reveals ideological aspects invisible to the interpreter, and perhaps this may account for the dearth of theory relating to this field.

However, in the words of Dr. Maki Mandela (granddaughter of the first democratically elected president of South Africa)

"Understanding comes from talking. It's through the language that any people

is embedded. By talking, you begin to understand where that difference is, and you get to understand that other person better. Talking is the first step toward understanding. That's not to deny that you still have incidents — however, I think we have not stopped trying to engage in dialogue and trying to heal." (Mandela, 2008 in Smith, 2008)

It is in the spirit of desiring to understand, of resisting denial of uncomfortable truths that I endeavor to interpret this text, and by extension the construct of South Africanness.

Ethnographic Hermeneutical Analysis

Sanele, only writes in capitals. Although emphasis is traditionally indicated by the use of italics, the use of capitals is more attention-grabbing, thereby producing an effect of forceful emphasis. Whether this consequence was intentional on the part of the contributor is not clear, it is possible that the caps lock 'just happened to be' activated at the time of writing, but the result for readers of the text remains the same in either case. However, since *Sanele* only uses capitals the effect is to some extent lost as all comments *Sanele* makes are equally emphasized in this manner.

The first comment of this text selection that is made by *Sanele* is in response to a story another respondent (*Tiffany*) related about a politically motivated murder of someone named 'Gerald'.

Sanele Khanyile wrote

at 12:29pm on April 23rd, 2009

U RIGHT TIFFANY SOME OTHER THINGS AS EXPECTED DID HAPPEN
AND CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY WHO LOST GERALD....I GUESS
KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)'. - Sanele Khanyile

This statement relates to the recurring theme of violence in the texts. *Sanele*'s comment
"I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)" suggests that he believes
violence to be an innate predisposition – the use of the word blood however does not
necessarily indicate this in the genetic sense, it could also be interpreted that *Sanele* uses
the word to underline the gore and horror associated with violence, while referring
perhaps to circumstances in the country's history which has resulted in a culture of
violence. This poses the question, who does *Sanele* include in the "our". As he
contributes with a conspicuously 'black' (of African descent) name, this identity is
complex as he could be speaking as a South African, or as a black South African. As
Sanele is generally a masculine name, he could be speaking also as a male in South
Africa.

Tiffany, three minutes later, sends the next post (perhaps not in response to Khanyile, it is
possible that she was already typing her comment by the time the previous comment was
uploaded). She refers to reverse racism saying

Tiffany Lassauniere (South Africa) wrote

at 12:31pm on April 23rd, 2009

talking about racism or apartheid is useless on this forum....despite
numerous anti-white or derogatory remarks to other race groups, made by
black ppl let me add. it seems that only whites are racist and no one else.

Since redress of past injustices, as well as the eradication of apartheid mindsets, has been
a constant theme in democratic South Africa, there has been a political and social (and
hence in the media) awareness created around the issues of the wrongs of apartheid and
the racism that political system entrenched both in law and in society. Clignet writes of
the psychological stance attributed to the colonizer in Marxist terms:

"The more privileges they derive from such a status, the more *all* individuals sharing such an experience will be obliged to construct similar sets of prejudiced beliefs and expectations regarding the exploited categories of the population" (Clignet, 1971: 296-7)

Tiffany's comment therefore may express the perception that as a result of postcolonial reflection on this history, white South Africans in general are seen as racist perpetrators since white society was privileged by the apartheid regime. Generally black South Africans, therefore, are proportionately constructed as victims of racism.

Tiffany's comment, "it seems that only whites are racist and no one else," appears to find fault with this attribution. In the implementation of distanciation, I have used race theory from outside of South Africa on the topic of reverse racism. As noted by Betts, there appear to be "wide limits of institutional toleration in Britain towards reverse racism in the name of "good race relations"."(Betts, 2002: 242). Given that in the South African context racial issues are a prominent feature due to historical forces, it is arguable that the imperative of 'good race relations' may in this context also be valued above white claims of reverse racism.

The minimal priority, if any, afforded to discourses of reverse racism in the mass media (particularly the public broadcaster) is highlighted by this statement and this post has allowed the contributor, *Tiffany*, to give expression to this issue and introduce the topic to the discussion in a way that would not be possible for consumers of traditional forms of mass media. However, it must be said that her claim that "talking about racism or apartheid is useless" is rather convenient for the subject position of white South Africans, since conversations on these topics are likely to frame whites negatively.

Tiffany also argues that there is no superior race and therefore racial slinging matches are redundant. She draws attention to the dynamics of the microcosm of South Africa represented by this newsgroup saying:

> skin colour is a poor reflection of who's better..in fact its not a reflection at all. men should be judged by how they live their lives, and how they treat

other ppl. and sadly, no one specific racial grouping comes up trumps as far as i can tell by reading this board...

Nzuzo responds to *Sanele*

....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)... read what you have just posted and tell me you not a retarded!

Nzuzo draws attention to the lack of subtle reasoning, which *Sanele* presents as "(FACT)". The politically incorrect use of the appellation 'retarded' would, in some more formal spaces of discourse practice, to some extent discredit the contributor, as well as the *ad homonym* element. In this forum, however, this would barely be considered a transgression in comparison with racial terms of depreciation (and, at this point in the text, the information implies both these respondents are black) in South African dominant cultural practice, and due to the informal nature that characterizes newsgroups.

It is perhaps self evident that the imperatives of the societal and media bodies (albeit often superficially) are used to draw taboo on racism. Given the emphasis of race in South Africa's history as well as the status quo, it is little wonder that the issue of race is dominant in the agenda of political correctness – to the detriment often of gender issues, and to a greater degree, the handicapped (being in the minority). Hence, it is not to be inferred that *Nzuzo* is particularly bigoted towards people with mental retardation, I simply wish to draw attention to the fact that there is not so large a shared consciousness of the impropriety of using the term 'retarded', as there is for the derogatory word 'kaffir' for example.

Sanele ignores *Nzuzo*, and expounds on the senseless nature of political violence, asking

WHAT DO KILLERS GET IN RETURN OF KILLING THAT PARTICULAR OFFICAL OF A CERTAIN PARTY? HOW HE ALONE POSE A THREAT IN AN ORGANISATION IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE HAS TO BE KILLED?

These questions appear to be rhetorical, with the intention perhaps of highlighting the extent to which violence is implicated in South African politics to this day, fifteen years since apartheid ended.

*Tiffany r*esponds to *Sanele*'s former statement:

> sanele i disagree...if killing was in our blood...then by that statement alone we give free reign to all the racist afrikaaners in Orania to kill all the blacks they see. that type of statement is dangerous. besides, do we not choose whether we kill or not? sure early neurological developement may well affect and thus affect our ability to rationalise, but i don't accept that blacks/africans are blood hungry murderers with anti-social behavioural issues i take it you meant africans by " we" or have i mistaken your meaning?

The contributor here is presented as a pseudo-intellectual, dropping in terms like "neurological developements" (sic) perhaps in an attempt to intimidate any possible opposition to her perspective. While the device may be superficial, it does illustrate that *Tiffany* is at least familiar with the term, thus revealing the contributor to be possessed of at least a certain level of education.

Tiffany applies *Sanele*'s statement (I refer to "....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT).") to the racist Afrikaaner rightwing, implying that in the case of this *white* paramilitary group, they have enough restraint to resist killing "all the blacks they see". *Tiffany* then vaguely refers to problems in neurological development which lead to a breakdown in the "ability to rationalise". Significantly, she continues in the same sentence ", but i don't accept that blacks/africans are blood hungry murderers with anti-social behavioural issues.", as if these two segments were inextricable, part of the same idea. This, in conjunction with her concluding question, "i take it you meant africans by " we" or have i mistaken your meaning?", may reflect her own ideology more than *Sanele*'s, because he did not give any indication who he included in "OUR BLOOD", and thus the racial dimension is initially introduced by *Tiffany* herself. It is

also significant that *Tiffany* excludes herself from the concept of 'Africanness" by virtue of her race.

At this point, despite prior claims of *Tiffany*'s that "there is no superior race", there is a strong inference that, at some level and for whatever cause she ascribes it to, she does 'see' a marked correlation between race and violent propensity. Ironically, however, her answer overall implies that she believes herself to be less prejudiced than *Sanele*.

[Sanele Khanyile](#) wrote

at 12:35pm on April 23rd, 2009

> MNCIM NZUZO ITS A TRUTH....BLACKS KILL MORE..HAWU...WE (BLKS) EITHER KILL EACH OTHER OR OTHER RACES...SO CALL MI A RETARD I DONT GIV A FUCK

While this provides some clarity on the contributor's prior statement which provoked such response, it also arouses the suspicions of the group as to the authenticity of the racial denomination implied by the name '*Sanele Khanyile*', because the belief in the myth of the 'inherent violence of blacks' is generally attributed to rightwing white supremacists and therefore it is a surprising attitude for a black person to hold. The work of Burkhalter supports the incredulity which prompts *Tiffany* to ask:

> "sanele are you a racist afrikaner in disguise dude? your comments seem a bit odd?"

Since "[i]n online interaction racial identity springs from a participant's perspective on racial issues rather than from physical cues" (Burkhalter, No Date, cited in Smith and Kollock, 1999:11). If '*Sanele*' really is a construction by a white racist attempting to revile other whites with his portrayal of what a black man is, this presents an insight into how this (for arguments sake presumably white, presumably male) contributor sees blackness and tries to re-present his interpretation of this notion.

Let us examine the textual devices that he uses in an attempt to convince the other group members that he is black; and what attributes he plays up in his attempt to 'mirror' black identity. Although we can never be certain what racial grouping '*Sanele*' belongs to

physically, for the sake of argument I shall explore what this would signify if we presume his creator to be white.

The most obvious device used by the creator of '*Sanele*' (if the creator is a white racist) is the sprinkling of a few basic *isiZulu* words into his dialogue. The use of "HAWU" and "NGIHLALA E THEKWINI (LIVING IN DURBAN)" as 'proof' of his blackness does not really indicate that he has a command of the language, since these are very simple examples – in fact, any beginners' second language *isiZulu* course will commence with learning such simple conversation. Therefore this is by no means 'proof' of his blackness since many non-Zulu South Africans would know this extremely basic nugget of *isiZulu* anyway.

Combined with these 'Zuluisms', the constructor of the *Sanele* identity portrays blackness by introducing slight flaws in his use of English (e.g. "IT'S A TRUTH…", "....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)") to make it appear that English is a second language to *Sanele*. Of course, if '*Sanele*' is white, it is still possible that English is not his mother tongue, as *Tiffany* illustrates by allusion to a "racist Afrikaner in disguise".

A person madly racist enough to go to the lengths of creating a Facebook account under a 'black' identity, presumably for the sole purpose of discrediting black South Africans, would likely 'see' black identity in negatively defined terms. If he 'sees' whiteness as defined by 'refinement' and 'higher' intelligence, then the binary opposites would be likely to form part of his portrayal of blackness.

For *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo*, this representation of blackness is obviously at odds with their experience of real life black people, and hence rouses suspicion.

Let it be noted, however, that the '*Sanele*' character does allow compassion (doubtless a positive attribute) to enter his portrayal of blackness, as a few softer comments illustrate (e.g. "CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY WHO LOST GERALD" and "WHAT DO KILLERS GET IN RETURN OF KILLING THAT PARTICULAR OFFICAL OF A CERTAIN PARTY? HOW HE ALONE POSE A THREAT IN AN ORGANISATION

IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE HAS TO BE KILLED?"), which, if he is a white person, implies that he is himself aware of benevolence in black people. Despite his apparent racism, if he is white, he does not appear to find this positive attribute as incompatible with what he apparently perceives 'blackness' to be in his prior statements.

Werner Smit replies to *Sanele*, apparently not troubling to doubt *Sanele*'s racial identity nor the motives this would imply for his statement:

> Sanele, it's true! SA is a killing country and the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from "colonialism". It was sad to hear that this poor man was killed because of politician.

The first part of *Werner*'s statement appears to bring the conversation back to political violence, however this is underpinned by drawing comparison between the ANC and ZANU PF, which are patently both dominant political parties mainly comprised of black members. *Werner* magnificently ignores the vast differences in official policy, as well as context, when drawing this neat parallel between the two parties. Also notable, is the absence of any mention of the National Party's role in perpetrating apartheid atrocities, which was responsible for some of the most glaring examples of politically motivated violence in South African history. Therefore, this statement points to the recurring conception of the inherent violence of black people, this time specifically in a political context.

The use *Werner* makes of quotation marks in the phrase, "freedom" from "colonization", seems to indicate that he dissociates himself from discourses linking colonization and oppression. Here the lack of demographic information is disadvantageous because it would be interesting to know the age of this contributor. The ideological framework *Werner* appears to operate within here reflects the dominant paradigms of the apartheid era and suggests that the propaganda and censorship of the media in those times may have shaped his worldview into, what is today, a residual mindset. Based on this, it is probable that *Werner* is old enough to have had significant exposure to apartheid

constructs of white superiority, and furthermore to be convinced that black people did not experience apartheid as a lack of freedom.

Werner's statement, " the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from "colonialism"," illustrates that since he does not believe in the oppression resulting from colonization, he perceives violence in the name of emancipation as meaningless, or perhaps as merely 'an excuse'. In the works of Frantz Fanon, the mindset of the colonizer ("A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man or at least like a nigger." Fanon, 1967a:121) and the colonial system could only be broken through violence:

> "I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight." (*ibid*: 234)

To *Werner's* mind (in common with *Sanele*, and as has been strongly suggested in her earlier comment, *Tiffany* also), since violence is associated with black men, the employment of violence by blacks is the behaviour that conforms to this rationale (which *Tiffany* expressed as the type of discourse associated with "racist Afrikaaner(s)").

Zethu's response indicates that he recognizes the racist element in a number of the prior posts:

> Tiffany, thanx for restoring order. Its sad that we had to be subjected to outdated arguments. Moving forward, i think that this election points to a need 4 the country to come together to stand 4 what is right. The battle is not lost, we've made so many cracks. This is only the bgning.

And yet he does not respond angrily, but sanguinely. Without verbally attacking *Werner*, *Zethu* calmly diagnoses *Werner*'s standpoint as "outdated" (i.e. in the apartheid era this was the dominant group's ideology, and this paradigm is obsolete nowadays). As a (presumably) black South African confronted with a white South African who has just dismissed the oppression and collective suffering of blacks under apartheid (or any other manifestation of colonization), this comment reflects an enormous measure of tolerance on *Zethu*'s part to react to this statement not with anger, nor with indignation, but with

something akin to poignant compassion. From this point on, *Zethu*'s statement shows more optimism than any other in the textual selection thus far. South Africanness is celebrated "…this election points to a need 4 the country to come together and stand 4 what is right" and the unity and solidarity of South Africans is implied.

However, elections are in essence the competition between rival parties for political power and are not infrequently fraught with violent conflict. Does *Zethu* mean South Africans must stand together to celebrate democratic principles, or by "come together and stand 4 what is right" is it possible that he means South Africans should 'stand together' politically, i.e. vote for the majority party? Given the brevity of most of the comments on this forum, ambiguities of this nature frequently occur.

The comment *Zethu* appears to refer to when he says "Tiffany, thanx for restoring order," is "sanele are you a racist afrikaner in disguise dude? your comments seem a bit odd?". According to the work of Smith and Kollock, *Tiffany* may have cast doubt on *Sanele*'s identity "as a way of challenging the poster's arguments" (Smith and Kollock, 1999: 11), rather than due to any real distrust of his identity. It may be that *Zethu* recognizes this and approves of the attempt to silence *Sanele*'s radical statements.

> [Sanele Khanyile](#) wrote
> at 12:43pm on April 23rd, 2009
> I MEANT A BLK MAN...GO AROUND, READ THE PAPERS...U'LL SEE A
> BLK MAN HAVING BEEN CAUGHT ROBBING, BOMBING ATM'S,
> RAPING ETC...AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY
> CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!

I have already explored the possibility that *Sanele* is a construction by a racist white person attempting to discredit black South Africans by pretending to be one, thereby projecting his negative view of blackness. While Burkhalter suggests that attitudes on racial matters are the greatest clues as to identifying the race of Usenet contributors, "there is often disagreement about whether a particular signal is inherently or

conventionally tied to the trait" (Dawkins and Guilford, 1991 in Smith and Kollock 1999: 33). This introduces the possibility that *Sanele* really is black and is voicing his frustration at the violence and crime committed by black perpetrators because such individuals reinforce negative racial stereotypes.

It is also interesting to note *Sanele*'s gendered account of the average criminal – "I MEANT A BLK MAN... U'LL SEE A BLK MAN HAVING BEEN CAUGHT ROBBING…(etc)". Therefore, it is not black people in general that *Sanele* accuses of criminal predisposition (referring back to prior statements), but it could be construed that to his mind the traditionally masculine trait of 'violence' is somehow enhanced (note: he does not discredit *Tiffany*'s claim about "CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES") in the case of black men. This finds resonance with the construct of black masculinity in Fanon's work, "The black man's sword is a sword. When he thrusts it into your wife she has really felt something. It is a revelation. In the chasm that it has left, your little toy is lost" (Fanon, 1967:169 in Alessandrini, 1999:68). Thus, although *Sanele* sees violence as negative, the power that is a by product of this trait is positive for those who are associated with it.

Drawing on Nakamura (2004), Farquhar states that "Race and gender stereotypes thrive online, especially when individuals "play" with identity… for instance, stock gender roles get exaggerated when individuals switch gender online" (Farquhar, 40: 2009). The exaggeration of certain traits that may be inferred from *Sanele*'s discussion, therefore, may indicate that *Sanele* is a fantasy construction. The fact that black masculinity is associated with superlative masculinity may make this identity type particularly appealing to white male South Africans, who may feel emasculated by their reduced political power and such policies as BEE and affirmative action.

If *Sanele* is black himself it is significant that he dismisses socio-economic and historical forces (presumably that is what is encompassed by "CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES") almost as irrelevant, since the results of crime for society are destructive whatever the cause may be. Given the fact that the Internet is a luxury that only a small percentage of South Africans enjoy, and that proportionately blacks are considerably under-represented

in South Africa's online participants, it is probable that *Sanele* has had a more affluent up-bringing than the majority of black South Africans.

This begs the question, to what extent, then, is he entitled to use the term 'we' when referring to black men? The lower economic class of black men would presumably face more challenges (quality of education particularly during apartheid and poverty among other issues) than their wealthier counterparts, and thus I question whether it is really possible for a more affluent black male to empathise sufficiently with that majority to justify his identifying himself with them and thus speaking on their behalf. In research relating to stress and suicidal tendencies in affluent black youth, the main source of anxiety stemmed from estrangement from traditional culture: "They tend to experience alienation from their own value systems and the main reason for this is because they had great expectations of the new South Africa and these expectations are not being met. It is much harder for them now." (Schlebusch, 2010 cited in Naidoo, 2010). Assertions that in South Africa "racial apartheid has been replaced by class apartheid" (Bond 2008, cited in Saayman, 2010:3), may have implications for black identity across social class.

For the purpose of distanciation, I looked for African American theory on black identity. McWhorter suggests that, in the US context "Since the late 1960s, blacks have been taught that presenting ourselves and our people as victims when whites are watching is the essence of being 'authentically black'." (McWhorter, 2004: xiv). In South Africa, therefore, where liberation occurred much later, it is arguable that psychologically coming to terms with past injustices, and where those injustices are deeply entwined with racial identity, this may be applicable in the local context. From this perspective, *Sanele* displays the capacity of free thought beyond the subject position traditionally associated with black identity, the result of self-reflexive inquiry into the value of such a discourse.

> Nzuzo Chiliza (South Africa) wrote
> at 12:46pm on April 23rd, 2009
>> Sanele you said you from Durban right! Ill be thr on Saturday , see you at Harvey's Durban North Broadway, we need to talk buddy.

Nzuzo's proposal to meet *Sanele* 'in real life', as opposed to speaking to him via this online medium, seems to indicate that *Nzuzo* is doubtful as to the 'truthfulness' (i.e. as an online reflection of physical attributes) of *Sanele*'s on-line identity regarding his race. Whether *Sanele* turned up as black or white, the generalization expressed in his provocative discourse seems to be *Nzuzo*'s central concern. Although, as has been discussed, the implications of *Sanele*'s comments are influenced by this dimension of identity as it radically affects the meaning within the highly racialised context of South Africa.

If *Nzuzo* does doubt *Sanele*'s racial identity in common with *Tiffany*, this action on his part of asking to meet *Sanele* in 'real' life equates to "mak(ing) the effort to assess the honesty of the signal" (Smith and Kollock, 1999: 33), where the "signal" in this case is racial identity. If *Nzuzo* found *Sanele* to be deceptive in his identity as a black man, this would constitute a dent in the integrity of *Sanele*'s virtual persona. Having not overtly pronounced his suspicion and as a black man himself (based on the name offered), *Nzuzo* is in a better position to act as the "probe" with *Sanele* since the "probing may itself have high costs if the probe turns out to be honest" (Dawkins and Guilford, 1991 in Smith and Kollock, 1999: 33).

> [Sanele Khanyile](#) wrote
>
> at 12:48pm on April 23rd, 2009
>
> > IM JUST STATING FACTS HERE LOVELY PPL, THE COUNTRY IF FUCKED AND I JUST HOPE THE NEW ANC WILL TRY AND RESTORE ORDER SO I CAN WALK FREE WITH MY CELLPHONE IN MY POCKET KNOWING I WONT GET MOCKED BY MY OWN BROTHERS...NX ITS SO SICK IT IRRITATES ME

This comment could be interpreted as adding to the authenticity of '*Sanele*'s identity, either because he is really black or as an extremely clever textual device if he is not, because this insight into the experience of a black man (with the accompanying connotations of physical strength, as well as being the demographics *Sanele* referred to earlier as the stereotypical

criminal) who is himself concerned about crime, and as a result his masculinity (and possibly his 'blackness') is challenged by his peers in such an instance. Since this is rather a poignant divulgence on *Sanele*'s part, it comes across as bearing the hallmarks of sincerity.

Two pages into the newsgroup entitled *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africas next President*, it is noteworthy that this is only the second mention of the ANC (the majority party of which Jacob Zuma is the presidential candidate) and Jacob Zuma himself has not been mentioned, nor alluded to, once in that space. "IM JUST STATING FACTS HERE LOVELY PPL, THE COUNTRY IF (*is*) FUCKED AND I JUST HOPE THE NEW ANC WILL TRY AND RESTORE ORDER…"

There is a perception (and *Sanele*'s use of the word 'restore' indicates that he subscribes to it) that violent crime has escalated since the ANC came to power - although the dictatorial state had a correspondingly authoritarian system of media control and this perception may be attributable to that fact. While most detractors of the ANC would probably cite this as one of their reasons *not* to vote ANC, *Sanele*'s comment could be construed in such a way that takes for granted that he is an ANC supporter, and that the "NEW ANC" (presumably meaning the ANC since the national ANC conference held in Polokwane in 2009, where Zuma emerged victorious) would receive his vote and stand a better chance than the 'old' ANC of dealing with crime. It is also possible that *Sanel*e speaks not from self-invested pride and confidence in the ANC, but as a realist, knowing that with the overwhelming majority held by the ruling party, it is virtually impossible that any other party could make significant inroads. In either case "I JUST HOPE" does not convey much conviction that the new ANC will be able to deal with the problem of violent crime.

> [Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote
>
> at 12:50pm on April 23rd, 2009
>
> Sanele,this huge propensity for crime by blacks in SA is, I feel, driven by poverty. outside of SA crime is not as hectic amongst black ppl. i feel confident that if our government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a drop in crime. ppl can either sit back and say Oh well i am black so i do crime (which is so ridiculous a notion anyways) or we can choose. and we can choose a better future.

zethu is right...we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one step at a time and we can see change. not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)

The apparently patronizing tone that pervades *Tiffany*'s statements serves as a reminder of the echoes of a residual mindset from the apartheid era. The instructive (and hence superior) tone *Tiffany* takes with *Sanele*, despite his agreement with her previously ("…AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!"), indicates that she speaks to him as if he were in direct opposition to her views. However, *Sanele* at no point says (as *Tiffany* ascribes to him) "Oh well i am black so i do crime…" and so it is strange that she chastises him thus: "not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)". In online discussions, "It is the spirit rather than the letter of a message which is seen to be significant, and earlier phrasing can be adapted to suit the new writer" (Crystal,2001: 147). This tendency to 'adapt' and hence appropriate prior comments, involves a dimension of power. This, however, may not be a conscious process and may not be limited to online communication. According to Cohen:

> "What passes as understanding is often based on interpretation, and the interpretation is generally accomplished by reconstructing other people's behavior as if it was our own: in other words, by attempting to put ourselves in their shoes, our minds in their bodies. Hence, when other people use words that we use, we interpret their intended meaning by assuming that it corresponds to ours. Sometimes it may; sometimes it may not...." (1985:16 in Burnett, 2002:159)

Therefore, for *Tiffany* to have interpreted *Sanele* as meaning "EVERYONE who is black is a criminal", this may indicate that she holds corresponding attitudes.

The statement "i feel confident that if our government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a drop in crime" appears to be an oxymoron. The word "confident" is slightly incongruous with the use of "should", which implies a level of uncertainty. If one were truly confident it would seem more likely that one would use the word "would" rather than "should". We can only conjecture what factor(s) outside of poor

policing and education *Tiffany* considers as the root of South Africa's prevalence of violent crime – this is a limitation of this type of research because it is impossible to probe this further.

Tiffany's use of the word 'we' in her statement, "ppl can either sit back and say Oh well i am black so i do crime (which is so ridiculous a notion anyways) or we can choose," is worthy of note, which harks back to *Sanele*'s use of 'we' and 'our'. Certain of *Tiffany*'s preoccupations seem to indicate that she is most likely a white South African, and this taken together with the relatively sound level of education which appears to be evident in her comments, indicates that she probably had a more affluent up bringing than most of the populace. In this case, it is obvious that the 'choices' *Tiffany* alludes to would have had a broader scope for her than for her poorer countrymen, which renders her use of the appellation 'we' as somewhat presumptuous.

Taken as a whole, *Tiffany*'s statement is a bewildering mix of implied negative racial stereotyping (pessimism) and elaborate idealism (optimism). The comment "…and we can choose a better future…we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one step at a time and we can see change", is strongly reminiscent of the clichéd and out-dated social marketing techniques associated with the early nineties discourses of the "New South Africa" and "the Rainbow Nation". However, given the racial divides still inherent in South African society, the use of 'we' here reveals a sense of solidarity and unified patriotism. In this case, therefore, the contributor's identification with South Africanness is characterized by ambivalence.

> [Sanele Khanyile](#) wrote at 12:51pm on April 23rd, 2009
> LOL I'LL BE AT THE GYM (VIRGIN ACTIVE) AT THE WORKSHOP CBD.
> MAYBE WE CAN MEET THERE

This is in response to *Nzuzo* challenging *Sanele* to meet him in person (see above, it appears that *Nzuzo* is skeptical that *Sanele* really is black). "LOL" is shorthand, in this context, meaning "Laugh Out Loud" – presumably because he finds it amusing that *Nzuzo* clearly

finds him rather enigmatic due to his previous statements. The fact that *Sanele* appears to belong to the franchised gym is further indication that he is at least comfortably middleclass.

> Nzuzo Chiliza (South Africa) wrote
> at 12:53pm on April 23rd, 2009
> The CBD no bro, its not safe lol, come to the North.

This response recalls *Sanele*'s prior account of being mocked by his peers for hiding his cell phone in his pocket in the fear of crime. *Sanele*, having recommended a meeting place in the CBD, in all probability feels comfortable there. *Nzuzo*, on the other hand, calls the CBD unsafe, most likely due to crime levels associated with the CBD, and suggests the relatively affluent northern suburbs as a more suitable meeting place. This illustrates that *Nzuzo* probably belongs to a higher economic class than *Sanele*, and the implication of his statement is that he is somewhat lacking in 'street credibility'. This raises questions about the authenticity of the construct of 'blackness' presented by more affluent black people who are removed from the experiences of the poorer majority.

> [Sherene Cooper](#) wrote
> at 12:52pm on April 23rd, 2009
> its in the humans blood to kill,no matter wot race or skin colour.cain killed abel
> because of jealousy.moses killed an egyptian out of anger.herod killed all the
> baby boys,because he was threatened by another ruling party.david killed his half
> brother for raping his sister.so wot makes this nation so different?

The biblical theme of *Sherene*'s comment on the universality of violence suggests strongly that she belongs to some branch of the Christian faith. The name suggests the possibility that *Sherene* is a white or coloured South African. So far, *Sherene* appears to be the only non-black contributor whose statement did not have a subtext related to the recurrent theme of the 'inherent violence of blacks', since *Sanele* launched that topic. Rather, her comment recalls violent actions related in the Bible to illustrate her point that humans are innately violent in general and so the violence in South Africa is, in her view, nothing out of the ordinary. Taken

in this way, it appears that in *Sherene*'s view South Africa is neither better nor worse in this regard than is any other country.

[Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote

at 12:53pm on April 23rd, 2009

> sherene we made it through our first electionin 1994 without too much trouble...that's what makes us different :)

I referred earlier to *Tiffany*'s 'patronizing' manner to Sanele, and alluded to the residual mindset this suggested when in the context of being addressed to a person with a name of African origin (and therefore presented as black). Here, however, *Tiffany* takes the same condescending tone when addressing someone with a name of European extraction, and so it becomes questionable whether this supercilious tone is at all linked to illusions of racial superiority. It is possible that this self-important manner is simply her usual form of address, regardless of the race of the person she is speaking to. This attribute of virtual identity is not uncommon sine the "decrease in social and physical "presence" causes CMC users to experience a significant reduction of their awareness of themselves as socialized individuals" (Burnett, 2002: 158).

For one who previously referred to "this huge propensity for crime by blacks in SA" to suddenly take a superior liberal tone in response to *Sherene*'s statement is somewhat hypocritical. Burnett draws on the work of Ricoeur, viewing online discussions as the mediating processes keeping communities alive: "This process unfolds in an ongoing public "performance" of writing texts, reading and interpreting those texts, and making those readings and interpretations explicit through the creation of further texts, all in an electronically mediated public setting accessible to all members of the community" (Burnette, 2002:157). In this case, the meanings conveyed through the virtual identity of *Tiffany*, unfolds in layers according to her interpretations and reactions to comments in conversations relating to violence at the levels of race and of nation.

In discourse theory "variability in terms of specific contexts" (Low & Potgeiter, 1994:161) is documented in face-to-face interaction, where no permanent record of conversation is available to recall such variability. In the case of online discussions, however record of discussion is "accessible to all members of the community"(Burnette, 2002:157), and it would seem likely that other members would take *Tiffany* to task for such apparent inconsistency, but this breach of constancy is unchecked in the newsgroup.

> [Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 12:54pm on April 23rd, 2009
> aah sanele,....now you see i've just left durbs...too bad. think we'd have lots to talk about !

Following *Nzuzo*'s cue, *Tiffany*'s regret at not being in Durban to meet *Sanele* (taken with some of her prior somewhat hostile comments) implies that if she were to meet *Sanele* it would be (a) with the expectation most likely of finding *Sanele* to be a white 'imposter' and (b) with the intention of 'setting him straight' according to her own ideological framework.

> [Sanele Khanyile](#) wrote at 12:54pm on April 23rd, 2009
> OK TEFF :) HOPE IT AINT TOO LATE. LETS HOPE WE AINT JUS PUTIING THEM THERE TO CHOW OUR MONEY AND BECOME FAT CATS THAT CANT EVEN CHASE THE MOUSE.

In *Sanele*'s reply, "hope it aint too late" presumably referring to *Tiffany*'s last comment ("I've just left durbs… too bad..") clearly some misunderstanding occurred . *Sanele* appears willing to meet *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo*, although he does not go as far as suggesting a meeting place in *Tiffany*'s case. *Sanele* returns the conversation to politics, referring to "FAT CATS" – this is an expression that has become commonly understood to refer to governmental officials benefiting from the 'gravy train' of state coffers, usually the term is associated with the perceived self-serving laziness of government officials. Although the term 'fat cat' is not necessarily racial, since the majority of government is comprised

of black members, racial connotations have become attached to this expression in South Africa.

The relationship between *Sanele* and *Tiffany* is complex. *Tiffany*, even while apparently fostering similar views to *Sanele,* persists in taking an argumentative line with *Sanele*. Even though she is argumentative, her remarks are not aggressive, and there is a degree of friendliness and familiarity between the two identities. While Smith and Kollock have referred to the "prevalence of hostility on the Internet" (1999:18), Burnett states that the case may have been exaggerated. He draws on Joseph Walther (1994 and 1996), who "further suggested that the lack of traditional physical and social cues in CMC can lead participants to form more positive images of their online interlocutors than they otherwise might" (Burnett, 2002: 158). Walter's work however, focused on online communities where membership was intended to be long term, where positive social behaviour was seen as an investment in future group relations. Since the election will presumably put an end to the relevance of this particular discussion group, this type of 'vested interest' in friendly behavior may not be the central factor here. Given the disparate perspectives from which *Tiffany* and *Sanele* engage with the myth of the violence of black men, the lack of hostility and the general tone of friendliness that pervades their discussion is noteworthy.

> [Sherene Cooper](#) wrote
> at 10:37pm on April 24th, 2009
> not one leader had the countrys interest at heart.they all were out for personal gain.even if it meant killing-june 16,raping or fraud-zuma-,they dont deserve that seat in parliament.not an honest person left nowadays.

Here *Sherene* apparently commences with the broad maxim 'absolute power corrupts absolutely', in the context of South Africa's "leaders" (note the term she uses is not 'president' therefore extending possibly to the old system when South Africa's leaders went by the title 'prime minister') this seems to indicate that her statement includes not only current leaders but extending also to leaders in the apartheid era. It is uncertain who

Sherene claims had 'personal gain' from the June 16 deaths (Sowetho uprising of 1976) today remembered in South Africa as the public holiday of Youth Day) but presumably she means the apartheid government. *Sherene* then refers to the rape and corruption allegations relating to ANC presidential candidate Jacob Zuma, both charges however were already dropped in court at the time *Sherene* was writing. It is clear however that she considers him to be guilty nonetheless.

> [Mosa Moamogoe](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 11:59pm on April 24th, 2009
>> Sheren u talkin isht. Nelson mandela! He had the countries intrest at heart n am (*and I am.*) sure everybody wud agree wit me so stop puttin up isht u dnt knw.

In *Mosa*'s rebuttal of *Sherene* it is interesting to note that in his use of a swear word, he intentionally misspells the word (as 'isht' appears twice here). There are at least two possible explanations for this: (i) perhaps *Mosa* does not wish to link himself to the vulgarity of the use of the expletive and hence distorts it, or perhaps, (ii) *Mosa* is familiar with the rules of many online notice boards and chat rooms, which frequently have rules against swearing – the penalty for which is expulsion from the site.

Mosa cites Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratically elected president, as a case in point to disprove Sherene's claim that "not one leader had the country's interest at heart. (T)hey all were out for personal gain". *Mosa* has such confidence in Mandela's irreproachability that he adds "(*and I am)* sure everybody wud agree wit me".

 As Nelson Mandela has become a world icon, representing the oxymoron of 'peaceful struggle' against oppression, in South Africa Nelson Mandela is sacrosanct. Jacob Zuma's biographer Jeremy Gordin controversially proclaimed, "The whole Saint Mandela thing has obscured the history of the ANC and the relationships between people. He's not a saint, he's a human being,"(Gordin N.D. cited in Mail and Guardian, 2009).

This use of Mandela's name as a 'sacred cow' may have relevance to *Mosa*'s use of it in the text. According to Thiesmeyer (2003):

> "In societies or polities that do not inhibit freedom of speech itself, there remains the problem that illocutionary power, the power to make oneself heard and to obtain an appropriate response, can still be 'circumscribed by someone else's speech' (Langton). When this type of silencing is at its most effective, it obscures both the realization that silencing exists as well as any awareness of its social and political uses (Eto, 1982, Jansen, 1991; Conklin, 1997)" (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 3).

Thus, although *Mosa* may not have consciously circumscribed *Sherene*'s speech, in contemporary South Africa, *Mosa*'s appeal to Nelson Mandela, has greater impact than *Sherene*'s appeal to God. After this reference to Nelson Mandela, and by virtue of association the ANC, anything *Sherene* responds that appears to detract from this icon is culturally tabooed, and therefore denied of a subject position that can make "an appropriate response".

> [Sherene Cooper](#) wrote
>
> at 12:48am on April 25th, 2009
>
> so y was discipline nd religion taken out of schools?same sex marraiges nd abortion made legal?y is everything that is an abomination unto GOD made acceptable? wot morals can we possibly teach our children when everything that is wicked has become the norm these days.look further than ur nose mosa!

Sherene's statement seems to confirm conservative views. This cannot be explained simply in terms of her Christian faith, as many denominations of Christianity have more liberal policies regarding issues such as same sex marriage and abortion. *Sherene*'s chain of logic seems somewhat flawed, as it appears she is implying that Nelson Mandela somehow experienced "personal gain" from the abolishment of corporal punishment, the recent (i.e. not during Mandela's presidential term) legal recognition of same-sex marriage and the pro-choice stance of South African policy on abortion.

In terms of types of rationality and public space, "(*wh*)y is everything that is an abomination unto GOD made acceptable?", such an appeal to 'God' does not conform to late modernity's standards for formal, rational public debate, as this is highly subjective given the plethora of differing opinions held by vastly disparate religious groups. For this reason, among others, religious views are traditionally kept out of formal public debates and are reserved for the private realm. However, the postmodern nature of this informal online debate does not obey the same rules as the Habermasian ideal public sphere, and if religious references are found to be convincing by other members, the validity of such an argument is sufficient to this forum.

Considering *Sherene*'s prior statement regarding Zuma's rape and corruption charges, and the fact that this newsgroup is particularly concerning the forthcoming (at the time when the selected text was written) 2009 general election, she appears to be including Jacob Zuma in her comment: "wot morals can we possibly teach our children when everything that is wicked has become the norm these days". With reference to the fact that it was a certainty that the ANC would remain in power, with Zuma as the presidential candidate, it appears that the conservative, orthodox Christian philosophy demonstrated by *Sherene* would find such an appointment as evidence that society's (i.e. voters') 'morality' is lacking.

Sherene's statement "everything that is wicked has become the norm these days", may have a racial implication, since South Africa history within living memory is frequently divided as 'during apartheid' and 'since democracy began' (which is effectively synonymous with "these days"). When this comment is then contrasted with *Sherene*'s first, which was in opposition to assertions in the newsgroup that black men are inherently violent, this duality of attitude is similar to that displayed by *Tiffany*.

This duality may be due to conflict between privately held beliefs and those which conform to dominant discourses that draw taboo on white skepticism. Therefore "…people's desire to appear politically correct may lead them to present a front to others

that is less than sincere," (Van Boven, 2000: 268), although when conversation gets heated, this veneer may be forgotten in the passion of the moment.

> [Mosa Moamogoe](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 5:06am on April 25th, 2009
> Sherene u said mandela was in office for personal gain. Wat does same sex marriages n arbotion being made legal have to do wit that? Hmmm let me see im thnkin u sayin mandela had sumtin to gain frm dis thngs? Again u talkin isht. sory to say dis bt maybe u nid to thnk further than ur skin colour. N i agree wit u 100% on ur last statement cos it doesnt say anyting bout wat i was initialy arguing bout.Mwah

This rebuttal in defense of Mandela by *Mosa* draws attention to the illogical nature of *Sherene*'s former statement, however he is prepared to acknowledge her statement "wot morals can we possibly teach our children when everything that is wicked has become the norm these days," (*Sherene*). *Mosa* may or may not be referring to the current political personalities with his avowal that "I agree wit u 100% on your last statement". It is also possible that he refers to the influence of international media, or a number of other perceived corrupting influences acting on society. While *Sherene* signed off with a further instance of *ad homonym "*look further than ur nose mosa,", *Mosa* replies "sory to say dis bt maybe u nid to thnk further than ur skin colour", implying that *Sherene*'s attack of South Africa's black leaders (in particular) constitutes – in his view – a typically white standpoint.

It is interesting that *Mosa* concludes his comment with the word "Mwah", the commonly used phonetic denoting 'a big kiss'. This is presumably meant sarcastically, and yet does not convey hostility (this is a case in point which conflicts with the myth of inherent violence of black men, and its implications for masculinity, which surfaced earlier in the newsgroup). Signing off with a kiss demonstrates supreme confidence in his argument as well as a slightly mocking magnanimity. It also suggests that *Mosa* does not feel that using this somewhat 'camp' expression challenges his masculinity in any way.

Sven Finkeldeh (South Africa) wrote

at 2:46am on April 25th, 2009

Sorry to interrupt your conversation...

But not everyone shares the same beliefs... I think people should respect one

another regardless of their differences..

(And I agree with you Mosa)

It appears that *Sven* takes issue with the self righteous tone of *Sherene*'s religious references. "I think people should respect one another regardless of their differences," at first appears to be a general statement, perhaps to upbraid both *Sherene* for her 'holier-than-thou' stance and *Mosa* also (his prior statement "Sheren u talkin isht" does not demonstrate respect). However, *Sven* then says "And I agree with you Mosa" which seems to indicate that he does not include *Mosa* in his remonstrations. Presuming that *Sven* is a white male, and given the racially charged nature of some of the prior entries on the newsgroup, *Sven* may have consciously taken the 'politically correct' stance (which is generally the more socially acceptable position), without adding any of his own thoughts on the matter by siding with *Mosa*. On the other hand, racial matters may have no bearing on this, and *Sven* may simply subscribe to more liberal attitudes than the blatantly conservative *Sherene*, and this may account for his distaste for her line of argument.

Brian Mpumelelo Sithole wrote

at 3:13am on April 25th, 2009

There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists have been saying that

since 94... The people have spoken. Long Live the President.

Brian's statement is somewhat enigmatic. While apparently in support of Zuma ("Long Live the President"), and condemnatory of "Bloody pessimists" (this stance is generally associated with whites who 'fear' the consequences for the country's wealth under ANC [or perhaps 'black'] rule – and has come to be associated particularly with the 'white flight' from South Africa since the demise of apartheid), *Brian* does not give his own view of the question of the economy or his reasons for this. Presumably he is distancing

himself from (what he terms) 'pessimism', and yet he offers no defense of the ANC's economic policy. Perhaps by this, his intention is to demonstrate that questions of policy (debated in the media, for example) are irrelevant in the South African practice of democracy, being a virtually one party state. In other words, the power of the political will in favour of Zuma renders any debate on such issues somewhat impotent in the face of such vast majority approval, hence his statement "Long Live the President".

> [Mosa Moamogoe](#) (South Africa) wrote
>
> at 5:11am on April 25th, 2009
>
> An economist cudnt make our economy grow. I wonder how people expect a person who has a third grade to help our economy.

If the previous statement by *Brian* used the term 'bloody pessimists' as a politically correct euphemism for 'white' pessimism, then this statement by (apparently black) *Mosa* illustrates that skepticism about the economy under Zuma is not a malady experienced whites only. The fact that Jacob Zuma is not formally educated appears to concern *Mosa*, and his rejoinder to *Brian*'s accusations of pessimism, "I wonder how people expect a person who has a third grade to help our economy", insinuates that those who are not pessimists in this regard are prone to blind optimism.

> [Sherene Cooper](#) wrote
>
> at 10:35am on April 25th, 2009
>
> i dont recall singling out anyone? and as for my skin colour well that has nothing to do with my statement nd for the record-im proud of my skin colour.nd as for ur language,i think just maybe u must learn how to spell shit!or how to spell for that matter? nd wen u read a statement in future,just try to look a bit deeper,that is if u know how!

Since *Sherene*'s last entry concluded with the quip "look further than ur nose mosa!", it is strange that she does not " recall singling out anyone". Her response to *Mosa*'s racial jab, that her skin colour is unrelated to the views she has expressed, requires some attention.

As her prior statements have strongly linked her with a conservative Christian perspective, and that the arguments she presents are bound up with this interpretation of the Bible, it may be inferred that these religious and cultural affiliations influenced *Sherene*'s standpoint more, perhaps, than her skin colour.

Christianity was introduced to South Africa originally by missionaries as part of the process of colonization. This process, in more recent historical commentary, has been interpreted as bringing oppression in the guise of 'enlightenment'. During apartheid, the Afrikaans National Party 'believed' that they were fulfilling God's will by enforcing racial segregation. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that *Mosa* associates these rightwing Christian beliefs as synonymous with illusions of white supremacy.

Sherene also adds "(*a*)nd for the record-im proud of my skin colour". On the assumption that *Sherene* is a white South African, this has very different implications to a black person expressing racial pride. In the context of present-day popular understanding of the racial liberation struggles, particularly in the USA and in South Africa, 'White Pride' is associated with white supremacist atrocities and white oppression of other races, whereas "Black Pride" is associated with hard-won emancipation from such historical subjugation. Where White Pride has negative connotations (for example Ku Klux Klan, the apartheid regime, etc), Black Pride is generally defined in positive terms.
Due to the sensitivity towards racial issues that pervades South African media and society since apartheid, such forthright demonstrations of 'white pride' are rare possibly because of the fear of the probable association with white supremacy and historical injustices.

Using distanciation, from outside of the cultural context, this situation appears to bear similarities to Schaefer and Lam's (1992) definition of the structural component of racism, where:

> "Societies develop social norms that dictate – for example – not only what foods are desirable (or forbidden), but also which racial and ethnic groups are to be favoured (or despised). These norms are often reinforced by the social institutions

of a society's social structure, such as government, religion, education and the economy." (Schaefer and Lam, 1992: 297)

Therefore, from within the cultural framework of South African society, structural racism against whites is 'invisible', by virtue of the perceived debt whites owe to blacks for their economic dominance, which was created by the racially oppressive apartheid regime. Such terms as 'affirmative action', 'black economic empowerment', 'the previously disadvantaged' rely on this history to present the justified enforcement of equity (as opposed to 'equality') policies. When viewed from outside of the cultural context through distanciation, however, these practices assume a different meaning and can be seen as evidence of structural racism in society.

> [Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 10:25am on April 25th, 2009
> reinhardt what exactly did you not understand? maybe i should clarify? i think its a fairly correct estimation to say most whites want to maintian our standard of living right. i also know loads of people of colour who want the maintain our standard of living and in fact develope it further. but what i am asking is this: why is it that when we argue the point that the ANC has done jack for SA and we are declining into a third world mess, the answer seems to be that this is africa and if we want europe we need to go to europe. so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here? and yes...obama is hot !

This entry draws our attention for the first time in this textual selection to the fact that some comments appear to have been removed from this Newsgroup. There are two possible ways that this could occur: (i) the contributor may remove her/his own comment if they regret having posted it, or, (ii) the Newsgroup administrator may remove comments at will – generally Newsgroups have a manifesto which often prohibits offensive or inflammatory statements.

Whatever the cause, it appears that at least two comments (one each from '*Reinhardt*' and '*Tiffany*') have been removed from the text. Since *Tiffany*, in this statement, says, "what exactly did you not understand? maybe i should clarify?" which implies that she is expanding on the content of her last entry, and so we can get a measure of insight into what her previous (deleted) entry may have related to. *Reinhardt,* judging from *Tiffany*'s response, seems to have disagreed with this previous statement.

Tiffany refers to the common contentions regarding standards of living of the different classes in South Africa. The historical context is of apartheid established white economic interests over those of other races. For *Tiffany* (who presumably is white herself), if she did experience the 'public' facilities the apartheid government extended to whites, the status quo may seem, to her, comparatively like "a third world mess". Such views have been widely interpreted as symptomatic of racism perpetuated by whites in the media, which might explain why *Tiffany* specifically articulates her perspective as being a common objective of all South Africans. Surely, the right to hope for improvement in public services and living standards is not limited to any particular race group, yet according to *Tiffany*'s statement, when white South Africans articulate this aspiration, these views are interpreted as being unpatriotic, the sub-text being that this is evidence of participation in a wider discourse of white racism.

Tiffany's final quip "(*O*)bama is hot!" may also be evidence that she is distancing herself from the 'inherent' racism she feels accused of. This may therefore have political intent, especially in light of Rooney's analysis of Can Themba:

> "Can Themba writes of how the flaunting of relationships with white women by black men therefore can become a political strategy against apartheid logic… This could be heard to assert: she desires me." (Rooney, 2000:129)

In this light *Tiffany*, with her presented liberal identity, uses the words "obama is hot", as complete rejection of racist white identity. However, the Kenyan born president of the United States is probably more culturally Westernised than most South Africans of European descent. While Obama has physically dark skin, he is probably culturally more akin to 'white' (English) South Africans perhaps than he is to the majority of poorer

black South Africans. If Obama is *Tiffany*'s platonic 'black' leader, this vision appears to bear similarities to the 'cocoanut' analogy.

" i also know loads of people of colour who want ("*to" instead of "the"?)* the maintain our standard of living and in fact develope it further. but what i am asking is this: why is it that when we argue the point that the ANC has done jack for SA and we are declining into a third world mess, the answer seems to be that this is africa and if we want europe we need to go to europe. so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here?" With the dramatic about turn in policy from the apartheid colour bar to the present equity laws, increasing numbers of black South Africans are proving that social class mobility and improved standards of living *are* a priority for black South Africans. According to a report by the Health Systems Trust in 1998 "Members are predominantly from high income groups, white, and formally employed. There was an increase of around 50% in black African medical scheme members of (private) medical schemes between 1990 and 1995" (Health Systems Trust, 1998), implying that more affluent black South Africans also find the public health service wanting, and are taking measures, in common with their white peers, to gain access to private health care.

> [Michael De Villiers](#) (Witwatersrand) wrote
> at 10:50am on April 25th, 2009
> Good grief the lack of literacy in South Africa eminates through the shocking
> language people use to convey their points. Learn to spell and communicate
> effectively, otherwise you are just as bad as the president with a 3rd grade
> education. People need to awaken their minds to the fact that the ANC hasn't
> actually done SUCH a bad job for the past 14 years. The economic policy of
> South Africa has seen a vast amount of growth in balck and white middle classes.
> Granted there have been many short comings of the government, and for a large
> part the standard of living for the middle class has been fantastic. Quality of life is
> a completely different matter. However, the fact that a president can make
> comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against

ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?

*Michae*l here is presented as something of an anachronism in this newsgroup. Here is evidently a relic of the 'old school' of late modernity (and the white supremacy of apartheid), and finds himself appalled at the poor grammar and spelling, the *ad homonym* and expletives that he is confronted with in this post modern, new media environment, which in which familiarity with language conventions is symbolic of membership (Saville-Troike, 1982 in Smith and Kollock, 1999:39). It is unfortunate (perhaps) that his air of superiority is marred somewhat by his own spelling errors ("eminate" and "balck" *sic*) as 'Mike' is quick to point out in the following entry:

Mike MacKenzie (Sheffield) wrote
at 11:38am on April 25th, 2009
Granted there have been many poor spells under this government Mike, but 'eminates' is spelt with an ·a·.
Main Entry:em·a·nate
Pronunciation:\ˈe-mə-ˌnāt\
Function:verb
Inflected Form(s):em·a·nat·ed; em·a·nat·ing
Etymology:Latin emanatus, past participle of emanare, from e- + manare to flow
Date:1756

Whereas *Michael* (as opposed to '*Mike*') may appear to profess himself more comfortable in the space of a public debate more closely resembling the traditional conception of Habermas' public sphere, his own argument is only superficially conforming to the conventions governing that type of discussion. For example, "Granted there have been many short comings of the government, and for a large part the standard of living for the middle class has been fantastic. Quality of life is a completely different matter. However, the fact that a president can make comments contradicting the core values of

democracy…" does not appear logically flowing and the sentences seem disjointed with no apparent ironically illustrative intent. Michael offers no constructive 'meat' in this part of his contribution, but seems to be using this forum to simply vent his frustration at Zuma and at the other Newsgroup contributors. Smith and Kollock note that "the hostility that exists on the Internet is a common… complaint. The puzzle to be explained is not the prevalence of hostility in online interaction, but rather how it is that there is any significant cooperation at all", (Smith and Kollock, 1999:18).

Michael presents himself as a disillusioned white liberal. In order to distance himself, perhaps, from the 'inherent racism of whites' *Michael* accuses ANC detractors of pessimism "People need to awaken their minds to the fact that the ANC hasn't actually done SUCH a bad job for the past 14 years". Yet he qualifies this by vaguely implying poor "quality of life" under ANC rule so as to imply that he is impartial in his observations, and hinting perhaps that this is evidence of his advanced subtle reasoning.

The last segment of *Michael*'s contribution appears to be moving out of the realm of mere venting towards issues of significant concern for the young democracy of South Africa: "However, the fact that a president can make comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?" *Michael* does not specify instances of these allegations, but may be referring to statements prior to Zuma's acquittal, made by Julius Malema "We will kill for Zuma" should any obstacle to Zuma's presidency present itself (i.e. imprisonment, were Zuma found guilty). While this type of public defiance was appropriate during the Struggle for democracy, today such comments may be perceived as out of place in the contemporary democratic state. In addition, *Michael'*s rhetorical question "When the justice system fails what else is there?" taps into doubts expressed in the media regarding the independence of the judiciary, particularly in connection with the Zuma trials, which is widely perceived as essential to the proper functioning of a democracy.

[Tiffany Lassauniere](#) (South Africa) wrote

at 11:08am on April 25th, 2009

Michael sadly you are wrong wrt how poorly the ANC government has performed. you are correct in saying the middle classes have enjoyed a fairly stable standard of living, but then that is not the challenge that was posed to the party. the challenge was the poorer portion of society and service delivery in those areas is abysmal at best. so no they never rose to that challenge. furthermore, little to no work has been done in respect of maintaining vital areas such as water and electricity supply. i have friends who work for the water dept in SA. new equipment was installed shortly before the new regime took over, the average life exoectancy of this equipment is 18 years...we've gotten 15 years so far. 3 more to go and no skilled labourers to maintain and no budget to replace...the same is happening with electricity. no provison was made for generators so we now have french companies coming in to build generators, but at what cost? i do believe that the true extent of poor planning will become apparent within the next 3 - 5 years. Healthcare is a true shocker. Our universities are being insructed (i have exoerienced this first hand) to downgrade the quality of our qualifications so that we are not acceptable in the rest of the world, all in an attempt to prevent the brain drain becoming worse. the trend is that of poor planning. crime is at an all time high and there is little hope of this improving. and the most worrying is the fact that our government seems to be unwilling to acknowledge these problems. in much the same way that zuma (and his cronies for that matter) refuse to acknowledge his guilt. this is ostrich behaviour...just pretend it's not happening. furthermore the ANC is aligning themselves with China, who has a poor track record of human rights offences....can you see how this is in DIRECT contradiction to the policies that are being " sold" as ANC objectives/policies?your points are correct though in that zuma has little regard for democracy :(

This encounter between *Tiffany* and *Michael* is interesting in that, in a country which has been politically and racially divided, here are two (presumably) white, disillusioned

liberals who appear to feel little common sympathy in their shared distaste for Zuma as president. Due to their difference in opinion in the areas of relevant governance action from the ANC since 1994, there is a level of antipathy conveyed in *Tiffany*'s statement "Michael sadly you are wrong wrt (*with regard to*) how poorly the ANC government has performed… can you see how this is in DIRECT contradiction to the policies that are being " sold" as ANC objectives/policies? (*Y*)our points are correct though in that (*Z*)uma has little regard for democracy". The last sentence in particular, with the grudging acquiescence it conveys, underlines the tension – despite their agreement that Zuma is 'undemocratic' – arising from their dissimilar views on the ANC's performance thus far.

While *Michael* just stops short of congratulating the ANC on the stability the middle classes (the social class *Michael* is likely to fit into), *Tiffany* scoffs at the elitism this suggests: "…but then that is not the challenge that was posed to the party. (*T*)he challenge was the poorer portion of society and service delivery in those areas is abysmal at best. (*S*)o no they never rose to that challenge." There is a certain naivety to comments that charge the government so harshly for failing to find a solution to poverty in a third world country in the first fifteen years of its nationhood, and perhaps it is rather the question of degree rather than of total success or failure in this regard that could more usefully be debated. In terms of service delivery, however, *Tiffany*'s words echo reports of numerous community riots in reaction to the frustrations experienced, particularly in rural areas, due to poor service delivery.

In-fighting of this nature in an online community may be linked to the tensions between individual rationality and collective rationality. It is in the interests of the participants engaged in this newsgroup to be cooperative (those who oppose Zuma's presidency), however, individual rationalities on the part of contributors may lead them to disagree on the 'reasons' for rallying their opposition to Zuma, thus "behavior that is reasonable and justifiable for the individual leads to a poorer outcome for all" (Smith and Kollock, 1996: 1 in Herring, 1996: 109). The poorer outcome, if we look at this exchange from this perspective, is that of reduced social cohesion in the group.

However, the clash of anti-Zuma paradigms that this exchange between *Tiffany* and *Michael* presents, may also be framed more positively for the health of the community, since "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence," as Blake declared in *Proverbs of Hell*. By publicly giving vent to their opposite views, *Michael* and *Tiffany* are both expressing their arguments to illustrate, according to their individual rationalities, as to why they would not vote ANC. As the text is addressed "potentially to whoever knows how to read" [Ricoer, 1976: 31 in Burnette, 2002: 165), this may allow other undecided voters to see – for both sets of reasons – why Zuma would make a poor president (i.e. their collective goal).

Tiffany's arguments about the ANC's failure to maintain infrastructure may well have arisen from Eskom's (South Africa's parastatal electricity provider) 'load shedding' which commenced shortly before the election. When taken together with the other concerns raised by *Michael* and *Tiffany,* South Africa's future from this perspective might be seen as a forewarning of a situation akin to that of neighbouring country Zimbabwe, which has in the last fifteen years experienced political strife associated with the corrosion of democracy and seen the accompanying effects of a plummeting economy and the resultant decay of infrastructure. Such comparisons to Zimbabwe have been associated with the so-called 'white flight' from South Africa. In the event, 'load shedding' lasted only for a few months but did serve to draw public scrutiny on Eskom's failings, and the government's inability to absorb the full cost of renovation resulting in previously unheard-of tariff hikes over the next few years.

This also resonates with *Tiffany*'s claim "i have friends who work for the water dept in SA. new equipment was installed shortly before the new regime took over, the average life exoectancy (*expectancy)* of this equipment is 18 years...we've gotten 15 years so far. 3 more to go and no skilled labourers to maintain and no budget to replace..." Whether or not this claim is true is immaterial to this research. The belief, however, that the ANC

government is ill equipped to deal with the essential service of water must be frightening to those who subscribe to it. Water, unlike electricity, is literally vital. While long power failures are inconvenient, the suspension or contamination of the national water supply would result in full scale human calamity. As such, this comment – if *Tiffany* truly believes in the possibility it presents, or if any readers are convinced by it – moves beyond mere ranting, it becomes an expression of the helplessness of citizens who are at the mercy of government blunderings. *Tiffany*'s reference to 'ostrich behaviour' of the government in relation to service delivery and crime (she also refers to Zuma's "guilt") seems to accentuate *Tiffany*'s frustration because denial that these problems exist seems to indicate that these are not high on the governments' list of priorities. Particularly for those who do not vote for the ANC's Jacob Zuma, the overwhelming support for the ruling party in the face of such 'Doomsday' prophecies must leave them with a sense of vulnerability.

These comments regarding the ANC government authored by ostensibly white South African identities can be looked at in two ways:

> "We must distinguish the speech we use when we are talking descriptively about the prescriptions of our own culture, contributing to our own ethnography, so to speak, from the speech we use to justify some action of ours to others within the culture, the kind of speech that has come to be called accounting." (Harré (1979) in Nocera, 2002:4).

With this in mind, the comments may be seen as descriptive of the culture of resistance to the political status quo by listing the perceived faults of the ANC government and the professed threats to democracy presented by the probability of Zuma becoming president – which may be prescribed by the diminished political power experienced by white South Africans - as encapsulated in the title of the newsgroup. However, this type of discursive formation at the same time could be seen as 'accounting' for white skepticism through such 'reasoning', especially by including "people of colour who want the maintain our standard of living and in fact develope it further" (prior statement by *Tiffany*) as a defense against accusations of racism for this culture of political opposition. Thus, the 'action' justified by these types of statements are the allusions of superior reasoning (to the ANC-

voters, of whom over 90% are black) by white contributors, which could be argued echo the colonizer/colonized relations that were present in apartheid race relations, while negating race as a factor.

> [Steven Bales](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 12:33pm on April 25th, 2009
> Mike you want to tell me they haven't done SUCH a bad job? I witnessed 2 of my close friends die due to improper safety measures with regard to construction/roadworks. So "not SUCH a bad job" is not fucking good enough, and before you tell me that this isn't the government's fault, the roadwork companies are part-owned by the government, and safety measures weren't properly implemented due to a lack of planning and cutting costs so they can all get their massive bonuses. Not "such" a bad job is not, and will never be, good enough. The ANC doesn't care about anyone, middle or lower class. They care about themselves alone.

In terms of the use of public reason, *Steven*'s comment has relevance for the eroding of distinctions between the public and private spheres that the Internet is perceived to have contributed to (Marshall, 2004: 12). Formerly, this comment would have been more appropriate to the private realm as it relates to his personal grief at the loss of his two friends.

The incident he refers to may not be significant in isolation for the wider voting public, however the concern for the safety of the workforce in general when the government itself is the highest authority in the implementation of health and safety regulations in regard to labour law does widen the relevance of this statement to this pre-election discussion and finds resonance with *Tiffany*'s concerns in the previous post about poor government planning in addition to her concerns over growing relations with China and by association its perceived disregard for human rights.

The 'greed' of government officials, in their administrative capacity as well as in their private interests, which *Steven* voices has also been referred to by *Sherene* (10:37pm April 23rd) and *Sanele* (12:54pm April 23rd). Except in the case *Mosa*'s quickly naming Nelson Mandela as an exception to this claim, no opposition to this view of the government is presented and so it is possible that this view is not limited to those who presented it but may be a general perception within the newsgroup.

Debra Ann Landman (London) wrote

at 1:16pm on April 25th, 2009

In support of the application to have the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution of Jacob Zuma reviewed:

We, the undersigned, believe that the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution of Jacob Zuma was taken on political, not legal grounds.

As the NDPP conceded, Zuma has not been acquitted. Only a court of law can do that. Only a court of law can examine and cross-examine the evidence that the NDPP submitted in mitigation of the decision to drop the charges. And only a court of law can determine whether the decision itself was lawful or not.

We, the undersigned, therefore support the application for a judicial review of the NDPP's decision to drop the charges against Zuma.

http://www.mypetition.co.za/index.php?page=sign_petition&petition_id=338

Debra Ann Landman (London) wrote

at 1:14pm on April 25th, 2009

JACOB ZUMA SHOULD BE PROSECUTED - SUPPORT THE DA'S APPLICATION TO REVIEW NPA's DECISION

http://www.mypetition.co.za/index.php?page=sign_petition&petition_id=338

Debra is the first contributor to this topic whose profile indicates that she is living outside of South Africa. The petition link that she posts, however, signifies that she maintains involvement with the political scene in South Africa which could mean that she is either a

South African citizen working in London with the intention of returning to South Africa, or that she has emigrated from South Africa but retains an element of South African identity.

It is significant that the petition is in support of the Democratic Alliance, but may not necessarily originate from the opposition party (the URL does not indicate the page to be part of a webpage of any specific party), despite the political nature of the request it aims for. This recalls the practice of political alliances in parliament, in which several parties may band together to vote on certain issues. This creates the impression that this request is not overtly for the political benefit of any single party such a judicial review may render lesser parties (although the advantage for them would possibly be significant if the majority party's presidential candidate were to stand trial) but rather it would seem for the benefit of society as a whole in upholding constitutional norms.

This petition link is also the first incidence in the textual selection which aims to invoke public action (other than voting action) outside of the newsgroup. In Europe and more developed countries governments have utilized "Computer mediated communication in order to involve citizens and as a specific means to intervene in the … democratic process." (Baringhorst et al, 2009:123)

Smith and Kollock elaborate on the necessity for all members to make efficient use of bandwidth (human mental 'bandwidth' as well as that of the transmission medium) by

> " refraining from posting unnecessary information. Among the actions that are usually considered an inappropriate use of bandwidth are: posting extremely long articles; reproducing long sections of text from a previous post rather than summarizing or excerpting only the relevant passages" (Smith and Kollock, 1996 in Herring, 1996:114-5).

Since this petition is one of the longest posts (*Tiffany*'s comments also dominate bandwidth), and does not stimulate conversation, this might be considered as a waste of space.

However, the use of this newsgroup to publicise the initiative is an effective strategy

since (i) the online nature of the petition requires the support of those with Internet access and Facebook necessitates this, and (ii) the newsgroup *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President* is and therefore the subject of the newsgroup matches the aim of the petition. Given this relevance to the newsgroup, the petition may not constitute "inappropriate use of bandwidth", in Smith and Kollock's terms.

When taken in the context of South African political protest action (which is often characterized by strikes, marches and riots involving physical participation), the use of a petition, particularly an online petition, appears feeble in contrast. The news value of a large march or a riot would also gain far more exposure than would a petition. However, the activities of marching and mass action are more traditionally the domain of poorer black South Africans, during apartheid and up to the present time than of other racial groups.

There may be an element of fear in other groups to participate in marches; in South Africa as well as internationally, as what may start as a 'peaceful' march can 'turn violent'. For those who do not come from a culture of demonstrations, this may be a factor which prevents those groups from initiating more demonstrative public action in favour of their cause, and might explain why a petition may be regarded as a more favourable option; one does not hear of 'a petition turned violent' on the news.

Another reason why a petition might have been the preferred line for this protest could be that, compared with a march, there is much less effort necessary from participants. Whereas in the case of a march protestors would be required to physically arrive at the agreed venue and spend a number of hours participating, petition protestors need only click on the URL and add their names to the list, a matter of a few seconds. Hence, in the former instance one would have to have a higher level of commitment to their cause than in the latter, since the investment is greater. This means that a petition might attract those who have only a slight level of dedication in addition to those who feel very strongly about it and overall could result in greater support than in the case of a march for the same movement. The online aspect of the petition also allows for participation by South Africans living abroad.

Lorimar Campbell wrote

at 2:38pm on April 25th, 2009

It's still early but 'ANC just fails to get two-thirds majority':
http://www.news24.com/News24/Elections/News/0,,2-2478-2479_2507085,00.html

As the first election results trickle through to news agencies, media such as television, radio and new media are able to deliver the freshest figures due to their natural immediacy. The ANC's victory being a foregone conclusion, the question of the two-thirds majority has high priority since this would allow the ruling party to alter the constitution, which could have serious implications for the young democracy.

It is interesting to note that *Lorimar* does not overtly state her own opinion as to whether she considers this piece of information to be 'good' news or 'bad' news, but in the context of this particular newsgroup it suggests that she perceives it as favourable news. As if to verify her statement, she includes a link to the thread on News24's website.

Halbo De Beer wrote

at 3:50pm on April 25th, 2009

Stompie must be so PROUD about Winnie's "victory" for the masses! Viva the Mother of the Nation. Stompie salutes you were ever hy might be...

This reference to Winnie Mandela is curious in that she has not been so active a political figure, in recent years, as she has been previously. Halbo may be referring to Winnie Mandela, as leader of the ANC Women's League, pledging support for Zuma as the preferred presidential candidate for the ANC. At the time, Madikazela Mandela was criticized by some gender activist groups for lending support to a man who was recently accused of rape, however, no such perspective has been alluded to in respect of Winnie Mandela in this newsgroup.

Rather, *Halbo* sarcastically refers to 'Stompie'(alias Stompie Moeketsi), whom Madikazela Mandela allegedly ordered her bodyguard to abduct and murder. Hence it is clear that *Halbo*'s statement "Viva the Mother of the Nation" is meant ironically. If this

contributor '*Halbo De Beer*' is a white South African, his lack of enthusiasm for Madikazela Mandela might also be accounted for by the distaste she has expressed for whites, in contrast to her ex-husband's legendary magnanimity. The fact that Madikazela Mandela, who is perceived as anti-reconciliation, supports Zuma appears to this contributor to signal an anti-white sentiment in Zuma also.

> Roxy Rodrigues wrote
> at 6:24pm on April 26th, 2009
> No0o0oo0o0o0o0o0o0!!!!!!!!!!! I dont want zuma 2 become president!!!!!!

> Tracey Chananie (South Africa) wrote
> at 7:19pm on April 26th, 2009
> And the tragic comedy begins. Don't forget to shower at least once a day.

As election results are made public and it is confirmed that Jacob Zuma is South Africa's president elect, new contributors to the newsgroup commiserate and pose bleak conjectures about the future of the country. *Tracy*'s comment draws on Zuma's then-recent statements in the rape trial regarding the measures he took to protect himself against infection (i.e. taking a shower), having knowingly engaged in sexual activity with an HIV positive woman. Considering that Zuma was then patron of an HIV/AIDS awareness program, and the context of years of sex education projects to prevent the spread of the virus and dispel myths surrounding HIV/AIDS in a country so profoundly affected by the disease, Zuma's was widely perceived as irresponsible and as such unbefitting the soon-to-be president.

By this time the political cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) had made several cartoons mocking Zuma in light of these statements, for months afterwards depicting Zuma with an ever-present showerhead over him. This is the background against which *Tracy* makes the statement: "And the tragic comedy begins. Don't forget to shower at least once a day." In a speech made on the 10th of September 2008, Julius Malema condemned

Zapiro's works as "despicable and racist" (Malema, 2008), and therefore some schools of thought may similarly value *Tracy*'s comment. However, Holborn of South African Institute of Race Relations points out that:

> "political satire and criticism of politicians is an important part of free speech and a free media in any democracy…While the ANC Youth League may expect nothing but adulation for the country's president, this is not what is needed in a healthy democracy and it is not what should be expected of a free media whose job it is to hold our leaders to account." (Holborn, 2010)

> Carel Steenkamp (South Africa) wrote
> at 7:34pm on April 26th, 2009
> OOOooooh hell, no(*w*) we have a corrupt-rapist for a president. Only in our banana republic!!! Our politic's are a JOKE damnit!!!

Again Zuma's rape and corruption trials are referred to in such a way as to illustrate that Zuma is seen as guilty, as if he had been found so in court of law. Therefore, in addition to being a statement expressing no confidence in Zuma as president, it also conveys the belief that the judiciary is no longer independent and the associated belief that democracy is unhealthy in South Africa (hence the allusion to "Our banana republic").

> [Garg Unzola](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 7:47pm on April 26th, 2009
> Guys, things are getting much better. The ANC missed its 2 thirds majority and we now have Cope. 2 opposition parties are better than one! We're no longer in danger of turning into a one party dictatorship. Plus, we can always move to the Western Cape and consolidate the Godzille...

Garg's gladness and optimism regarding the election is expressed in terms of the positive signs for democracy (in contrast to the prior statement by *Carel*), that is signs that South Africa may be moving away from the concept of a one party state. However, the effectualness of COPE had not been tested as this was a very young party at the time of

this election and it is possible that some DA supporters may have crossed over to COPE and so the level of *new* opposition to the ANC that this party represented may be negligible.

"Plus, we can always move to the Western Cape and consolidate the Godzille...," in this statement *Garg* sees the DA province as an island of refuge against the feared maladministration of the nationally dominant ANC. "Godzille" is a nickname for DA leader Helen Zille, which connotes female strength, tenacity and courage, yet the 'scary' dimension implied by the nickname may not be entirely complimentary. Garg's notion of those who are disillusioned with the country under Zuma's administration moving to the Western Cape "and consolidate(*ing*) the Godzille" means that, despite the arrival of COPE on the South African political scene, for *Garg* the only credible opposition is the DA under Zille. His choice of the word 'consolidate' implies more than merely joining the province (apparently in order to escape ANC-run South Africa), but of strengthening the 'Godzille' counter-ANC movement.

> Mogamat Zaid wrote
> at 7:53pm on April 26th, 2009
> Dats a cool id evry1 jus move 2 WC best prov in da country

> Reinhardt Botha (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) wrote
> at 8:03pm on April 26th, 2009
> Great idea! Hopefully it spreads to other provinces as well so that we can hav a
> better country. Zille is my hero. Haha!

These expressions of faith in Helen Zille are expressed only by members – presumably according to the evidence in the text, although with this medium demographic information is never certain – of racial minority groups in South Africa. From a gender perspective, the perceived strength of Zille as alluded to in these comments by masculine named identities indicates that Zille's persona challenges traditional feminine roles,

particularly those engrained in Afrikaner culture which dictated its norms in the apartheid regime. It is also interesting to note that in these comments

Zille is not referred to in the feminine pronoun, or in the female equivalent 'heroine'. Perhaps the perceived 'strength' of Helen Zille, where strength is a traditionally masculine trait, gives her an androgynous identity in the view of these contributors. Since white men may experience labour policies of transformation, which render 'pale males' the least attractive to employers, and their hugely diminished political force since South Africa became democratic, as emasculating, their masculinity may be further undermined by the fact that the masthead of their opposition political party is a woman. This may account for the masculine form "hero" being applied to Zille, as by making her an 'honourary man', they are not overtly transgressing patriarchal gender norms.

> [Ongama Ntloko](#) wrote
>
> at 9:09pm on April 26th, 2009
>
> why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? Why? I dnt like the character of the man bt he is a S.A and soon to be our president. Our fight against Zuma should nt be racial bt on merits. If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites

This comment underlines the perceived racist rationale of whites who choose to vote DA rather than ANC. *Ongama*'s insinuation that (whites) who are opposed to Zuma only dislike the idea of him as president because he is black. However, *Ongama*, as an established member of the newsgroup, has had access to all the prior posts in which many reasons are raised as to why Zuma would apparently make an unfit president, and not a single one has stated his race as Zuma's major shortcoming. This is further evidence of the prominence of race issues in the national psyche, and this statement is informed by the myth of the 'inherent racism of whites', which is strongly implicated in the 'white flight' from South Africa.

The hyperbole expressed by *Ongama* in the words "hate" and "worship" is interesting in that it denotes a sense of the pseudo-personal relationship (after all, it is difficult to 'hate' someone one does not know quite well) via the media that makes politicians more accessible to the voters in terms of the image they project, particularly at election time. This is related to Zuma being hailed as "the man of the poor" and standing "for the people". *Ongama*'s use of the word "worship" in relation to Zille, however, implies a level of aloofness from the people. The contrast in the class and background of each of these presidential candidates could be implicated in these words.

 Ongama could be interpreted as meaning that voting for anyone who is not black shows allegiance to the defunct apartheid regime. *Ongama*'s understanding of politics appears to be somewhat limited as he apparently has not taken into account that the DA may have a white presidential candidate but is multiracial as a whole, whereas the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) is black dominated because of its focus on black interests, thus alienating non-black voters. Also, for voters who are not in favour of the ruling party it makes sense to vote for the next largest official opposition party rather than for one of the multitude of minor parties – PAC received only 48530 (0.27%) of votes cast and only one seat in parliament (Independent Electoral Commission, 2009).
This racial exchange and others like it may reveal aspects of the cultural product of this particular newsgroup. In terms of Baudrillard

> "… one should bear in mind that the masses have never been on the side of reason, to which they always preffered the seductive power of spectacle – whether of gladiators' fights, public executions, sports, games, ceremonies, fireworks or special effects."(Terranova, 2004: 135)

Given the cultural imperative to racial matters embedded in South African psyche due to historical forces, is it possible that racial spats like this may serve a similar function to "gladiator fights" or "public executions"? In racial spats like these black and white contributors have their identities invested in the conflict and therefore may be seen to invest as much, if not more, in these as soccer fanatics in their identity, in the teams they support in the world cup.

Conely (1999)'s article *The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting*, highlights the "playful, symbolic and ritualistic" functions of conflict, which I argue could be applicable to virtual conflicts, despite the fact that contributors themselves are not physically at risk in the online situation. Therefore, if "For Baudrillard it is not the media that manipulate the masses, but it is the masses who 'envelop the media' because they are themselves already a medium" (Terranova, 2004:136), then in the case of this manifestation of the new media, the appeal for 'spectacle' fused with conflict is met with its appearance in the newsgroup through online arguments.

In South Africa in particular the present economic, social and political contexts informed by racially divisive history may render racial conflict the most apt form of spectacle to appeal to these contributors. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the enveloping the medium's content in their capacity as "prod-users" (Bruns 2002), this online community should use racial spats for recreational and symbolic purposes.

While the barrage of 'self-defense' that this comment provokes may make it appear that such a comment is, perhaps, unwelcome to a number of the active participants in this newsgroup, in the process of pushing the boundaries of the community, *Ongama*'s comment is constitutive of extending the axis from which contributors can speak in the community. Since online communities provide "people with the means to make meaning ... [and also provides] them with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them" (Cohen, 1985: 16, quoted in Burnett, 2002:159), *Ongama*'s comment can be seen as extending these means for the newsgroup.

> [Roma Puckaree](#) wrote
> at 9:21pm on April 26th, 2009
> Its a lil too late now dontya think

Choosing not to engage with the details of *Ongama*'s plan to "fight against Zuma …nt … racial bt on merits", *Roma* calls attention to the fact that Zuma's victory is *fait accompli*: a statement that confirms the failure of this newsgroup's aim as articulated in its name.

[Mandilakhe 'Orange-blossom' Siyongwana](#) (Port Shepstone High School) wrote
at 9:46pm on April 26th, 2009
WE'VE FAILED.....WE'VE REALLY REALLY FAILED.
HERE COMES THE DOWNFALL OF OUR OH SO BUTIFUL
COUNTRY,ZUMA IS CLOSE, HE'S HERE TAKING OVER...KILL ME FAST
SUM1!!!!!!

Mandilakhe, presumably a black South African, vents her anguish with dramatic
pessimism. In terms of national identity, *Mandilakhe* is clearly patriotic as is illustrated
by her reference to "OUR OH SO B(*ea*)UTIFUL COUNTRY", but apparently feels
alienated by the political scene.

The allusion to national 'failure' with the election of Zuma to the presidency could be
interpreted, in the context of recent posts on the newsgroup, as concurring that the
democratic ideals of 1994 are eroding under ANC leadership. If this contributor really is
black, this support for this view of the matter which is more commonly held by whites in
this text, illustrates that political pessimism is not merely a racial issue – as a number of
black contributors have alleged.

[Steven Bales](#) (South Africa) wrote
at 9:54pm on April 26th, 2009
Ongama perhaps it ISN'T based on race, white people not voting for Zuma is
because they are of the opinion that he will not be a good president. The same
goes for the black people who voted against him. Saying that "all white people
worship Zille" is in itself a huge generalisation, and as we know racism falls
under the category of generalisation. I myself do not agree with Zille purely
because I believe the DA's campaign was an attempt to slander Zuma, and they
offered no alternative. It was as if they were defined by Zuma.

If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right

to state that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist.

The theme of reverse racism is again raised in *Steven*'s comment. While *Steven* is adamant in his denial that "all white people worship Zille", it is interesting to note that he makes no such refutation in the case of the statement made by *Ongama* that "all whte pple hate Zuma", which too is a generalization. In support of his argument, *Steven* distances himself from Zille by criticizing the DA's election campaign.

The point *Steven* raises as regards a moral (and in terms of white guilt, emotional) blackmail of whites in particular, in *Ongama*'s statement, as to the race of their preferred presidential candidate, should be considered in the light of Njabule Ndebele's (vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town) speech at the initial Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at UCT, relating to nation building in South Africa:

> "he argues that Whiteness in South Africa – that is not the colour of the skin but a specific way of thinking, speaking and acting – must declare that its own and the Black dignity are inseparable". (Haferburg, et al, 2003:138).

Ongama's statement may therefore be construed as meaning that whites exercising their political force by voting for a 'white' party (DA as white, in light of having a white presidential candidate), is not showing itself to be in the service of "Black dignity". *Steven*'s response under this interpretation of *Ongama*'s words, is reminiscent of Steele's work on the positioning of whites in postcolonial discourse: "The authority [whites] lose transfers to the 'victims' of historical racism and becomes their great power in society. This is why white guilt is quite literally the same thing as Black power." (Steele, 2006: 24) This correlates with the perspectives yielded earlier in the ethnographic element using the tool of distanciation.

In such a racially charged environment as this newsgroup (in the historical context of South Africa which has left society, largely, racially polarized), it is significant that this is only the second direct accusation of racism in the newsgroup (I consider *Tiffany*'s opening comment's reference "it seems only whites are racist and no one else" indirect.

The first was when *Mosa* responded to a comment by *Sherene* by saying "sory to say dis bt maybe u nid to thnk further than ur skin colour". As South Africa has more established discourses for white on black racism, it remains something of a novelty (and is perhaps taken less seriously) when the accusation of reverse racism occurs.

> Adrian Rainier wrote
>
> at 10:21pm on April 26th, 2009
>
> Agree 100% with u thr mate!
>
> Think this racist bull is gettin really really Old, u guys gotta start sparkin cuase that shit is old!
>
> Have u eva asked urself why the ANC has lost thr 2/3 majority and are losing thr supporters???
>
> I beleive that this is the begining of the end for the ANC, so im happy with this result, we all knew they wud win it but by how much is what counted...
>
> they did 1 or two good things in thr time of power ill give them that much, but not much more, lol!
>
> what a useless bloody government!
>
> maybe this will make them pull thr socks up, doubt it though!

Adrian begins his statement in approval of *Steven*'s comment. The second line, however, is equivocal in that he may be reacting to the 'racism' of *Ongama*'s comment, or he might be addressing both *Ongama* and *Steven* and upbraiding them for their respective recourses to discourses of racism, which he perceives as cliché, as is intimated by the words "Think this racist bull is gettin really really Old, u guys gotta start sparkin cuase that shit is old!". "Sparking" is a slang term, often applied in break dancing, meaning 'to improvise' or to be more creative by breaking out of the routine. Hence, it could be interpreted that *Adrian* sees the 'race card' as a formulaic argument in South African political and social matters, which yields no progress and suggests that any other argument but 'race' issues may be more likely to achieve steps forward.

Nocera's (2009) study of online communities relied on a methodology that grouped content into two categories: (1) "what is happening in the country (real world); and (2) accounts about internal events and general discussions of the cybergroup, namely … flirting, fights, virtual parties … human relationships, life and death, sex, aliens, etc." (Nocera, 2009: 7). In the case of this newsgroup, most of the content centers around the first category, with occasional diversions into the latter usually for the purpose of illustrating a topic relating to national event in more detail.

Nocera draws on Simmel to identify the primary source of social cohesion in the newsgroup:

> "what is clearly permanent is the presence of the social phenomenon described by Simmel (1910) as *sociability*. This affective pleasure of chatting is the main factor that will give the motivational forces of cohesion and attraction to the virtual group's life." (Nocera, 2009:7)

For the *Help Us Stop Jacob Zuma From Becoming SA's Next President* newsgroup, however, the very name may imply that social cohesion is driven more by this articulated goal that by sociability. *Garg*'s words of encouragement to the newsgroup as a whole considering that their 'cause', is confirmed to have failed by election results, may be an effort to foster the community's cohesion in light of the election results which may dissolve the group.

However, more than a year after this posting, with Zuma a quarter into his presidential term, the *Help Us Stop Jacob Zuma* newsgroup is still functioning with over 68 000 members. The conversation is now less driven by conversation about the country and is consequently more occupied with general discussions, probably due to the fact that the newsgroups cause has been 'lost' for over a year. The participation has also waned and sometimes weeks go by before a new comment is posted. The detail of consequence, however, is that despite the perceived function, the social cause, of the newsgroup cohesion was maintained for a long period after the cause was seen to fail. Thus, sociability was proved to be a more powerful force for social cohesion in the newsgroup than expected. However, the failure to achieve the goal of preventing Zuma from

becoming president, and the failure of the group to reinvent itself with new goals has led to a decline in the health of the newsgroup.

> [Adrian Rainier](#) wrote
>
> at 10:34pm on April 26th, 2009
>
> Ongama Ntloko, another thing u shud keep in mind is that thr whr (*there were*) whites in the battle against aperteid (*apartheid*) too!
> And just for the record you sound very racist for even thinking that way!
> Just use common sense then maybe u'll understand whr we comin from, this has nothin too do with race!
> Hell i wish Obama cud be our president, damn shame!

In a second response to Ongama's statement, *Adrian* cites white resistance to apartheid. There could be several interpretations of *Adrian*'s intentions with regards to this statement. Possibly *Adrian* is pointing out the fallacious nature of the presumptions about the inherent racism of whites alluded to in *Ongama*'s statement. It could also be interpreted as a response to *Ongama*'s statement "mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA" (referring to the 'white flight') by asserting that whites also fought for democracy in South Africa and as such have a right to remain South Africans. A third possibility is that *Adrian* cites white opposition to apartheid in terms of the fight for democracy, and that with the perceived threat to democratic ideals represented by Zuma, all South Africans including whites, should choose their political allegiance in favour of 'democracy' in the same way as South Africans confronted the struggle against apartheid.

"Just use common sense then maybe u'll understand whr we comin from, this has nothin too (*to*) do with race!" The use of "we" here is problematic in the comprehension of *Adrian*'s statements. His first comment apparently denounced racial polarization as counter productive and, taken together with one interpretation discussed in the previous paragraph, it could appear that *Adrian*'s "we" is defined in political rather than racial terms, i.e. "we" who are not in favour of Zuma (in terms of the name of the newsgroup as well).

However, in his rebuttal against *Ongama*'s "racist" statements *Adrian* does enter into racial discourses. By defending whites in the first sentence of his second post, it could be assumed that he is still referring to that race group. In this case, *Adrian* would be acting against his first statement's implied condemnation of the 'race card', although it could be seen as an apt, if unconscious, illustration of the futility of such a line of argument. In this reading *Adrian* could mean that Zuma's race is irrelevant, but "we" – in terms of white South African identity – should not be thus maligned.

Adrian's appeal to 'common sense' is fraught with contextual elucidation also. By "common sense" *Adrian* could refer to the numerous reasons posted on the newsgroup of why people think Zuma is not fit for presidency (other than *Ongama*'s insistence on white racists rationale being simply due to his skin colour) as part of national discourses around the issue of the next president as the basis for 'common sense'.

On the other hand, if we interpret his use of "we" to delineate white South Africans in conjunction with his assertion about white participation in the Struggle, then the body of 'common sense' may refer to discourses about apartheid and its aftermath in society.

Adrian's praise of Obama may be considered in the same light as *Tiffany*'s comment at 10:25am on April 25th. While Obama is physically black, he is of Western culture and in a sense presents himself as (what South Africans would see, in terms of identity) 'white'.

> Andrea Kühn (South Africa) wrote
>
> at 10:53pm on April 26th, 2009
>
> Ongama: How can you be such an idiot? The reason why anyone, including some white people, dislike Zuma has EVERYTHING to do with his character and NOTHING to do with his skin color. That should be obvious. And he has NO merits. He's uneducated, a liar, a rapist and corrupt. That spells disaster for our already meager economy. Some of us don't want to immigrate, because we love the country, that's WHY we hate to see it falling into the hands of such an imbecile. How can you not see that????

Andrea joins in the protest at *Ongama*'s statement. Her argument is structured logically by virtue of her giving 'reasons' to back up her claim that 'Zuma would be an unfit president, but not because he is black'. However, by resorting to *ad homonym* by calling *Ongama* an "idiot" and the subjective wording of her argument she falls short of the requirements of rational engagement.

 As has already been discussed, this statement is further evidence that many South Africans consider Zuma to be guilty of the charges of rape and corruption in spite of the conclusions of the courts. This implies a widespread belief that the judiciary is open to political interference, which is anathema to democratic ideals.

In response to *Ongama*'s apparent encouragement of 'white flight', *Andrea* expresses patriotism and an unwillingness to leave "because we love the country". In *Andrea*'s view, then, it is perhaps unpatriotic to express apathy or approval of Zuma because of her belief that due to Zuma being "uneducated, a liar, a rapist and corrupt" he would damage the economy and by extension the country as a whole.

While *Ongama*'s comment roused indignation from white contributors, as discussed earlier with reference to Cohen (1985), it has a constitutive role in expanding the discourse in the newsgroup. In reference to Cohen, Burnett says, "In other words, communities find themselves through a system of signification and exchange allowing for the construction of shared meaning and the possibility of understanding," (Burnett, 2002: 159). While this possibility is, perhaps, indefinitely deferred here, the increase of the breadth and depth of shared meaning are steps towards this goal.

> [Tina Kapoutsis](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 10:58pm on April 26th, 2009
>
> thank-you Andrea!!!!!! that was a really great response! Its Zuma's character we hate!!!!!!!

[Jaco Veldsman](#) wrote

at 12:24am yesterday

> Ongama, dont be an idiot. Go look at the people leading the different party. ANC and COPE have alot of criminals running their parties. You wonder and want crime to stop in SA? Start by putting the corrupt leaders in prison. And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race! Thats why Zimbabwe is where it is, because of a corrupt president... and guess what? HE BLAMES IT ON THE WHITES!

Ongama's statement attracted more comment than any other in the text. This appears to be due to the blanket accusation of racism directed at whites, which in light of South Africans' particular sensitivity to racial issues and the legacy of 'white guilt', seems to be read by other (presumably white) respondents as a form of emotional blackmail.

Jaco links the themes of South African crime with that of corruption in government claiming, somewhat idealistically, that if the latter problem were dealt with the former would begin to be resolved. Although *Jaco* is the first to offer any kind of a 'solution' to the problem of crime in South Africa, the hyperbole and generalization expressed in his comment "ANC and COPE have alot of criminals running their parties" somewhat detracts from the credibility of his point.

"And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race!" It is interesting to note that *Jaco* in this instance equates the accusation of racism (by *Ongama*) with a puerile line of argument. Given the shared consciousness of South Africans in the wake of apartheid, to some extent continuing accusations of the racism of whites to the detriment of blacks have been held sacrosanct. Decades of apartheid disregarded the rights of black people and the resultant 'white guilt' that emerged as a dominant discourse in the late eighties and early nineties to some extent gagged the white subject position from repudiating such accusations (Steele, 2006:24 and Cheng, 1997:49) . Hence, Jaco may be asserting the belief that such accusations are childish because of their irrefutable nature. Needless to say, such profuse recourse to allegations of racism have somewhat detracted

from the just impact of genuine cases of racism which still continue in South Africa today.

"Thats why Zimbabwe is where it is, because of a corrupt president... and guess what? HE BLAMES IT ON THE WHITES!" This second instance of parallels between South Africa and Zimbabwe being drawn, is more direct than the former (by *Michael De Villiers*). Relying on his belief (shared apparently with the majority of the newsgroup members) that Zuma is guilty of corruption, *Jaco* compares him to Robert Mugabe and hints that South Africa end up in the same plight.

Taken as a whole, *Jaco*'s statement can perhaps be interpreted as supposing allegations of racism as the ultimate trump card to which it is virtually impossible in terms of political correctness for whites to refute, as discourses around the injustices of (white) colonization of Southern African countries are the dominant *Weltanschauung*. This, it may be inferred from his last sentence, *Jaco* perceived as a blind used by 'corrupt' leaders to mask their own role in the decline of their nations.

In searching through dozens of pages of quotes from Zuma on the Internet, I was not able to find a single instance where Zuma himself overtly "blames" whites as a group for South Africa's ills – perhaps it was not *Jaco*'s intention to draw the comparison so far, or perhaps over years of being exposed to post colonial discourses, as they are portrayed in overly simplified form in the media and from politicians lips, *Jaco* has come to expect this line of thought from black people in the main. This generalisation, however, is contrary to his appeal "And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race"; since his preconceived notions of what to expect from the subject position of South African blacks is obviously generalised on racial grounds.

Tiego Mogano (South Africa) wrote
at 9:48am yesterday

I saw zuma taking nevirapine- anti-retroviral drugs from forest town pharmacy
Dnt worry he'll vanish.

This allegation that Jacob Zuma is HIV positive would be considered slander were it to appear in any traditional media form and the author would be held liable in court. In the new media there is less stringent media law and its content is not generally held to be in earnest. *Tiego* might be considered a 'storyteller', a 'liar' or mistaken and it is up to the other members of the newsgroup whether to believe each statement or not. Given the overwhelming HIV statistics in South Africa, however, it is relatively likely that HIV positive people may read this statement, and in this light the reference "he'll vanish" (because he is HIV positive) is somewhat tactless.

This statement also reveals a measure of ignorance about HIV, because with the use of anti-retrovirals one may live far longer that a presidential term with HIV.

> [Funmi Sangodeyi](#) (USF) wrote
> at 2:53am yesterday
>
> I want Zuma to win and I want South Africa to fail. You know why? Because I am Nigerian and if South Africa fails then the most important country in Sub Saharan Africa will be Nigeria.

This is a somewhat unconventional raison d'être for favouring Zuma as president, however it reveals that *Funmi*, presumably a black Nigerian according to the name given, is also of the opinion that Zuma will lead South Africa to ultimate failure. However, the flippancy expressed by the tone of *Funmi*'s comment could imply that she has not given much thought to the issue of Zuma's presidency. The notable dearth of comment from other African countries in this newsgroup impoverishes the overall meaning and sense of perspective to be derived from the text.

> [Arthur Tsimitakopoulos](#) (South Africa) wrote
> at 6:28am yesterday
>
> Aaaah shuddup you Nigerian wench. Even if SA 'fails', your cesspool of country Nigeria will still be a stinking mess filled with drug dealers,crack whores, pirates,

monkey lovers, thieves and losers. So get of your high horse and get back to selling your cocaine at the street corner...mampara!

[Kagisho Phoku](#) (South Africa) wrote

at 11:39am yesterday

Well said Arthur..nothing else can be said to this...oh you said it, Nigerian Wench..

It is significant that "xenophobia in South Africa is not applied equally to all foreigners… African foreigners seem to be particularly vulnerable to violence and hostility (*Human Rights Watch*, 1998; *Human Rights Commission*, 1999)... [social theory on Xenophobia however] do(es) not properly account for why the (black) foreigner -- as the unknown other – evokes violence and aggression in South Africa" (Harris, 2002 in Hooks, 2002: 173). Given the historical context of South Africa, Europeans would appear a more likely to be prone xenophobia in South Africa.

After the racial tensions which have dominated the text and the seemingly divided picture this presents in terms of national identity, it is perhaps refreshing to see an instance of (apparently) black and white alliance of South Africans speaking out together against this Nigerian prophet of doom. The use of the colloquial insult *mampara* (meaning monkey, or one who behaves as such) puts an authentic South African stamp on Arthur's comment.

However, if racial tensions (which remain a monumental stumbling block to South African cohesive society) are fuelled by stereotypes and generalizations, then these recourses to xenophobic stereotypes of Nigerians (as "drug dealers,crack whores, pirates, monkey lovers, thieves and losers") have the same principle at work, merely directed at a nation rather that a racial group. Hence, while this racially united front against Nigerians does appear to indicate social cohesion (by 'othering' Nigerians), if these habits of thinking about 'other' groups are perpetuated then no real progress appears likely. Stereotyping is the primary device used by *Arthur,* and enthusiastically supported by *Kagisho,* in the South African retort to *Funmi.* A few months after this encounter on the

newsgroup, the film *District 9* was released in South African cinemas, and evoked allegations of negative portrayal of Nigerians by the Nigerian government. Similarly to the stereotyped characteristics listed by *Arthur*, in the film Nigerians are "crudely caricatured as gangsters, cannibals, pimps, prostitutes and dealers in guns and addictive drugs (in this case cat food)" (Reuters, 2009).

Earlier in the analysis, I drew on Baudrillard and Conely to propose that as violent spectacle (such as gladiator battles, sports and bear-bating) is a highly prized form of entertainment, and racial issues are deeply and emotionally embedded in the South African psyche, racial spats in online communities may be seen as recreational spectacle. It is arguable that this xenophobic incident may serve the same entertainment function. After all, "Xenophobia is a form of violence and violence is the norm in South Africa. Violence is an integral part of the social fabric, even although the 'New South African' discourse belies this." (Harris in Hooks, 2002: 181)

It is significant also that the appellation "wench" is applied to *Funmi*. In-keeping with the stereotypes about Nigerians, the term wench denotes a 'girl', but has connotations of prostitution. This means that *Funmi* is denigrated specifically as a woman, and in sexual terms, which coming from two men is further evidence of this 'othering' habit.

7.2.2 Conclusion

Despite a few heated exchanges, particularly centered around the sensitive topic of race in South Africa, the newsgroup overall can be said to function relatively harmoniously and somewhat productively, considering that, in common with Usenet newsgroups, it has, "no central authority, no single source of power that can enforce boundaries and police behaviour" (Smith and Kollock, 1999: 6).

Although the newsgroup does have an administrator, i.e. the person who began the group, who is able to remove inflammatory comments, there is only evidence in one instance that text has been removed. However, it is also possible that the contributor themselves (*Reinhart*) may have decided to delete the comment. As this occurred only once, it is

probable that the administrator does not wantonly resort to censoring the newsgroup, and appears to take a noninterventionist stance.

Race and violence emerged as the dominant topics for discussion in the newsgroup. There are historical factors in South Africa that situate these two themes as having priority in South African discourse, and make them particularly contentious. Since "decrease in social and physical "presence" causes CMC users to experience a significant reduction of their awareness of themselves as socialized individuals" (Burnett, 2002: 158), one might have expected greater racial polarization and hostility than actually transpired. Further, I have argued that the few overt racial quarrels that did occur may be likened to the appeal of the 'spectacle' noted by Baudrillard in broadcast media. In the new media context of the newsgroup, it is the contributors who create the content and thus may resort to online racial conflict as a form of 'agreeable recreation' (Conely, 1999) to meet this desire for 'spectacle'.

Conely particularly argues the "playful, ritualistic and symbolic" role of fighting, and perceives it as therapeutic despite the individual risk of injury in hand-to-hand combat. The online medium, therefore, offers a physically safer platform for the symbolic exercise of dominance between the numerically (and hence politically) dominant and the economically dominant groups in society.

The analysis also revealed culturally engrained expectations as to the stances particular racial groups should take in relation to particular issues. These prescribed subject positions frequently incur conflict and limit the voice permitted to those who deviate from raced identity bound attitudinal norms. Although some contributors are challenging these norms, in the online community the question of fluidity of virtual identity is sometimes used in order to undermine comments 'unbefitting' a particularly raced contributor.

South Africanness is characterized in the text by a patriotism that does not extend to faith in government. Parallels between South Africa's future and the status quo in Zimbabwe

are drawn in the text, accompanied by fears for the state of democracy should Zuma become president – the most cited reasons revolving around the perceived political interference in the judiciary which dissolved rape and corruption charges against Zuma.

Despite the 'white skepticism' alluded to by some black contributors, the majority of whites in the newsgroup displayed loyalty to the nation, if not to politicians, and took great umbrage to a statement by *Ongama* suggesting that they should "mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA". Despite this, one of the most active contributors, *Tiffany*, does not include herself as 'African', despite her assertion that national priorities (alleviating poverty and combating crime in particular) are the same for all South Africans.

While the newsgroup does facilitate discussion between South Africans who have been racially segregated by apartheid and for whom integration has not been fully achieved, residual suspicions and stereotypes are yet present in the community and appear to serve as barriers a more unified South African identity. As demonstrated in the xenophobic exchange directed at *Funmi*, however, these same destructive tools directed towards a foreign 'other' may serve to bond black and white South Africans together. The danger of keeping these tools sharp in this practice, however, is that in the absence of an external 'other', South Africans may turn these weapons on each other with greater energy.

Having returned to the newsgroup more than a year after this text was first created, I was somewhat surprised that it is still functioning despite the objective outlined in the title of the newsgroup is clearly defeated by the fact that President Zuma has been in office for over a year. As the topics of the discussion have since shifted away from a focus matters of national interest towards more individually relevant matters, the 'health' of the community has declined as weeks elapse between posts (despite the fact that membership remains high). This would appear to correlate with Nocera's (2009:7) theory of community cohesion with reference to Simmel (1910), whereby sociability is seen as the primary function of an online community.

7.3.1 Appendix iii: Critical Discourse Analysis

This chapter contains the data analysis and discussion of the selected text from the *Help us Stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President* Facebook newsgroup derived from the critical discourse analysis. While interpretive and discursive methods are associated with subjective tendencies, the critical discourse analysis component of the research design is consciously aimed at limiting the subjectivity of the analyst and relies on open coding to uncover themes as they appear in the text. This open coding, however, is at the discretion of the researcher. The conclusion and limitations chapters will evaluate the extent to which this research design has achieved triangulation and will attempt to locate this study on the "fundamental interpretive continuum" (Kelly in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002: 399).

For the purposes of the critical discourse analysis component of this study, the cues to demographic information implied by the names given by contributors will be taken as 'true', since, for this component of the research I am more concerned with the presented virtual identities of contributors than with the physical traits (ethnicity and gender) of the contributors in the 'real' world, although in the case of coloureds in particular this system of identity classification is obviously inherently flawed, as familial names are often derived from African or European names in the genealogy. The fluidity of identity associated with the new media will be dealt with in the hermeneutic ethnographic component of the research in the next chapter. Due to the newness of the field, this study's experimental research design is not equipped with a body of theory specific to the medium and the national context.

As the open coding method used in this analysis was performed at various levels, certain aspects of the data may be discussed under various headings. In order to make the reading of the analysis less tedious I have not drawn attention to this fact at every instance, and hence I wish to draw attention at this early juncture to the fact that I draw on the same comments a number of times in each of their various categories of relevance.

While this study is qualitative in nature, a brief quantitative investigation into the race and sex of contributors to the newsgroup, relative to the make up of the South African population, will serve to illustrate the extent to which the representation of South Africans on this new media platform differs from the demographic make up of the nation. This will inform the critical discourse analysis by accounting for the voices present in the newsgroup, by sex and race, to underline the prevailing groups and highlight identities that are subjugated, or absent from the text, as this dimension may be expected to have implications for the types of discourses to be found in the newsgroup.

7.3.2 Demographics

In terms of social class, the contributors are likely to belong, predominantly, to the middle class. It is presumed that due to the cost of computer equipment and Internet access, the lower class that comprises the majority in South Africa, are effectively excluded from this medium. Hence, the analysis that follows cannot generalise the concerns of this sector of society as representative of South Africans in general.

Judging by the racial demographic information implied by the names of the virtual identities of contributors, the population of the newsgroup comprises of twenty 'white'(of European extraction) members, one of whom writes from the United Kingdom, ten 'black' members (one of whom writes from Nigeria) and three 'Indian' members. When this is compared to the Statistics South Africa 2010 population estimates (Statistics South Africa, 2010: 9), which estimates that 'black' (in the report the group is referred to as 'African') South Africans comprise 79,3% of the population, 'white' South Africans comprise 9,2% and 'Indian' South Africans, 2,6%, it becomes apparent that the predominance of white South Africans in this newsgroup is disproportionate to the actual numbers of whites in the country. The fact that blacks are under-represented on the newsgroup, considering that they comprise the majority in the country, can be attributed to historical forces that disadvantaged this group under the apartheid regime as well as the digital divide. Also, since this newsgroup is written in English, those who take part in this discussion are generally those with a comfortable command of that language.

population by racial group South Africa

- black
- white
- indian
- other
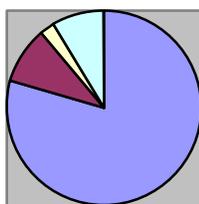
population by racial group for participants in this newsgroup
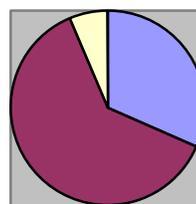
- black
- white
- Indian

Of consequence also, is the amount of line space in the text occupied by comments from members of the respective racial groups. White contributors (twenty out of the thirty two newsgroup contributors) take up 213 lines of text, which yields an average of 10,7 lines of comment from each white contributor. Black contributors (ten out of thirty two) account for 63 lines, averaging 6,3 lines per black contributor. The two Indian contributors accounted for two lines of comment, providing an average of one line each. One Spanish contributor accounted for three lines, which consisted of an advert for Mxit. This indicates that not only are whites the numerical majority in this newsgroup, but also that, compared to other racial groups, they express themselves with longer comments and thus dominate the line space of this newsgroup, which may indicate an unequal social and economic situation.

Of the thirty two contributors active in the discussion on the newsgroup for the selected textual event, twenty of the identities are presented with typically masculine names and twelve are presented with feminine names. Taking this as representative of sex, it can be said that there are more male voices present in the newsgroup than female voices. However, female contributors accounted for 126 lines, compared to 155 lines by male contributors. Therefore the average number of lines for each female contributor is 10,5 against 7,8 lines per male contributor. In terms of gender, this is divergent from culturally entrenched gender norms which dictate that "masculine values have higher status and constitute the dominant and visible culture of the society" (Bovee Polk, 1974:418, in Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 332).

It is significant that only two black female contributors are present in the textual event, particularly given that for one of these (*Funmi*), her Facebook identity indicates that she is Nigerian. Therefore, South African black women are almost entirely absent from the textual event. Despite institutional advances in the empowerment of black women in South Africa, this notable absence may reflect patriarchal African traditional cultural practices that discourage black women from participation in political concerns, where "in African traditional practice, women keep their eyes lowered demurely" (Manuh, 1998). The fact that black women suffered a double oppression under the apartheid regime, on the basis of race *and* gender, has caused this sector of society significant disadvantage. In South Africa, therefore, it is predictable that the luxury of Internet access is beyond the economic reach of many black women, and hence they are unable to engage with new media.

White women, on the other hand, are represented by nine contributors who account for the greatest amount of content, comprising 121 lines. These figures are skewed by the fact that the most frequent contributor, *Tiffany Lassauniere*, who accounts for the most lines in the whole newsgroup, is presented as a white female.

7.3.3 Themes

As has been stated in the Methodology chapter, critical discourse analysis relies on historisized interpretation to reveal aspects of social context. This section therefore requires background information to contextualise the analysis.

Given the name of the Facebook newsgroup this study focuses on, *Help us stop Jacob Zuma from becoming South Africa's next President*, it is significant that Jacob Zuma is only mentioned by name in twelve of the comments from contributors in the six pages of the textual selection. More prominent themes revealed by the discourse analysis are those related to race, issues of democracy and crime. This indicates that what began as a platform for discussing the narrow issue of a particular presidential candidate was expanded by contributors to broader issues of public concern.

This section will document discourses present in the text by category, introducing social and cultural studies theory to explore these themes in terms of the historical and social

context of South Africa. Please note that I have omitted text that does not have bearing to the themes discussed here and in some cases the text has been reorganised to allow for coherent commentary within each theme. Hence, in this chapter the text does not necessarily follow chronological order. The ethnographic hermeneutic chapter, however, traces the full text in chronological order, and readers are referred to that chapter where further context is required.

7.3.4 Race and ethnicity

The construct of race in South Africa, engineered in specific ways under the apartheid regime for the segregation and subjugation of 'non-white' people, has extended its relevance into democratic South Africa, as national initiatives to address the legacy of apartheid and amend historical injustices rest likewise along racial lines. Despite the hoped-for national ideal articulated as "a united democratic and non-racial South Africa" by Nelson Mandela in his historic speech on his release from prison (11th February 1990), the concept of race continues to be a preoccupation in post-apartheid South Africa. It is, therefore, unsurprising that this preoccupation is reflected in conversations in the textual selection - particularly in light of the fact that racial identity appears to play a role in political affiliation in the South African context, as is reflected by the table below.

Political Parties	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
African National Congress (ANC)	92.4%	2.5%	3.8%	1.3%
Democratic Alliance (DA)	9.9%	51.4%	31.5%	7.2%
Congress of the People (COPE)	77.8%	11.1%	10.4%	0.7%

Ipsos Markinor findings of political party support by racial grouping

* "Ipsos Markinor conducted its latest opinion poll in May 2010 – a nationally representative study of 3 386 South Africans of 18 years and older. The sample accurately mirrors the adult South African population and has a margin of error between 0.7% and 1.67%" (Ipsos Markinor, 2010)

When discussing race in South Africa, a necessary dimension to consider is the question of dominance. In sociological terms, a dominant group can be defined in two ways, i.e. political (numerical) dominance and economic dominance (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992:289). Under apartheid, which disenfranchised black South Africans, the white

population group was *both politically and economically* dominant. With the fall of the apartheid regime black South Africans became the political majority and in this sense can be considered the dominant group. Economically, however, white South Africans maintain their hold and therefore can be seen as remaining economically dominant. In such a scenario it is predictable that a certain level of conflict between two dominant groups arises. According to Chua, in a liberal democracy such as South Africa, there are three possibilities as to how this situation is resolved: ""when free market democracy is pursued in the presence of a market-dominant minority, the almost invariable result is backlash. This backlash typically takes one of three forms. The first is a backlash against markets, targeting the market-dominant minority's wealth. The second is a backlash against democracy by forces favorable to the market-dominant minority. The third is violence, sometimes genocidal, directed against the market-dominant minority itself." (Chua, 2002: 115)

The text contains numerous references to race, and as this topic is too broad to discuss as a single discourse structure, this analysis will discuss sub-categories relating to race as they appear in the text.

The prevalence of racial concerns

At the broadest level of open coding of the text, it became apparent that in the newsgroup discussion, the overriding theme was that of issues pertaining to race and racism, identifying this as a fundamental matter to the South African contributors. At this broadest level of the open coding procedure, all comments containing the words referring to race, such as "black", "white", "race", "racist", "skin colour" and their derivatives, were included as terms or comments pertaining to "race". Therefore, at this level of analysis it would be most difficult to attempt any interpretation of discursive practices relating to racial issues present in the newsgroup. In the second phase of open coding I identified sub-categories in comments relating to race. The main sub-categories identified were (a) the social myth of the inherent violence of black men, and (b) the social myth of the inherent racism of whites. Within these discourse structures, and therefore discussed within these sections, are references that are (c) apparently neutral statements about race, (d) instances of white-on-black racism in the text, (e) black-on-white racism. A further

category (f) relates to xenophobicreferences in the text which is discussed separately but is intrinsically linked to national discourses on race and racism.

a) The Social Myth of the Inherent Violence of Black Men
The discussion on the newsgroup about the supposed inherent violence of black men was initiated by a comment from a contributor under the name of *Sanele Khanyile*. For more detailed contextual discussion, refer to the ethnographic hermeneutic analysis chapter.

Sanele Khanyile: U RIGHT TIFFANY SOME OTHER THINGS AS EXPECTED DID HAPPEN AND CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY WHO LOST GERALD....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)

The imagery evoked by the use of the word "blood", possibly synonymous here with 'genes', in conjunction with the use of the pronoun "our" effectively illustrates linguistically the fact that Sanele does not consider himself to be excluded from the 'killing' instinct he refers to. The qualifier "I GUESS" is a speaker oriented discourse marker (Őstman, 1981: 34-5 in Fisiak 1990: 57), which generally serves the function of "disclaimers… expressions of uncertainty" (Jun, 2007: 375). Concluding the statement with the word "(FACT)", however lends an air of authority to the statement of the claim. An apparently white contributor responded:

Tiffany Lassauniere: sanele i disagree... sure early developement may well affect neurological developements and thus affect our ability to rationalise, but i don't accept that blacks/africans are blood hungry murderers with anti-social behavioural issues. i take it you meant africans by " we" or have i mistaken your meaning?

Sanele gave no definite indication of what group (South Africans in general or a particular racial group) he was referring to in his initial statement, beyond the fact that his name is associated with black people. It is equally associated with the male gender, and as men commit the vast majority of violent crimes the gender marker in *Sanele*'s name would appear to make this association more obvious. It is the racial aspect, however, that *Tiffany* focuses on.

Tiffany's use of the term "neurological development" frames violent acts of deviance in medical discourse, which has historically also been used to legitimise racial separatism and white supremacy. While this would appear to mark the reference as linked to individual development, the fact that *Tiffany* uses the word "our" indicates that whites are not excluded from this malady, yet the overall emphasis of her statement resting on the black population seems to imply a greater prevalence of this condition in black people – justifying her belief in a greater proportion of black criminals in medical terms.

Tiffany's comment is somewhat contradictory, in that at the same time that she is apparently refuting the inherent violence of blacks, it is the black race group that she immediately associates with the predisposition to violence alluded to in *Sanele*'s comment. This reveals the discourse practice which is characteristic of this kind of new media discussion – as *Tiffany* is responding to a comment by another contributor, she is engaged in consumption, in the first place, of the prior comments on the newsgroup, and in the second, based on the interpretation she puts on these, is engaged in producing her own comment in reply.

Nzuzo Chiliza: ....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)...
read what you have just posted and tell me you not a retarded!

Nzuzo, another black male apparently, also refutes *Sanele*'s statement, although he does not specify his conclusion as to who *Sanele* includes in "OUR BLOOD".

Sanele Khanyile: MNCIM NZUZO ITS A TRUTH....BLACKS KILL MORE..HAWU...WE (BLKS) EITHER KILL EACH OTHER OR OTHER RACES...SO CALL MI A RETARD I DONT GIV A FUCK

This comment can be linked to discourses relating to the legacy of apartheid, as black-on-black political violence was a feature of the political and social landscape during the Struggle. Aside from political violence, in a country with a vast black majority it is unsurprising that the majority of criminals belong to this racial group, indicating that it is not so much a question of the inherent violence of that group, but rather that any race

group will have certain criminal members, and therefore that the majority group will contain a corresponding proportion of criminals (for further information see Silber and Geffen [2009] *Race, class & violent crime in South Africa: Dispelling the 'Huntley Thesis'* and Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 213-4) . It is interesting therefore that as black male *Sanele* appears to have internalised the stereotype of 'a criminal' as black, without reference to the demographic make up of the country as a whole.

In *Sanele*'s comment, "WE (BLKS) EITHER KILL EACH OTHER OR OTHER RACES," it is significant that victim-status is attributed to all races (including blacks), while criminal-status is attributed seemingly exclusively to blacks. This provides the perspective that this violence is not simply the just retribution of the formerly-oppressed on the former-oppressors (as described, somewhat problematically, in the work of Fanon), but is indicative of a culture of violence beyond political motivation. Fanon, however would contest that such violence is linked to the political. Fanon's works, which advocate violence against the coloniser as instrumental in the reinstatement of the colonised, nonetheless acknowledges the accompanying "programme of complete disorder", in which black-on-black violence is perhaps seen as an extension of the "absolute violence" necessary to reversing the master/ slave relationship (Fanon 1963: 36 in Alessandrini, 1999: 237)

Werner Smit: Sanele, it's true! SA is a killing country and the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from "colonialism". It was sad to hear that this poor man was killed because of politician.

Werner, presented as a white male, concurs with *Sanele*, but in the dual process of production and consumption, places his own interpretation on *Sanele*'s statement by conflating violence in general (in response to *Sanele*'s comment), political violence and the emancipation rhetoric deployed by these respective political parties. This is achieved by referring to the dominant political party, the ANC, and drawing a parallel between the ANC and the dictatorial ZANU PF of Zimbabwe. *Werner* makes no distinction between

political party leaders and their supporters when he says "the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that", and so presumably implicates the entire organisation in violent tendencies.

While *Sanele*, as a black South African, does not run the risk of being labelled as 'racist' when making remarks about his own race group, a white South African articulating the same view would likely be perceived as racist, given the sensitivity to racial issues imposed by the historical context. *Werner* minimises this risk by merely agreeing with *Sanele*'s statement, and extends the argument in relation to politically motivated violence, the responsibility for which he attributes to the ANC exclusively. *Werner*'s comment, which places quotation marks around the words 'freedom' and 'colonialism', will be discussed further under the heading of 'the myth of the inherent racism of whites', as well as in the ethnographic hermeneutic component, but here it is necessary to state that the residual discourses of apartheid ideology is evidenced in this comment. Thus, it is to be expected that a contributor holding this prejudiced mindset would subscribe to a world view that attributes negative values to the black race group and hence would be susceptible to the myth of the inherent violence of blacks.

[Sanele Khanyile](#):   I MEANT A BLK MAN...GO AROUND, READ THE PAPERS...U'LL SEE A BLK MAN HAVING BEEN CAUGHT ROBBING, BOMBING ATM'S, RAPING ETC...AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!

Sanele here introduces the second demographic component to the identity of the stereotypical criminal, that of sex. According to Schaefer and Lamm, "most index crimes are committed by males" (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 213). This is considered to be strongly influenced by gender roles in society, which construct masculinity as incorporating aggression and toughness. These traits are considered to be characteristics associated with the kind of criminality *Sanele* refers to. In terms of discourse practise, *Sanele* acquiesces to *Tiffany*'s argument (regarding "neurological development"), but appears to dismiss debate on causal factors since the effect on society is negative ("DAMMN ITS BAD") in spite of mitigating causes.

By representing black men as more prone to violent tendencies *Sanele* presents an over-simplified picture of the matter, although, on one level, he does present a 'truthful' account in that the majority of violent crime offenders in South Africa are black males. *Sanele* does not refer to the intricacies of the matter in terms of factors such as the majority population that blacks represent in South Africa, the cultural factors that produce masculinity in such a way as to predispose males to violence, or the influence of poverty, but this gap in *Sanele*'s logic may be seen to correspond to Tajfel's work on the individualistic and social stereotypes, in which he identifies the cognitive function of stereotyping, in which stereotyping is seen as serving to "order, systematise and simplify information in order to make sense of a complex social world" (Tajfel, 1981 in Foster and Louw-Potgieter, 1994: 136). Hamilton and Gifford (1976) investigated the origins of stereotypes and also explored their cognitive function.

In his solo work, Hamilton (1981) investigated majority group stereotypes of minority groups, and found that " the image held by a majority group of a minority group may greatly exaggerate characteristics which were present in an occasional form in the minority group" (Hamilton, 1981 in Wetherell, 1996: 193), hence stereotypes may be considered to grow from a "kernel of truth" (*ibid*: 193). In *Sanele*'s comment, therefore, there is evidence that, presented with media reports of the high incidences of black males engaged in violent criminal activity, *Sanele* has accepted this as a stereotype of black men. However, Hamilton (1981) investigated the attitudes of one racial group to another, whereas *Sanele,* being black himself, is not holding an outside perspective but rather is engaging in stereotyping of his own group. This may be seen as substantiating the cognitive function of stereotyping in this instance.

The sense of frustration conveyed in *Sanele*'s summing up his comment with "MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!" may indicate that being aware that this is a stereotype, *Sanele* feels aggravated when black men are "CAUGHT ROBBING, BOMBING ATM'S, RAPING ETC…" since this appears to justify the stereotype that, as a black man himself, he is subject to.

Tiffany Lassauniere: sanele are you a racist afrikaner in disguise dude? your comments
                         seem a bit odd?

Here *Tiffany's* comment appears to indicate that the myth of the inherent violence of blacks is one that is known to her, but associated with the views of "racist Afrikaners". Since *Sanele* is presented as black by virtue of the virtual identity marker of a traditionally black African name, such views expressed by a black person seem to *Tiffany* to be incongruous. While her reference to "racist Afrikaner" mindset makes it appear that she considers the myth of the inherent violence of blacks to be a perception warped by racism and therefore irrational, the last sentence, "your comments seem a bit odd", could also be interpreted as signalling that *Sanele's* comment seems odd because it does not fit the conventional subject position one would expect from a black identity. In other words, the meaning behind *Tiffany's* words might also be read as 'given your comments, your racial identity seems a bit odd'.

Nzuzo Chiliza: Sanele you said you from Durban right! Ill be thr on Saturday , see
                       you at Harvey's Durban North Broadway, we need to talk buddy.

Nzuzo's words addressed to *Sanele* "we need to talk buddy" imply that *Nzuzo* considers *Sanele* as being mistaken, and seems to convey a desire to 'set' *Sanele* 'straight' – the appellation of "buddy" in particular may indicate a certain condescension in *Nzuzo's* tone. It is also interesting that *Nzuzo* is more willing to meet *Sanele* in person to discuss this issue, rather than doing so via the convenience offered by this online medium. As discussed in the ethnographic component of the research, this may also indicate that *Nzuzo*, like *Tiffany*, is suspicious of the 'truthfulness' of the presented racial component of *Sanele's* virtual identity.

The responses to *Sanele's* perspective (as a black male himself) are noteworthy in that his account is opposed by both *Tiffany* (a white female whose comments, on a superficial level, convey liberal views) and *Nzuzo* (a black male), both of whom have in some measure implied doubts about *Sanele's* racial identity. *Sanele's* comments are, however, affirmed by *Werner,* a white male who by his comment betrayed residually racial

attitudes in his denial of the oppression experienced by blacks as a result of colonialism. Significant also, is that *Werner* did not appear to regard *Sanele*'s comments as incongruous with his identity as black. Considered like this, it may appear that given the generally polarised perspectives of the stereotypical "racist Afrikaner" and the stereotypical "black man", for *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo* it may seem impossible that *Sanele* and *Werner* can share any viewpoint, and hence conclude that *Sanele* must be "a racist Afrikaner is disguise".

This illustrates how discourses of race in South Africa may determine racial subject positions, and deviance from these constructed perspectives is treated with contempt (*Nzuzo* "read what you have just posted and tell me you are not a retarded") and suspicion by both in-group and out-group members alike. This type of reaction may further entrench these racially-determined subject positions by enforcing social stigma since the replies from *Tiffany* and *Nzuzo* signal that *Sanele*'s attitudes are socially unacceptable. Where these subject positions are violated, resulting in confinement to sanctioned perspectives entrenched in racial identity. The sixth point of Parker's (1992) model for the identification of discourses involves "Speculating about what they (types of persons identified as objects of discourse) can say in the discourse… (what rights to speak in that way of speaking)" (Parker, 1992: 10). Here, the discourse regulates the point of view and manner of speaking permitted to black participants, and is 'punishable' by social pressure, as in the case of *Tiffany's* and *Nzuzo*'s unreceptive responses.

The concept of social anomie has bearing on this, and is associated with societies in a state of flux, such as the political and social shifts in South Africa over the last two decades. "The concept of social anomie … is commonly used to describe a state of lack of norms and social regulation in a society. This means that rules on how people ought to behave are breaking down and thus people do not know what to expect from one another." (Huschka & Mau, 2006: 268). In light of this theory, *Tiffany*'s comment would seem to suggest that *Sanele*'s argument does not conform to her internal expectations of perspectives from black people. Hence, instead of viewing *Sanele* as an individual with rights to his own way of thinking, *Tiffany* appears to expect him to reflect a racially-

bound viewpoint which, she expects, would speak of blacks only in positive terms. This instance of parapraxis in her own comment may indicate that she is attempting to 'instruct' *Sanele* into adopting the standpoint she expects from a black person to deal with this apparent aberration.

In terms of the apparent sense of agreement between *Sanele* and *Werner* in this case, *Sanele*'s negative attitude towards his own group might be linked to out-group favourability of oppressed groups, the case of blacks in South Africa holding approving views of whites has been linked to this tendency in social psychology (Fanon, 1967 in Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1994, 159). In these terms, *Sanele*'s comment may reveal that he has internalised white ideological rationale informing his notions of group positioning in order to be more 'acceptable' to white perspectives. It is ironic, therefore, that the 'white liberal' position presented by *Tiffany* takes exception to *Sanele*'s stance, without her overtly finding fault with the white imperialism *Sanele*'s comment might be seen to encompass.

Tiffany Lassauniere: Sanele,this huge propensity for crime by blacks in SA is, I feel, driven by poverty. outside of SA crime is not as hectic amongst black ppl. i feel confident that if our government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a drop in crime. ppl can either sit back and say Oh well i am black so i do crime (which is so ridiculous a notion anyways) or we can choose. and we can choose a better future. zethu is right...we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one step at a time and we can see change. not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)

This incident in the text is another illustration of the discourse practice that is characteristic of new media discussion groups. Responding to *Sanele*'s comments, which advance the maxim 'most violent criminals are black men', *Tiffany* appears to interpret

Sanele as saying that "most black men are violent criminals". This may be perceived as an instance of parapraxis or, as it is more commonly referred to, 'Freudian slip'.

Tiffany presents herself as a liberal, renouncing the myth of the inherent violence of blacks (*note: Tiffany* does not enter into the sex dimension proposed by *Sanele*) and attributing it to discourses associated with "racist Afrikaner(s)". Nowhere does *Sanele* say anything akin to "Oh well i am black so i do crime", or that "EVERYONE who is black is a criminal", as *Tiffany* apparently attributes to him. Her asymmetric decoding of *Sanele*'s words may be perceived as an expression of her own repressed (by virtue of her identification as liberal) attitudes to black people. This occurrence may also be seen as a case of projection, whereby a person who harbours socially undesirable attitudes, such as racism, may project his/her own attitudes onto others. The very act of voicing these generalisations in conjunction with *Sanele*'s comments on the topic of the myth can be seen as mapping the world view this discourse (illustrated here through myth) creates (Parker, 1992: 11 *point seven*). While *Mosa* makes the notable exception of Nelson Mandela, at a general level the myth is not convincingly challenged even by other black participants.

Another instance in this comment that may be further evidence of parapraxis, tending to illustrate the same tendency, may be located in the conflict betrayed in the sentence "i feel confident that if our government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a drop in crime". If *Tiffany* is "confident", the word "should" is in disagreement since it implies a level of uncertainty. Logically, confidence would agree better with the word "will" in this sentence. *Tiffany* therefore appears to betray doubts whether alleviation of the circumstances she sees as aggravating criminality, would in fact lead to "a drop in crime". This could be read as insinuating that she harbours a concealed belief in the politically incorrect myth of the inherent criminality of blacks, but feels compelled to mask this belief in liberal rhetoric. "We may espouse PC (politically correct) rhetoric simply out of a desire to 'fit in' and may refrain from voicing our doubts about politically charged issues" (Van Boven, 2000: 268), thus *Tiffany*'s comment may feign indignation at *Sanele*'s statements, while privately agreeing with him.

Since the myths of the inherent racism of whites and the inherent violence of black men are deeply inter-related themes, this comment will be analysed again in that section of the critical discourse analysis.

Sherene Cooper: its in the humans blood to kill,no matter wot race or skin colour.cain killed abel because of jealousy.moses killed an egyptian out of anger.herod killed all the baby boys,because he was threatened by another ruling party.david killed his half brother for raping his sister.so wot makes this nation so different?

Sherene approaches the myth of the inherent violence of black men in a type of Christian theological discourse, stating that all humans are inherently violent "no matter wot race or skin colour", thereby attempting to debunk the myth. However, *Sherene*'s next comment appears to support the myth of the inherent violence of black men by citing Zuma as an example.

Sherene Cooper: not one leader had the countrys interest at heart.they all were out for personal gain.even if it meant killing-june 16,raping or fraud-zuma-,they dont deserve that seat in parliament.not an honest person left nowadays

Sherene's use of the word "leader" may signify that she extends the term beyond political party leadership or presidency, perhaps to include 'leaders' of South Africa during apartheid when there were two heads of the government, the prime minister and the president. *Sherene*'s example of June Sixteenth, the Soweto Uprising (where at least 23 people, including two whites, were killed as a march, protesting compulsory Afrikaans in schools, turned violent) appears, in terms of dominant contemporary discourse on national history, to be attributing violence to white apartheid leaders. However, if *Sherene* is old enough to have been exposed to apartheid propaganda, this residual discourse may frame the incident differently, laying the 'blame' for this violent historical incident on the black Struggle leaders who organised the march, despite the fact that the protestors were instructed to conduct a peaceful march to avoid conflict with the heavily armed white police force.

Sherene's comment regarding Zuma implies that she is convinced of his guilt, despite his acquittal. In her concluding statement "not an honest person left nowadays", the word "nowadays" implies a prior time when parliament *did* have honest people. Given the major political, and hence racial, shift in parliament between apartheid and democracy, "nowadays" might be interpreted as meaning 'since apartheid ended', or in other words, since the country came under black rule.

In terms of discourse practice *Sherene*'s two statements appear to be contradictory. Although discourse theory has observed "variability in terms of specific contexts" (Low & Potgeiter, 1994:161) in analysis of face-to-face discussions, illustrating that 'attitude objects' can be assembled and re-assembled in the minds of speakers within a single conversation, sometimes in contradictory formations, in the case of the text-based virtual community the records of the conversation are visible to all members and thus are easily recalled – word for word – to point out such inconsistencies, which is not generally possible in face-to-face discussions. The fact that no contributor takes *Sherene* to task in this regard may indicate this post modern medium's openness to post-structuralist modes of reasoning, which allows *Sherene* to profess contrary views in each of her statements.

This 'virtual schizophrenia' may also be linked to *Tiffany*'s dual advancement and refutation of the myth of the inherent violence of blacks discussed earlier where, it should also be noted, none of the other contributors pointed out the inconsistency in rationale her comments represent. One explanation for this may be that both black and white South Africans are familiar with the inconsistencies between private and public attitudes to issues related to race in South Africa since "…people's desire to appear politically correct may lead them to present a front to others that is less than sincere," (Van Boven, 2000: 268), and therefore may have become inured to this symptom of apparently internal conflict in public discourse on race.

Mosa Moamogoe: Sheren u talkin isht. Nelson mandela! He had the countries intrest at heart n am sure everybody wud agree wit me so stop puttin up isht u dnt knw.

Mosa's comment links to the fact that even the apartheid court that charged Mandela for his part in the Defiance Campaign "found that Mandela and his co-accused had consistently advised their followers to adopt a peaceful course of action and to avoid all violence" (ANC website 'Profile of Nelson Mandela', no author given). In the act of rebuking *Sherene* for her misrepresentation of black, ANC politicians, *Mosa* also poses the example of Nelson Mandela, an international icon of peace, as an example of a man whose image is anathema to violence who is also a black male. The example of Mandela, therefore, stands in stark contrast to the stereotype of violent criminals as black men conveyed in *Sanele*'s prior statements.

 Later in the newsgroup, *Halbo* contradicts the gender dimension of the myth, referencing Nelson Mandela's ex-wife Winnie Madikizela Mandela.

Halbo De Beer: Stompie must be so PROUD about Winnie's "victory" for the masses! Viva the Mother of the Nation. Stompie salutes you were ever hy might be...

This is the only mention in the text of violence being associated with a woman and it refers to the allegations made against Winnie Mandela by her bodyguard, Jerry Musivuzi Richardson, that she ordered the kidnap and murder of 14-year-old James Seipei (alias Stompie Moeketsi) in 1988, because he was believed to be an informer for apartheid security forces. In this instance of the text, the myth of the inherent violence of black men is extended from *Sanele*'s account to encompass black women and is also linked to political matters.

As some branches of ANC Struggle rhetoric framed violence in the cause of political emancipation as justifiable means to attaining freedom (for example Winnie Mandela's well-known speech delivered in Munseville on the 13th of April 1986 where she said "with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country" – source Beresford, the Guardian 27 January 1989), the South African national psyche to some extent perceives political violence as more acceptable than other forms of violence. Harris (2002) writes about South Africa's culturally engrained violent propensity :

     "This is a culture in which violence is proffered as a normal, legitimate solution

to problems: 'violence is seen as a legitimate means to achieve goals particularly because it was legitimised by most political role-players in the past' (Hamber and Lewis, 1997: 8, cited in Harris, in Hook, 2002: 180).

It is interesting, therefore, that most of the white contributors frame their comments relating to violence in references to political grounds. Given the sensitivity of racial issues in South Africa and since violence is commonly attributed to black men, when white contributors are engaged in discussion on this topic it may be that they perceive political violence as safer ground for them to converse on, in terms of political correctness, since "the topics of race and to a lesser extent gender have been taboo in our society…What people say in public is not the same as what they believe in private" (D'Souza & MacNeil, 1992 in Van Boven, 2000: 267). Hence, while white South Africans may have thoughts on non-political forms of violence, the proximity of the topic of violence to that of race may discourage discourse on the topic since it may lead to comments being construed by other members as racist. This can be seen as an illustration of the limits placed on the condoned white subject position for the topic of violence in South Africa, according to point six of Parker's 20 point plan, since the fear of being labeled as 'racist' channels white discussions of violence into the less perilous course of specifically political manifestations of violence.

Michael De Villiers: …However, the fact that a president can make comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?

Michael's comment also focuses on political violence, but as has been discussed earlier, political allegiance in South Africa has a marked relation to race. The fact that over 90% of the ANC's support base are black voters (Ipsos Markinor, May 2010), gives *Michael*'s comment - "He (Zuma) has a hysterical support base" and allusions to "militant action" - a racial implication, particularly in light of the fact that the ANC are the dominant

political force in South Africa. The logic structure behind this comment, in the context of the text as a whole, may be represented as 'Most violent criminals are black. Most ANC voters are black. Therefore, ANC supporters are likely to be violent'. Consequently, this comment can be considered as discourse in the service of the social myth of the inherent violence of blacks, even though race is not overtly alluded to in this particular comment.

Using the second point of Parker's twenty-point plan for the identification and analysis of discourse (Parker,1992: 6-20), I looked for synonyms for the word "hysterical", used by *Michael* to describe Zuma's supporters. When unpacked like this, the word's connotations construct an image of this (mostly) black group as 'crazed', 'demented', 'frenzied', 'frantic', 'irrational' and 'out-of-control' (Spooner, 2001:440 and Office XP Thesaurus).

Billig advanced the opinion that social inquiry into prejudice via social identity theory tended to focus on processes of perception of self and other, largely ignoring the 'talk' or rhetorical aspect of discriminatory action, which he felt held the key to understanding the roots of bigotry (Billig, 1985 in Louw and Potieter, 1994:160).If "objects of thought are constructed in and through discourse" (Louw and Potgieter, 1994: 161), the uncovering of attitudes to other groups embedded in language constructions in casual discussions can be useful in exposing the discourse practices which form the basis of discriminatory action. Since black ANC supporters form the political/numeric majority in South Africa, if *Michael*'s assembled mental picture of this group is formulated along these lines, these negative perceptions and the fear of that dominant group such perceptions give rise to, this may reveal a cycle of prejudice that such discourses could perpetuate. It is worth mentioning, however, that *Michael*'s comment about Zuma's supporters "threatening (indirectly) militant action", is not simply a fabrication to portray ANC supporters in a negative light, nor is it simply a fictitious statement stemming from white paranoia. Julius Malema declared, in the run up to the election, when Zuma was facing allegations of corruption, "We are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma" (Malema, 2009 cited in Ndlovu, *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 5th April, 2010), a statement anathema to democratic principles.

b) The myth of the inherent racism of whites

Tiffany Lassauniere: sherene...talking about racism or apartheid is useless on this forum....despite numerous anti-white or derogatory remarks to other race groups, made by black ppl let me add. it seems that only whites are racist and no one else.

Tiffany's seeking to avoid discussion "about racism or apartheid" may be motivated by a wish to avoid conflict, which, given the racially sensitive context of South African society, might be precipitated by engaging in debate on these issues. However, since *Tiffany* is presented as white, her subject position in relation to these topics renders it likely that such discussions would, in light of prevalent post colonial discourse, portray whites (*Tiffany's* own racial group) in a negative light, and any defence of her own racial group (as the group 'responsible' for apartheid) would be perceived as expressions of white pride, which is commonly held to be synonymous with racism. Hence, white South Africans, therefore, may be subject to the same 'tripling' effect of raced identity described by Fanon: "I was responsible at the same time for my body, my race, my ancestors" (Fanon, 1967a: 112). In this light, *Tiffany's* apparent eagerness to evade such topics is perhaps thus explicable. This is evidence of a reaction to the apparent advantage to the employment of the myth of the inherent racism of whites for the black subject position, in terms of points seventeen and twenty of Parker's twenty point plan for the identification of discourses.

In terms of number twenty of Parker's plan ("20: Showing how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history", Parker, 1992: 6-20) *Tiffany* may be reacting in the method of least resistance for white South Africans in discourse about these topics by refusing to engage with them, since contemporary laymen's discourse on such topics are likely to be subject to *Siegerjustiz*. However, this refusal in itself may cast whites negatively, as it may be seen as a refusal on the part of whites to engage in discussions on these topics with the end of achieving conciliation. This 'aloofness' may be further perceived as symptomatic of whites' desire to maintain

unequal power relations. Thus, in terms of the sixth point of Parker's plan, *Tiffany* is overtly drawing attention to the *lack* of rights whites have to speak on these topics.

Tiffany draws attention to the 'snookering' affect of popular post colonial discourses on the white race group in relation to these topics by referring to black-on-white racism, concluding with the remark "it seems that only whites are racist and no one else" which appears to have ironic intent.

Tiffany Lassauniere: sanele i disagree...if killing was in our blood...then by that statement alone we give free reign to all the racist afrikaaners in Orania to kill all the blacks they see….. i don't accept that blacks/africans are blood hungry murderers with anti-social behavioural issues i take it you meant africans by " we" or have i mistaken your meaning?

As in the case of the myth of the inherent violence of blacks, which was focused more specifically on black males, the myth of the inherent racism of whites is here concentrated towards Afrikaans white South Africans. In a later comment that sustains this stereotype, *Tiffany* accuses *Sanele* of being "a racist Afrikaaner in disguise". As *Lassauniere* is not an Afrikaans surname, this may be a tactic on *Tiffany*'s part to assert distance between herself and the construct of the stereotypical racist.

At the same time, however, there is an element of racism in *Tiffany*'s comment since she seems to be implying that in the case of Orania Afrikaaners, despite their rationality being warped by radical racist ideology, as whites they are able to 'control themselves' from committing such acts of violence. This is in contrast to *Sanele*'s statement "KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD" to which *Tiffany* is responding, which *Tiffany* interprets as denoting blacks or, in her terms, "Africans". Therefore, *Tiffany*'s comment betrays the opinion that she believes whites to be less violent than blacks, and that she considers the term 'African' as synonymous with 'black', indicative that she does not consider herself to be African.

Werner Smit: Sanele, it's true! SA is a killing country and the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from "colonialism". It was sad to hear that this poor man was killed because of politician.

This comment, with its evident residual ideology, may be seen as justification for the myth of the inherent racism of whites. Despite the major dissimilarities between the ANC and ZANU PF (Zimbabwe's dictatorial political party led by Robert Mugabe, associated with human rights violations and undemocratic parliamentary procedures), *Werner* appears to regard these black ruled parties as harbouring similar tactics for the emancipation of their black citizens from the legacy of colonisation. In terms of cognitive psychology (Appiah, 1992: 6), this stereotype of 'black political parties' as portrayed by *Werner*, should perhaps not be too hastily interpreted as a conscious (and therefore morally reprehensible) discrediting of blacks, but may be seen as a mental 'short-cut' that is internally, if not actually, coherent. *The Failed State Index* (Fund For Peace, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) indicates most African countries as being 'red-alert' (that is, abysmally failing countries), with the rest of Africa falling into the 'orange-warning' category of Nations. *Werner*'s negative perception of black African political parties is informed by the fact that most African countries have been unable to sustain democracy in the post colonial context, and the higher the incidence of failed democracies in Africa, the more rational such inferences become. Given these examples of 'failed' post colonial African nations, in the case of South Africa's government *Werner* therefore expects a similar pattern from the governance of the ANC.

Werner makes use of quotation marks around the words "freedom" and "colonisation". The use of quotation marks is often used to imply doubts about the validity of the words they delineate, thus, *Werner* is effectively saying "…is the solution to their *so-called* freedom from *so-called* colonialism." The interpretation of this reference to "freedom" has two possible readings: (a) that under black rule freedom has not yet been fully attained for the previously disadvantaged, or (b) that there is no question of freedom, since blacks did not experience white rule since the advent of colonialism as oppression,

which would correspond with the ideology of apartheid in that (in terms of Parker's twentieth point) was employed to prevent Struggle discourses from making their voices heard in a manner reasonable to white South Africans.

 Werner's agreement with *Sanele*'s, on one level, negative portrayal of black men, coupled with his (*Werner's*) perspective that ANC and ZANU PF, as predominantly black political parties, are necessarily akin, appears to make the latter interpretation more plausible. This meaning would therefore indicate that the virtual identity of *Werner* subscribes to residual mental frameworks with regard to race, and in the dominant ideology of South Africa today, such ideology is deemed racist. Foucault's notion of the decentered subject, which advances the view that "regimes of power constitute us to our very roots, producing just those forms of subjectivity on which they most efficiently go to work" (Eagleton, 1991:47 in MacDonald, 2003:23) involves the idea that humans are at the mercy, so to speak, of discourses, and thus divorces *Werner* from individual culpability for his views on black oppression under apartheid, but in South African social practise such discourses may be evaluated in moral terms.

MacDonald (2003: 22-25) asserts that the Foucaldian approach to discourse denies the concept of agency, and proposes the rejection of human subjectivity to be misguided since "the role of individuals in perpetuating or challenging already existing discourses, and in shaping those of the future, needs to be acknowledged" (MacDonald, 2003:23). Given the emotionally charged subject of 'apartheid' in South Africa today and the sensitivity to racial issues in society, it is reasonable that the question of moral reprehensibility of those whose outlook remains shaped by apartheid doctrine should emerge. Acknowledgement of agency in the case of maintaining residual discourse frameworks rather than adopting dominant ways of perceiving reality, however, cannot be evaluated in terms of morality, without considering that emerging discourses should be viewed in the same light. After all, the dominant discourses of today were emergent discourses during apartheid and would have been labelled as 'immoral' under that ideological framework, particularly in light of the religious slant the National Party incorporated into their political and social philosophy. In addition, MacDonald does not

deny that choices between competing discourses may be made in accordance with prior-held versions of reality.

As the Bill of Rights chapter of the South African Constitution states "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion."(South African Constitution, Bill Of Rights, section 15), subscribing to marginal ideologies is not illegal. Although *Werner*'s views may be deviant from dominant norms, he is not actually making discriminatory inflammatory statements here and therefore, even if we grant individual agency in the process of discourse acceptance or rejection, while such discourses can be perceived as 'racist' (since apartheid ideology is synonymous with racist ideology), it is perhaps irrational to represent the holders of such views as necessarily 'immoral' in themselves.

This comment's relevance to the post-apartheid project and violence brings to mind Billig (1995):

> "…it should be remembered that violence is seldom far from the surface of nationalism's history. The struggle to create the nation-state is a struggle for the monopoly of the means of violence. What is being created -- a nation-state -- is itself a means of violence. The triumph of a particular nationalism is seldom achieved without the defeat of alternative nationalisms and other ways of imagining peoplehood." (1995: 28 in Harris, 2002: 183).

Taken in this way, therefore, *Werner*'s subscribing to defunct ideology can be conceived of as fuelling the violence in its resistance of dominant national discourse.

The fact that *Werner* speech is not *overtly* discriminatory but is symptomatic of the prejudiced ideology of apartheid, links to works on 'New' or 'Cultural Racism'. This body of theory may see a racist inflection to *Werner*'s comment as it "naturalises social functions in terms of a racial-cultural logic of belonging" (Solomos and Back 1996: 19). In this way, this type of discourse practice results in "racism without racists" (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 21) Although, in sociological thought "prejudiced *attitudes* should not be equated with discriminatory *behaviour*. Although the two are generally related, they

are not identical, and either may be present without the other." (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 298)

Tiffany Lassauniere	Sanele,this huge propensity for crime by blacks in SA is, I feel, driven by poverty. outside of SA crime is not as hectic amongst black ppl. i feel confident that if our government can get off their arses and sort out policing and education there should be a drop in crime. ppl can either sit back and say Oh well i am black so i do crime (which is so ridiculous a notion anyways) or we can choose. and we can choose a better future. zethu is right...we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one step at a time and we can see change. not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok ;)

I have already pointed to the interpretation of the possible parapraxis in this statement under the heading of ***the myth of the inherent violence of blacks***, which may indicate that *Tiffany* does believe, on some level, in this myth. *Tiffany* herself asked *Sanele* if he was 'a racist Afrikaaner in disguise' because he stated the fact that the majority of violent crimes are committed by black men. *Sanele* expressing the stereotype of a criminal as a black male cannot be accused of racism, if he is a black person in the 'real' world, since racism is defined as "discrimination against or hostility towards *other* races" (Soames, 2001, my emphasis). However, *Tiffany*'s interpretation, which exaggerates *Sanele*'s original comments, and the unfounded implications she draws from them ("this huge propensity for crime by blacks" , "Oh well i am black so i do crime", "not EVERYONE who is black is a criminal, so lets not make those sort of blanket statements ok") appear to make Tiffany's comment symptomatic of a higher degree of 'racism' than she accuses *Sanele* of – a case, perhaps, where "the lady doth protest too much" (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act 3, Scene 2, l. 230). Hence, a white person privately subscribing to this myth about black people, even if they publicly renounce the myth, can be recognized as harbouring racist attitudes by careful investigation of the logic structure revealed through language. *Tiffany*, despite her professed liberal identification, would therefore seem to

substantiate the myth of the inherent racism of whites, even while apparently renouncing the myth of the inherent violence of blacks associated with racist discourse practice.

This may be explicable in terms of point six of Parker's (1992) discourse identification plan, which involves "Speculating about what they (types of persons identified as objects of discourse) can say in the discourse… (what rights to speak in that way of speaking)" (Parker, 1992: 10). As a white South African who is aware of the sensitivity to racial issues in the context of post apartheid South Africa, and is likely to be aware of the myth of the inherent racism of whites, *Tiffany* may feel obliged to publicly oppose *Sanele*'s comment, which she (not quite correctly) interpreted as condemnatory of all blacks as criminals. While her comment indicates that she perceives the truth of *Sanele*'s original comment "GO AROUND, READ THE PAPERS...U'LL SEE A BLK MAN HAVING BEEN CAUGHT ROBBING, BOMBING ATM'S, RAPING ETC", and takes this further in her interpretation (in accordance with my earlier analysis of the asymmetrical discourse practice in evidence here) to signify a stereotype of blacks as criminal, rather than *Sanele*'s which constructs the stereotype of criminals as black. While this may be indicative of *Tiffany'*s personal attitudes, it is significant that she apparently takes exception to this view (which she attributes to *Sanele* mistakenly), in order to (publicly) distance herself from accusations of racism, since white-on-black racism is the ultimate taboo in contemporary South African social discourse. Thus, in this case, the application of the sixth tenet of Parker's plan indicates that *Tiffany,* as a white South African, is able to speak about black crime only from a position which emphasises mitigating factors and (pretends to) dissolve(s) the racial dimension from its relationship to criminality. As a black South African, however, *Sanele* is not limited in his subject position by racial sensitivity and is able to disregard such justifications ("AND U RIGHT TIFFANY, MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD") in order to condemn instances of black criminality.

Sherene Cooper: not one leader had the countrys interest at heart.they all were out
                     for personal gain.even if it meant killing-june 16,raping or fraud-

> zuma-,they dont deserve that seat in parliament.not an honest person left nowadays

My interpretation of this statement is outlined in the section discussing **the myth of the inherent violence of blacks**, where I discuss my reasons for supposing that *Sherene* here may be attributing the atrocities of June 16 to the black protestors rather than to the apartheid police, as well as the racial implications contained in the use of the word 'nowadays'. The fact that racism is taboo in South African society means that racist discourse is characterised often by subtlety and equivocation. In the words of Franz Fanon:

> "The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence forms of racism… In the very heart of "civilized nations" the workers finally discover that the exploitation of man, at the root of a system, assumes different faces. At this stage racism no longer dares appear without disguise." (Fanon1967b, 35-36)

Given this nuance, delicate yet thorough analysis of these complexities is necessary to fully uncover its manifestations. *Sherene's* first comment, which relies on Biblical references, may be taken as partial evidence of an ideological link between her apparently racist rationale and her orthodox Christian beliefs (support for this assertion may be inferred from her 'pro-life' and anti- homosexuality comments, see ethnographic analysis), given the "strong negative connotation of 'black' in Christian colour symbolism" (Wetherell, 1996: 181).

Mosa Moamogoe: …sory to say dis bt maybe u nid to thnk further than ur skin colour…

Despite the veiled quality of *Sherene*'s comments, *Mosa* perceives these comments as racist. It is perhaps significant that the gender implications bound up in *Sherene*'s anti-abortionist stance, as well as the homophobic element of her talk do not receive censure at all, serving to illustrate again that the issue of race is foremost in South African consciousness. It is significant also that *Mosa*, rather than saying '*Sherene*, your comments are racist', immediately implicates all whites with the statement "u nid to think further than your skin colour", thereby implying that *all* whites subscribe to racist

ideology, therefore concretising the myth of the inherent racism of whites, even while making a racist statement himself.

Mosa's comment, however, finds resonance with the relatively new field of whiteness studies .Makalani (2003) takes the view that the imposition of difference achieved through institutional racial demarcation has had the effect of placing whites in a superior position, in such as measures implemented by the apartheid state . Drawing on Harris: "… privileged rights in property based on race elevated whiteness from a passive attribute to an object of law and a resource deployable at the social, political and institutional level to maintain control" (Harris, 1993:1735 in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003: 82), Makalani argues that this practise "conceptualises whiteness as a material object used to maintain white supremacy rather than as merely an aspect of white identity" (*ibid:* 82).

Ongama Ntloko: If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites

Tiffany Lassauniere   reinhardt what exactly did you not understand? maybe i should clarify? i think its a fairly correct estimation to say most whites want to maintian our standard of living right. i also know loads of people of colour who want the maintain our standard of living and in fact develope it further. but what i am asking is this: why is it that when we argue the point that the ANC has done jack for SA and we are declining into a third world mess, the answer seems to be that this is africa and if we want europe we need to go to europe. so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here? and yes...obama is hot !

Tiffany here reacts to perceptions that white South Africans who are critical of the ANC's policies are considered 'unAfrican', if not racist, since they apparently expect 'European' standards, and, the extension of this argument, that if they are dissatisfied with South Africa they should repatriate to the countries their colonial ancestors came from. These pan-africanist notions (note "this is Africa" not the country of 'South Africa') can be considered as racist, since biological race is, logically, derived from one's ancestors. The conclusion *Tiffany* arrives at is that this type of response to dissatisfaction with the government's performance is ideologically crafted to appear as 'white dissatisfaction' (further evidence of the 'inherent racism of whites' myth), hence to represent all black South Africans as satisfied with the status quo, which conveniently absolves the government of failure to develop the economy and the standards of living for the predominantly black lower classes.

Sherene Cooper :   i dont recall singling out anyone? and as for my skin colour well that has nothing to do with my statement nd for the record-im proud of my skin colour.nd as for ur language,i think just maybe u must learn how to spell shit!or how to spell for that matter? nd wen u read a statement in future,just try to look a bit deeper,that is if u know how!

Sherene's comment here claims "and as for my skin colour well that has nothing to do with my statement". In discussion of her previous comment, I argued that *Sherene*'s comment betrayed racist ideology since most of her comments could be interpreted as instancing black leaders' violence and (what *Sherene* perceives as) immorality. However, except for her reference to Zuma's rape and corruption allegations, her comments were ambiguous in that they may have been levelled at white former heads of government as well. The racialised interpretation I laid on her statement "not an honest person left nowadays" may not have been *Sherene*'s intended meaning, and the reference may have been broader, since it is a well-worn idiom. Given the subtlety racist discourse is often couched in, and the sensitivity to racial issues in the South African context, if one analyses any text closely it is usually possible to 'find' some thread of racism if one looks

carefully enough, which is a limitation of this type of research which should be borne in mind in the reading of South African interpretive research.

Just as *Sanele* was asked whether he is "a racist Afrikaner in disguise" when he made less than positive comments about his own race group, *Sherene*'s comments (interpreted as being condemnatory of black leaders) are attributed, by *Mosa*, as being 'typical' of white (racist) mentality. *Sherene*'s response "my skin colour … has nothing to do with my statement", is interesting since it is probable that many black South Africans (particularly those holding either Christian or more traditional African values [Juschka, 2001:338-350]) also perceive same-sex marriage and abortion as immoral. Further, statements by black contributors in the text also express disgust at corruption and violence in society; however, when a white person voices these sentiments it is diagnosed as racism. This indicates the difference in socially condoned racial subject positions on this topic for white and black South Africans respectively in terms of point six of Parker's (1992:10) twenty point plan for the identification of discourses.

Mosa's reaction may be explicable in the context of Afrocentricism, which has been defined as a school of thought and epistemology "to help lay out a plan for the recovery of African place, respectability, accountability, and leadership" (Asante 2000). Afrocentricism, however, has been criticised by some academics as seeking to portray all whites as malicious, "without careful differentiation between persons of goodwill and those who consciously perpetuate racism" (Felder, 1994). While criticisms of Afrocentricism are often deflected by advocates as being symptomatic of the preservation of eurocentricism by white academics, African-American academic Clarence E. Walker described Afrocentricism as "a mythology that is racist, reactionary, essentially therapeutic and is eurocentrism in black face… creating new structures of community and ways of thinking racially that will bolster black people's self-esteem" (Banner-Haley and Walker, 2003: 663-4). In a country that has emerged from the white supremacist apartheid regime, Afrocentricism may perhaps be a balm to the wounds inflicted on the black consciousness by such a regime – however, in its extreme forms bears eerie

similarities to the mental processes that informed and maintained apartheid's unequal racial dynamics.

While South African popular culture unapologetically celebrates black pride, expressions of white pride (locally as well as internationally) are usually associated with notions of white supremacy (Ku Klux Klan, apartheid regime and the AWB spring immediately to mind) and related acts of racial oppression, which makes *Sherene*'s statement "for the record-im proud of my skin colour" rather controversial, and to some readings would firmly link *Sherene*'s comments to racist discourse. Thus, in terms of point seven of Parker's twenty point plan (Parker, 1992: 12), it may be said that the 'map' of the world view presented in contemporary dominant South African discourse allows expressions of black pride, while denying the same privilege to white South Africans.

Ongama Ntloko: why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? Why? I dnt like the character of the man bt he is a S.A and soon to be our president. Our fight against Zuma should nt be racial bt on merits. If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites

Several studies have found that blacks "perceive racial discrimination to be more pervasive and damaging… than do whites (Davis & Smith, 1994; Hochschild, 1995). Blacks view discrimination as a dominant force in their lives" (Dovidio et al 2002: 89). This may account for *Ongama*'s accusation that Zuma's detractors attitudes towards Zuma are "basd on his skin", rather than "hs character", since as a black man himself he is highly sensitive to perceived racial slurs.

Ongama's comment illustrates that he perceives the link between race and political preference (as shown in the Ipsos Markinor table in the introduction to this section), however he focuses on white political favour of the DA. According to the table, 51.4% of

Democratic Alliance voters are white, while 92.4% of voters for African National Congress are black. These figures show that there is a much stronger correlation between being black and voting ANC, than between being white and voting DA, despite *Ongama*'s hyperbolic assertion that "all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille".

In the text there are no references to Zuma's race having any bearing on his detractors' arguments against his fitness for presidency. Reasons given mainly revolve around the allegations of rape and corruption against him in the run up to the election and suspicions of political interference in the judicial processes that acquitted Zuma of these charges. This statement by *Ongama* illustrates how deeply entrenched the myth of the inherent racism of whites is in the public consciousness, hence, despite the reasons stated by whites in the text for opposing Zuma ("raping or fraud", "the president with a 3rd grade education", "contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action", "zuma has little regard for democracy", etc), *Ongama* reads these comments as solely culminating veiled racist intention. Hence, it would appear that criticism of black politicians when voiced by whites is dismissed as racist rhetoric and is therefore concerns emanating from the white subject position remain 'unheard' when they are expressed.

A by-product, perhaps, of the myth of the inherent racism of whites is what is commonly referred to as the 'race card', whereby accusations of racism are introduced into discussions which have no explicit bearing on racial issues. As Cheng noted "Indeed, it has acquired the peculiar status of a game where what constitutes a winning hand has become identical with the handicap"(Cheng, 1997: 49), referring to the fact that when the race card is played arbitrarily, refutations of such allegations are futile, as the sensitivity of racial issues determines the position of whites as untenable. African-American academic, Shelby Steele puts forward a related view in his work on white guilt:

> "Whites … must acknowledge historical racism to show themselves redeemed by it, but once they acknowledge it, they lose moral authority over everything having to do with race, equality, social justice, poverty and so on. ... The authority they lose transfers to the 'victims' of historical racism and becomes their great power in

society. This is why white guilt is quite literally the same thing as Black power."
(Steele, 2006: 24)

"If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character", this statement advances the notion that racism is the main reason for emigration from South Africa. A 2010 survey by Youth Dynamix research company, however, indicated that more black youths (aged between 13 and 15 years of age) plan to leave South Africa than white or Indian youths. While 42% of black teenagers surveyed signalled their wish to emigrate, "in contrast only 33% of white and Indian youth want to go" (Naidoo, 2010). This survey would therefore seem to indicate that racism is not the primary motivation for leaving South Africa, and contradicts popular notions associated with 'white flight' from South Africa.

Ongama's advice to white voters, to "join… a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites" rather than vote DA, is somewhat illogical, since the DA support base is the most multiracial of the top three political parties, according to Ipsos Markinor's (2009) representative survey. *Ongama*'s particular illustration that "PAC has no whites" may be read as an assertion that whites are racist since they don't vote PAC. This may be due, however to the fact that the PAC are associated with an ideology that is expressly Afrocentric, and has an alliance of long standing with Zimbabwe's ZANU PF party (GlobalAfrica.com) which has a distinctly anti-white ideology. It may be that *Ongama* is ignorant of this connotation to the PAC, or, this statement may imply that in *Ongama*'s view in order for whites to divorce themselves from racism, it is necessary for them to embrace overtly Afrocentric ideology. If one accepts the latter interpretation, in terms of point seventeen of Parker's twenty-point plan, it is apparent that this aspect of the discourse denies whites moral authority unless their political choice coincides with Afrocentric or black dominated parties.

Steven Bales: Ongama perhaps it ISN'T based on race, white people not voting for Zuma
                  is because they are of the opinion that he will not be a good president. The

same goes for the black people who voted against him. Saying that "all white people worship Zille" is in itself a huge generalisation, and as we know racism falls under the category of generalisation. I myself do not agree with Zille purely because I believe the DA's campaign was an attempt to slander Zuma, and they offered no alternative. It was as if they were defined by Zuma.

If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right to state that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist

This response to *Ongama*'s comment bears similarities to *Tiffany*'s earlier comment ("i think its a fairly correct estimation to say most whites want to maintian our standard of living right. i also know loads of people of colour who want the maintain our standard of living …so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here?"), in that both comments betray an awareness that whiteness is perceived as being synonymous with an anti-ANC stance. A month later, Helen Zille made reference to the fact that her party's 'Stop Zuma' election campaign was "accused… of "negative" campaigning and—outrageously and illogically—racism" (Zille, 2009), comments echoing *Ongama*'s apparent perception that anti-ANC opinions, by whites, are sentiments akin to anti-black attitudes.

This perception may be supported by the strong correlation between race and political allegiance illustrated in the *Ipsos Markinor findings of political party support by racial grouping* table (Ipsos Markinor, 2009), which can be found in the introduction to this section, illustrating that the majority party, who won 65.9% of the national assembly votes (IEC, 2009), relied on black supporters for over ninety percent of their votes. This builds the perception that the ANC is the party 'for' black South Africans, which is supported by the popular notion of the ANC as the principle 'liberation party', despite political involvement in the Struggle by various other actors, of all races, who were not ANC members.

In the early nineties, when the ANC under Nelson Mandela were newly unbanned, opposition to the ANC in favour of the National Party could be seen as racist, since the former represented democracy and black liberation against the backdrop of apartheid's white supremacy. Fifteen years since the advent of democracy in South Africa, with the constitutionally enshrined principle of racial equality, however, it is perhaps out-dated and simplistic to consider ANC detractors as simply 'racist', and the matter of the benefit this type of discourse renders the ANC politically, in terms of points seventeen and eighteen of Parker (1992), cannot be ignored. For non-blacks, not voting ANC by the rationale of this discourse, is racist; while for blacks, not voting ANC implicates them as race traitors. In terms of the last point of Parker's plan for the identification of discourses (Parker, 1991: 20), this would appear to benefit the majority political party, and serve to crush opposition parties by ideologically aligning resistance with 'anti-black' discourse.

Steven responds to *Ongama*'s faintly veiled accusations of racism with the comment: "Saying that "all white people worship Zille" is in itself a huge generalisation, and as we know racism falls under the category of generalisation." This response overtly challenges proponents of the myth of the inherent racism of whites with the accusation that this perception of whites is, in itself, an essentially racist notion.

Theory of racism is predominantly (all but exclusively) focused on white-on-black racism and anti-Semitism. Particularly in the context of South Africa, such focus has been centred on white forms of prejudice against blacks due to the racist framework upon which apartheid was built and legitimised. In the 'New' South Africa, fifteen years since the advent of democracy, it appears that the 'non-racial' South Africa envisaged by Nelson Mandela on his release from prison remains an elusive ideal, although there has been a shift of emphasis in national racial discourses from those favouring whites, to those favouring blacks, on the pretext of repairing the past injustices of apartheid.

 It might be argued, that since the Mandela's speech where non-racialism was celebrated, race has been re-established in South Africa, in the words of Painter: "It was in relation to

the projected homogeneous national population (defined in reference to a shared culture, language or religion) that *mismatched* populations (those who resisted assimilation to the national ideal), first became visible as a political problem, and were cast as specifically *racialised* and *ethnicised* minorities (Balibar, 1991a, 1991b; Malik, 1996; May, 2001; Williams, 1999)" (Painter, 2010: 27). Thus, discontent voices by white citizens may have led to their being categorised in terms of race, leading to a perception that dissatisfaction with the status quo was a typically 'white' syndrome, and, perhaps given the sensitivity to race and racism in post-apartheid South Africa, this white discontent came to be viewed as synonymous with white racism.

However, drawing on the work of Steele (2006) and Banner-Haley and Walker (2003) cited above, there is the possibility that such Afrocentric discourses may become "Eurocentricism in black face" (Banner-Haley and Walker, 2003: 664). The effect internationally of white guilt for historical wrongs may prevent the generation of theory relating to discriminatory discourse practices against whites.

> " In (Foucault's) view publicly circulating discourses were both produced by these social institutions and systems of action, and in turn produce and continuously maintain them. Discourse would thus try to prohibit and exclude categories of thought and knowledge and their forms of expression that do not maintain the social status quo." (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 5)

In contemporary South African society, such policies as Black Economic Empowerment and Affirmative Action are, ultimately, discriminatory but are framed in discourses which label any resistance to such practices as 'racist'. Fifteen years after apartheid, with equal education opportunities opened to all races in South Africa, no indication that such policies are in their closing stages is apparent. One of the main criticisms levelled at Affirmative Action and BBBEE is that instead of advancing opportunities to the poorest in society, such policies have created a small black elite (colloquially known as 'black diamonds') while doing little to alleviate the burden on the majority of impoverished black people (Mbeki, 2009). "The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of "race" – an ideology that has served well to successfully obscure and disguise class interests behind the smokescreen of multi-culturalism, diversity, difference, and more

recently, whiteness" (Darder & Torres, 2004:1). While poverty is more prevalent amongst the black population group, such policies do not address class inequalities, but remain focussed on race and gender. This scenario has been called, particularly by outside observers, "a kind of reverse apartheid arising from government pro-black empowerment policies" (Wood, 22nd January 2006, Guardian.co.uk), highlighting the somewhat sinister resemblance the new order bears to the old.

The works of Van Dijk (1984, 1987, 1993) Garnham 1990, Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996), Schiller (1995), Jansen (1991) and Mumby (1993) (all cited in Thiesmeyer, 2003: 9) discuss the range of institutionally engrained discourse practices which have consequences for silencing such deviant discourses. According to Thiesmeyer,

> "the goal of using discourse to silence other discourse is to remove the potential for the audience to obtain unacceptable discourse. That is, the audience will be rendered incapable of hearing or noticing the existence of certain discourses because they differ too much from those normally used within the daily life of the community." (*ibid*: 9).

In a society that is saturated with memories of the atrocities the apartheid regime inflicted on blacks for the advancement of white interests and the accompanying sensitivity to white-on-black forms of racism, such criticisms of the status quo are frequently branded 'racist' – and as noted by Cheng, this argument "constitutes a winning hand" (Cheng, 1997:49). In this way "a major function of silencing" is achieved by "contain(ing) this potential for opposition by identifying categories of persons and ideas about which speech and texts will be unacceptable, that is, categories of forbidden speech and 'forbidden reading' (Manguel 1996)" (in Thiesmeyer 2003: 9).

Those discourses which support the equity of Affirmative Action and development policy at the macro-level are experienced by South Africans at the micro-level as materially advancing black interests at the expense of the white workforce, and further give rise to subsidiary discourses, such as contained in the myth of the inherent racism of whites, which socially privilege the subject position of blacks. As long as such discourses remain dominant, any discourses that deviate from the accepted template of racial relations, such

as perceived instances of black-on-white forms of racism, are deemed 'unacceptable' and are easily rendered forbidden, in terms of the dominant discourse, as 'racist': the ultimate taboo in South African social practice. Thiesmeyer explains the course of this argument thus:

> "This process is complemented by the circulation of acceptable speech and texts that express some things at the expense of others; it is thus a discursive displacement. It's effect is to remove certain kinds of texts or speech from circulation but without necessarily censoring the texts or speech themselves." (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 9)

Hence, white resistance to equity policies at the macro level, and their articulation of experiences of discrimination *as whites*, are overpowered by discourse in the service of black power (which, as I have argued above may be more strongly linked to ANC identity than, necessarily, racial identity), which is evidenced in the reaction to such deviance, that is, accusations of racism.

McKee (2005) refers to the opposing views on equity in relation to modernity's tenets of "equality, justice, freedom and comfort" and the definitional problems these terms invite, since "When people disagree about facts, they can be checked; but when people disagree about attitudes, this isn't so easily done" (McKee, 2005: 15-6). The importance in a democracy of the ability for citizens to "ensure that their opinions and ideas contribute to the forming of general agreement" (*ibid*:16). Therefore, when sectors of society have their ability to voice concerns limited by cultural norms and discursive displacement, the democratic balance is thrown out of kilter.

In the first comment analysed in this section of the critical discourse analysis, by *Tiffany*, I drew attention to the silence, at that stage in discussion, that *Tiffany* implied was prudent for whites in discussion of the topics of "racism or apartheid", which I attributed to concerns that such topics were probable sites of *Siegerjustiz*. "These groups and individuals are silenced both by the denial of attention and by the concurrent belief that since they are not being heard from they are therefore not trying to say anything. In such contexts, it is the acts of *non*-speaking that conform to accepted norms" (*ibid*: 10).

As discussed earlier, however, the dominant discourse in place may even condemn such "acts of *non*-speaking" as evidence of whites evading the moral responsibility for the inequalities still prevalent in South African society. "In these situations, Habermas says, we have the responsibility to 'examine not only the… de facto currency of the norm in question, but the rightness of this norm itself'," (*ibid:* 10). The response elicited from this analysis is that the norms expressed in dominant race-related discourses in South Africa do not permit any subject position other than the pro-black, pro-ANC position to whites in South Africa, which could lead to further break-down in race relations. Since even silence on the part of whites can be interpreted as unsavoury, some, like *Steven,* will risk the stigma attached to white resistance discourse. "If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right to state that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist."

Here *Steven* levels the accusation of racism back at *Ongama*, constructing his argument in such a way as to show the steps of logic that lead him to explicitly label *Ongama*'s comment as "racist". On the newsgroup, there are no comments decrying *Steven*'s statement by *Ongama*, nor any other contributors. It is possible, in this medium, that comments may have been removed by the administrator. However, in an earlier instance there was evidence that the transcript had been tampered with because the remaining comments referred back to the 'missing' text, which does not appear to be the case here. This leaves two other possibilities for the lack of response to *Steven*'s provocative comment. Either that *Steven*'s comment, as belonging to a silenced, 'unacceptable' discourse "because (it) differ(s) too much from those normally used within the daily life of the community" (*ibid*:9) and therefore requires no response, just as if it had not been voiced, or for the reason that this exchange between *Ongama* and *Steven,* in Cheng's analogy (1997: 49), may be likened to a game of 'snap', where *Steven,* unconventionally as a white South African, plays the 'winning hand' of the race card back at *Ongama*.

Adrian Rainier:	Agree 100% with u thr mate!
	Think this racist bull is gettin really really Old, u guys gotta start sparkin cuase that shit is old!

It is interesting to note that *Adrian*, while agreeing "100%" with *Steven*'s sentiments which point to the 'racist' logic of *Ongama*'s comment, *Adrian*, in the same breath so to speak, bemoans the cliché he perceives allegations of racism to be. Perhaps this can be attributed to the predominance in South African popular discourse of allegations of white-on-black racism, and *Adrian* is voicing his approval of this pronouncement (of *Steven*s) of the apparent hypocrisy of such an assertion in this instance. Given *Adrian*'s statement about "this racist bull", it may be that *Adrian* interprets *Steven*'s comment not as a pronouncement that *Ongama* is 'a racist', but rather that *Steven*'s intention was to demonstrate to *Ongama* what it feels like to be accused of racism, essentially giving *Ongama* 'a dose of his own medicine'. In *Adrian*'s next comment it appears that he wishes to add to this 'literary device' of *Steven*'s:

Adrian Rainier:	Ongama Ntloko, another thing u shud keep in mind is that thr whr whites in the battle against aperteid too!
	And just for the recor d yousound very racist for even thinking that way!
	Just use common sense then maybe u'll understand whr we comin from, this has nothin too do with race!
	Hell i wish Obama cud be our president, damn shame!

It is noteworthy that instead of saying blatantly 'Ongama, you are a racist', *Adrian* frames the sentiment thus: "yousound very racist for even thinking that way". This may be further evidence that *Adrian* does not wish to overtly label *Ongama* as racist, but does wish to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the mindset which subscribes to the inherent racism of whites.

Another reading of *Adrian*'s statement might be that he is intentionally, yet slightly more politely, accusing *Ongama* directly of racism. This may be a reaction to the frustration

white South Africans feel with regards to the myth of the inherent racism of whites, and thus, his statement "This racist bull is getting really really old," may refer only to accusations of white-on-black racism. In which case, *Adrian*, in spite of this assertion, may be remarking that accusations of black-on-white racism are as not well worn but are perhaps as equally deserved as indictments of white-on-black racism.

Adrian draws attention to the fact that " thr whr [*were*] whites in the battle against aperteid too!," as refutation of the myth of the inherent racism of whites. This links to popular notions, alluded to earlier, that since the apartheid regime advanced white interests, all whites were necessarily in agreement with the policies that the National Party enforced. For readers who are unfamiliar with South African history, it is worth bearing in mind that white South Africans, on the 18th of March 1992, went to the polling stations to vote in a referendum on whether or not apartheid should be ended. A record number of voters turned out, indicating the enthusiasm of whites for democratic change, and 68.6% of white South Africans voted in favour of ending apartheid (BBC.co.uk *On This Day*).

Andrea Kühn:	Ongama: How can you be such an idiot? The reason why anyone, including some white people, dislike Zuma has EVERYTHING to do with his character and NOTHING to do with his skin color. That should be obvious. And he has NO merits. He's uneducated, a liar, a rapist and corrupt. That spells disaster for our already meager economy. Some of us don't want to immigrate, because we love the country, that's WHY we hate to see it falling into the hands of such an imbecile. How can you not see that????
Tina Kapoutsis :	thank-you Andrea!!!!!! that was a really great response! Its Zuma's character we hate!!!!!!!

Andrea and *Tina* add their voices to the refutation of the myth of the inherent racism of whites, in response to *Ongama*'s assertion that whites are opposed to Zuma due to their

racism. *Andrea* details her reasons for not favouring Zuma "he has NO merits. He's uneducated, a liar, a rapist and corrupt. That spells disaster for our already meager economy". The allegations of corruption and rape resurface, despite Zuma's acquittal. This may be linked to *Michael*'s earlier comment "When the justice system fails what else is there?", implying the existence of a popular belief, associated with anti-Zuma discourse, that political interference with the judiciary was the reason behind Zuma's non-conviction.

Although these white contributors detail specific reasons and affirm that these arguments have "NOTHING to do with skin colour" (*Andrea*), these reasons may in themselves be bound by the way the invisibility of whiteness frames social discourse. Frankenberg details three aspects of whiteness: "a location of structural advantage, of race privilege", "…it is a 'standpoint'… from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society" and whiteness "refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg, 2000: 227, in Fourie, 2008: 295).

With this conception of whiteness, the very framing of Zuma as a rapist is problematised since Zulu traditional culture has different norms. "Jacob Zuma's sexual actions are not to be interpreted as either aggressive or irresponsible but rather as those prescribed by the wisdom of *culture*, familiar to him since his youth. He was acting, he claimed, as a *Zulu* man" (Waetjen and Mare`, 2010: 58). Likewise in the case of the corruption allegations against Zuma, Frankenberg's three dimensions of whiteness facilitate a 'white perspective judgement' in that to the

> "typical Western person, the African person must look very stupid supporting a
> man charged with corruption. But it's exactly this traditionalism that has been
> overlooked. Africans look at the bigger picture, not because they condone
> corruption, but because they weigh other things in balance" (Madlala, 2005 in
> Sesanti, 2008:365).
> "How long should our culture be demonised to our silence (*sic*)? How long we
> should allow ourself (*sic*) *to* feel inferior about who we are? And most hurting is
> the fact that, all is a lie. This is done to crush our spirit, and that spirit is also

evident enough within the man we support. It is the African in JZ that is maybe a problem…" (Druza, 2006, cited in Waetjen and Mare` 2010, 58).

In view of this perspective, the white contributors citing rape and corruption allegations against Zuma as reasons why he is unfit for presidency could be interpreted as cultural racism, disguised by the invisibility of whiteness and the privilege such viewpoints unconsciously lend to Western norms. Anti-Zuma (hence, anti-ANC) discourse is seen as anti-Zulu culture and therefore symptomatic of white racism. In terms of point seventeen of Parker's (1991) discourse identification, whites gain politically from this kind of judgement of Zulu culture.

However, not all black people see contemporary Zulu culture as in keeping with Zuma's actions

> "This is why so many black people are angry. Zuma's behaviour has set Steve Biko's philosophy back by decades. For Biko, destroying apartheid was about asserting our blackness with pride; it was about celebrating the diversity of customs and traditions that enrich the social fabric of SA. It was not about using "culture" as an excuse to violate women, something we have fought against since the 1970s" (Kadalie, 2010).

Drawing on this perspective, using Zulu culture as "an excuse" (*ibid*), makes all blacks complicit in Zuma's dubious activities. Employing such rationale (in terms of Parker's (1991) point seventeen) grants significant political benefit to the ANC at the expense of ordinary black people. In addition, recourse to traditional Zulu culture disqualifies white voices from criticism of Zuma, since white disparagement of traditional African culture is naturally construed as racism, and hence whites too are subjugated in the service of this discourse, to the benefit of Zuma's ANC.

Jaco Veldsman: Ongama, dont be an idiot. Go look at the people leading the different party. ANC and COPE have alot of criminals running their parties. You wonder and want crime to stop in SA? Start by putting the corrupt leaders in prison. And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race! Thats why Zimbabwe is where

it is, because of a corrupt president... and guess what? HE
BLAMES IT ON THE WHITES!

Jaco's comment builds on the notion that the myth of the inherent racism of whites is a 'smoke screen' for corrupt politicians to deflect allegations against them by the (largely white-owned) media and opposition political parties. His statement "And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race!," signals that he considers the 'race card' a puerile device relying on simplistic rationale. *Jaco* draws parallels between the future for South Africa under Zuma and Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, stating that the end result of this racial 'smoke screen' discourse is the socio-economic situation Zimbabwe currently faces. This comment finds some resonance with Kwame Appiah's observation "The truth is that there are no races… The evil that is done is done by the concept and by – yet impossible – assumptions as to its application. What we miss through our obsession … is, simply, reality" (Appiah, 1995: 75 in Darder & Torres, 2004: 1).

c) Xenophobia

Funmi Sangodeyi: I want Zuma to win and I want South Africa to fail. You know why? Because I am Nigerian and if South Africa fails then the most important country in Sub Saharan Africa will be Nigeria.

Arthur Tsimitakopoulos: Aaaah shuddup you Nigerian wench. Even if SA 'fails', your cesspool of country Nigeria will still be a stinking mess filled with drug dealers,crack whores, pirates, monkey lovers, thieves and losers. So get of your high horse and get back to selling your cocaine at the street corner...mampara!

Kagisho Phoku: Well said Arthur..nothing else can be said to this...oh you said it, Nigerian Wench.

Funmi's somewhat novel reason for wishing Zuma to win, which is directly linked to her nationality, and her stated desire for "South Africa to fail", is rather provocative and might be interpreted as a xenophobic statement in itself.

Despite earlier instances of racial tension in the newsgroup between black and white South African contributors, it is interesting to note the solidarity displayed in this instance of a white and a black male contributor together repelling this comment by a Nigerian woman.

Harris (2002) notes that "foreign black Africans, especially those originating from countries north of South Africa's neighbours, are being portrayed as a major threat to the success of the post-apartheid project'" (1998: 1117). Harris, In Hooks 2002: 174). Harris further proposes that xenophobia is constructed as the "scapegoat for the intolerance and disunity that threatens the health" (*ibid*: 174) of the New South Africa. In this way, *Kagisho* and *Arthur*'s verbal attack on *Funmi* may also be perceived as socially cohesive in their hostility, since in the wake of the racial tension earlier appearing in the newsgroup, *Funmi* is a socially acceptable 'other' to serve as the scapegoat an preserve the construct of national unity.

The references to "Nigerian wench" and "crack whores" implicate gender in this assault on *Funmi*, where as a woman sexual forms of insult are utilised. This has power implications since the authors of this barrage are male, because "of the social actions those descriptions accomplish" (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 2-3 cited in Painter, 2010: 240), and "In practice, fucking is an act of possession – simultaneously an act of ownership, taking, force, it is conquering…" (Dworkin, 1979 in Dever, 2004: p113). In discourse practise, therefore, the sexual nature of the language used denigrates *Funmi* as 'conquered', and since the words refer to prostitution, it is implied that *Funmi* is thus 'defeated' not once by one man, but often by numerous men. This finds resonance with hooks' work on the phallocentric identification with the coloniser in black resistance discourse:

> "The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and their white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal

belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus." (hooks, 1990: 66-7 cited in Alessandrini, 1999: 207).

Therefore, despite the cosy camaraderie displayed between a black and a white member of the newsgroup in this instance, this unity is underpinned by the fact that as males and as South Africans, *Arthur* and *Kagiso* are in this context 'in group' members and, as a female and a Nigerian, *Funmi* is defined as belonging to an 'out group'. Therefore, in the context of external discord, black and white South Africans may bond together in the common cause of defence of South Africa and South Africanness, however they still rely on the principles of exclusion and stereotyping to achieve this. These discourse apparatuses however are the same as those which fuel interracial conflict within the local context.

7.3.5 Crime

Introduction

The next most prevalent theme present in the newsgroup, after race, is that of crime. As few aspects of South African discourse are devoid of any racialised dimension, a portion of the discussion relating to crime has unfolded under the headings of *myth of the inherent violence of black men* and *the inherent racism of whites*, illustrating how the topic of violence and crime is linked to race and racism in South African discourse. In this section I have excluded comments relating to corrupt politicians and the allegations that were previously against Zuma to be discussed separately.

(a)Political Violence

Sanele Khanyile: AS IT HAPPENED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS....PPL GOT KILLED AND I ALWAYS ASK MYSELF...WHAT DO KILLERS GET IN RETURN OF KILLING THAT PARTICULAR OFFICAL OF A CERTAIN PARTY? HOW HE

ALONE POSE A THREAT IN AN ORGANISATION IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE HAS TO BE KILLED?

Werner Smit: Sanele, it's true! SA is a killing country and the ANC, same as ZANU PF, thinks that killing and intimidating other parties is the solution to their "freedom" from "colonialism". It was sad to hear that this poor man was killed because of politician.

Michael De Villiers   ...However, the fact that a president can make comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?

Sherene Cooper: not one leader had the countrys interest at heart.they all were out for personal gain.even if it meant killing-june 16,raping or fraud-zuma-,they dont deserve that seat in parliament.not an honest person left nowadays.

Halbo De Beer: Stompie must be so PROUD about Winnie's "victory" for the masses! Viva the Mother of the Nation. Stompie salutes you were ever hy might be...

The comments above illustrate that political violence is an issue that is represented by newsgroup contributors as a significant concern in contemporary South African discourse. As mentioned in the race aspect of the critical discourse analysis, however, white contributors refer to political forms of violence with more frequency than they do to the more common criminal forms of violence. I have suggested that this may be linked to Struggle discourse, in that political violence has been legitimised as a necessary form

of resistance and that violence in the service of emancipation is therefore regarded, as to some extent, justifiable in South African discourse practise.

In contrast to white contributors' preoccupation, *Sanele* is the only black contributor to mention political forms of violence. In his comment *Sanele* asks rhetorical questions addressing the philosophy of political faction fighting, in contrast to more superficial, and sometimes flippant, comments by white contributors on this topic (eg "STOMPIE salutes you, w(*h*)ere ever hy might be"). This may be attributable to the relative proximity of faction fighting to black South Africans in comparison with whites.

On this newsgroup the main nexus associated with political violence, is that of the ANC. This may be attributable to the title of the newsgroup, since those who wish to *Stop Jacob Zuma from becoming SA's next president*, are likely to be opposed to the party for which Zuma is the presidential candidate. It is significant also that given the human rights atrocities committed by the authorities under apartheid, only one rather ambiguous reference (by *Sharlene*) is made to apartheid political violence in the case of June sixteenth.

Michael's reference to "the fact that a president can make comments… threatening (indirectly) militant action" may be a reference to president of the ANC Youth League Julius Malema's comment "We are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma" (Malema, 2009 cited in Ndlovu, 2010). *Michael*'s use of the word "(indirectly)" may refer to the fact that it was Malema, and not Zuma 'directly', who was the author of the threat. The thread of *Michael*'s argument is that such militant threats stand in contradiction to democratic principles. However, in South Africa militant action was implemented as one of the measures towards securing democracy "In contrast to most liberation movements, the struggle against apartheid developed especially militant and organized social movements" (Heller, 2001:146). Whereas democratic theory maintains that "Violence begins where democracy ends" (Pepinsky, 1991, abstract cited by NCJRS), this aspect of South African history might undermine such a binary view, thus rendering South African citizens thoughts on this a likely site for contradictory contextual

rationalities. This contradiction may be illustrated by *Werner*'s, presumably ironical, statement "Viva the Mother of the Nation. Stompie salutes you were ever hy might be..."

(b) General Violent Crime

Sherene Cooper: its in the humans blood to kill,no matter wot race or skin colour.cain killed abel because of jealousy.moses killed an egyptian out of anger.herod killed all the baby boys,because he was threatened by another ruling party.david killed his half brother for raping his sister.so wot makes this nation so different?

Nzuzo Chiliza: The CBD no bro, its not safe lol, come to the North

Tiffany Lassauniere: crime is at an all time high and there is little hope of this improving. and the most worrying is the fact that our government seems to be unwilling to acknowledge these problems

Common forms of criminal violence, in the South African context, are only alluded to three times, in passing, by white contributors, whereas *Sanele* in particular foregrounds criminal violence as a central concern (discussed in the section on *Race*) A comment by *Jaco* will be discussed under the *Corruption* section of the analysis.

There are at least two explanations as to why white South Africans in this newsgroup are less active in their discussion of ordinary criminal violence, than of political violence. Firstly, that "Black South Africans are much more likely to be victims of crime, largely because they are less able to afford the protections and security measures which most white South Africans, as still privileged citizens, are able to acquire" (Silber and Geffen, 2009), and therefore the threat of violent crime has relatively less proximity to the lives of white South Africans. In certain contexts, however, white victimisation does occur, for example farm murders appear to have a larger than population-consistent proportion of white victims.

Secondly, whites may feel uncomfortable discussing general violent crime since "the crime rates in South Africa are high as a consequence of numerous interrelated factors – many of which are the working through of the past brutalization of our society by the system of white supremacy, and none of which relate to inherent criminal tendencies in black people" (Silber and Geffen, 2009). The discourses relating to crime which attributes violence to "white supremacy", may intensify feelings of white guilt in relation to the subject matter, causing whites to feel that complaining about the crime rate detracts from their credibility as citizens reformed from apartheid mentality. Linked to this is the possibility already discussed in the *Race* component of the analysis, whereby the proximity of the topic of general violent crime to the demographic of race may preclude the white subject position from discussion on this theme, since this may result in their being labelled as racist.

In contrast to the discussion between *Sanele* and *Tiffany*, which illustrates the racialised dimension of this topic, *Sherene*'s statement is racially neutral. In relation to the discussion between *Sanele* and *Tiffany*, *Sherene* claims that "its in the humans blood to kill,no matter wot race or skin colour". Considering that *Sherene*'s later comments could be construed as evidence of an ideology influenced by apartheid discourse, and hence racist (see *myth of the inherent racism of whites* section of this analysis), it is interesting that she does not subscribe to the myth of the inherent violence of black men.

Nzuzo's comment is part of a discussion between himself and *Sanele*, where *Nzuzo* opposes *Sanele*'s claim regarding the inherent violence of black men, and requests to meet him, face-to-face, to discuss the matter. *Sanele* proposes the CBD of Durban as a meeting place, to which *Nzuzo* responds "The CBD no bro, its not safe lol, come to the North", illustrating that despite his refutation of the myth advanced by *Sanele*, he is concerned about crime in the metropolis and proposes the more affluent Northern suburbs as a 'safer' location. *Nzuzo*'s statement might be interpreted as attributing crime to the lower economic classes, whereas *Sanele* does not acknowledge this dimension of the

stereotype violent criminal, except for the comment "MAYBE WE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES BUT DAMMN ITS BAD!!!".

(c) Corruption (excluding comments linking to Zuma)

Jaco Veldsman: Ongama, dont be an idiot. Go look at the people leading the different party. ANC and COPE have alot of criminals running their parties. You wonder and want crime to stop in SA? Start by putting the corrupt leaders in prison. And PLEASE, grow up and stop making everything about race! Thats why Zimbabwe is where it is, because of a corrupt president... and guess what? HE BLAMES IT ON THE WHITES!

Sanele Khanyile: LETS HOPE WE AINT JUS PUTIING THEM THERE TO CHOW OUR MONEY AND BECOME FAT CATS THAT CANT EVEN CHASE THE MOUSE

Jaco's comment links to both corruption and the problem of crime in South Africa. His comment could be interpreted as either propounding the idea that politicians should lead by example, or that in a country where instances of white collar crime in government are not adequately punished it is to be expected that more general crime also be treated apathetically. In racial terms, the comparison *Jaco* draws between South Africa and Zimbabwe may also rest on ANC discourse which has been known to link allegations of corruption against its leaders with racism (Makinana, 2010). However, government have come under fire from black critics too, who are not to be fobbed off with accusations of racism: "All we ever see in this country is musical chairs . . . but it is our money they are wasting. We have every right to ask them what is going on and — because we are black — they can't play the race card against us," Matsunyane (2010 quoted in Clayton, 2010).

Sanele's reference to "FAT CATS" "CHOW(*ing*) OUR MONEY" illustrates that he is concerned about corrupt government officials slaking their greed with tax payers' money.

His reference to 'FAT CATS THAT CANT EVEN CHASE THE MOUSE" might also link comment to the perceived lack of governmental concern about crime, since his statement follows an exchange with *Tiffany* that is about crime in South Africa.

7.3.6 Zuma

Introduction:

When one considers that the newsgroup was established under the title *Help Us Stop Zuma from Becoming South Africa's Next President*, it is noteworthy how comparatively few comments directly relate to Zuma, with only twelve comments referring to him by name. This is symptomatic of the dynamic fluidity of the medium compared with more traditional forms of mass media, since once a newsgroup has been established by the administrator (the term given on Facebook to the person who starts off a newsgroup), they have little control over the direction the conversation will take from that point.

Discussion relating to Zuma revolves around four major themes: Allegations of Rape and Corruption, Democracy, HIV/AIDS and Reactions to Zuma as President.

(a) Allegations of Rape and Corruption:

Some of the discussion relating to this topic, in particular discussion of *Andrea*'s comment is to be found in the section of the analysis that deals with the myth of the inherent racism of whites. Briefly summarised, the case presented in that section is that some Afrocentric philosophers have claimed that Zuma's rape allegation in particular is evidence of white racist judgement of normal aspects of Zulu tradition in relations between men and women. This has been refuted however by some black feminists who claim that using culture as "an excuse" (Kadalie, 2010) discredits Zulu culture and angers many black people.

Speaking generally about Zuma's corruption charge, Afrocentric philosopher Madlala states that even if Zuma is corrupt, the Afrocentric perspective would not see this as rendering Zuma unfit

for presidency since "Africans look at the bigger picture, not because they condone corruption, but because they weigh other things in balance" (Madlala, 2005 in Sesanti, 2008:365). The term 'African' here is problematic and has been dwelt on by a number of intellectuals and social commentators (Nakasa, 1964; Mda, 1999; Nesbitt, 1999 and Granelli, 1999, cited in Fourie, 2008: 289-290, among others), but if Madlala means 'black' by "African", the text illustrates that opposition to Zuma and aversion to corruption originates from both black and white South Africans. A response to this may be that as blacks have been swamped by Eurocentric ideology in the media and in schools, they may have internalised 'foreign' attitudes.

Carel Steenkamp: OOOooooh hell, no we have a corrupt-rapist for a president. Only in our banana republic!!! Our politic's are a JOKE damnit!!!

Debra Ann Landman: In support of the application to have the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution of Jacob Zuma reviewed:
We, the undersigned, believe that the NDPP's decision to discontinue the prosecution of Jacob Zuma was taken on political, not legal grounds.
As the NDPP conceded, Zuma has not been acquitted. Only a court of law can do that. Only a court of law can examine and cross-examine the evidence that the NDPP submitted in mitigation of the decision to drop the charges. And only a court of law can determine whether the decision itself was lawful or not.
We, the undersigned, therefore support the application for a judicial review of the NDPP's decision to drop the charges against Zuma.

Andrea Kühn: Ongama: How can you be such an idiot? The reason why anyone, including some white people, dislike Zuma has EVERYTHING to do with his character and NOTHING to do with his skin color. That should be obvious. And he has NO merits. He's uneducated, a liar, a rapist and corrupt. That spells disaster for our already meager economy. Some of us don't want to immigrate, because we

love the country, that's WHY we hate to see it falling into the hands of such an imbecile. How can you not see that????

Tiffany Lassauniere: …in much the same way that zuma (and his cronies for that matter) refuse to acknowledge his guilt. this is ostrich behaviour...just pretend it's not happening.

The most striking feature about discussion in the text regarding Zuma's rape and corruption allegations, is that contributors' comments belie serious conviction of Zuma's guilt, despite his acquittal on the charge of rape and the fact that the corruption charges were dropped. This may be seen to confirm Zuma's claim that he was convicted through the media "in the court of public opinion" (Zuma, 2009 in SAPA, 2009b). The comments which refer to Zuma as a "a corrupt-rapist" may also indicate that these contributors perceive Zuma's acquittal as evidence that the judiciary is not free from political interference, which may account for *Michael*'s comment "When the justice system fails what else is there?", as well as concern by contributors for the health of South African democracy under Zuma's leadership.

The post by *Debra Ann* is a link to an online petition by the Democratic Alliance with the purpose of reviving the corruption charges against Zuma. Since the petition originates from the DA, there is vested political interest in this group attempting to revive Zuma's case. It is significant, however, that the petition is reproduced here by a private individual (through the Internet I have searched for evidence that *Debra Ann* is employed by the DA, but this does not appear to be the case) in an attempt to achieve some kind of action beyond that of the exchange of public opinions through the newsgroup. Further commentary on this petition can be found in the ethnographic component of the research.

(b) Zuma and Democracy

Ongama Ntloko: why is it tht all whte pple hate Zuma and thy worshp Zille? Why? I dnt like the character of the man bt he is a S.A and soon to be our president. Our fight against Zuma should nt be racial bt on merits.

If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party.ie PAC has no whites

[Steven Bales](#): Ongama perhaps it ISN'T based on race, white people not voting for Zuma is because they are of the opinion that he will not be a good president. The same goes for the black people who voted against him. Saying that "all white people worship Zille" is in itself a huge generalisation, and as we know racism falls under the category of generalisation. I myself do not agree with Zille purely because I believe the DA's campaign was an attempt to slander Zuma, and they offered no alternative. It was as if they were defined by Zuma.

If people wish to fight Zuma by voting DA, that is their choice. You have no right to state that it is purely a race issue and say that their concerns are not worth listening to because they vote for a white woman. THAT is racist.

Michael De Villiers: However, the fact that a president can make comments contradicting the core values of democracy, discriminating against ANYONE , can do whatever he pleases by threatening (indirectly) militant action is of great concern. He has a hysterical support base willing to do anything he says. When the justice system fails what else is there?

Tiffany Lassauniere: ...your points are correct though in that zuma has little regard for democracy :(

I have already analysed these comments in terms of the racial aspect under the heading of the myth of the inherent racism of whites. Briefly, I have linked *Ongama's* statement to allegations levelled at the DA in particular, which frequently labels detractors of the ANC

as 'racist'. 'Racism' being an extremely undesirable characteristic in South Africa today, I argue that this device contributes to maintaining ANC power. In a de facto single-party state, this discourse affecting 'deviant' political parties and negating criticism of government may function as a retardant to liberal democracy.

In his statement *Ongama* puts forward the idea that whites who oppose Zuma do so on purely racial grounds, despite the fact that as a black South African himself, *Ongama* "dnt like the character of the man (*i.e. Zuma*)". He further refers to "Our fight against Zuma", implicating himself as a Zuma detractor.

Ongama's suggestion to whites as a 'cure' for this alleged racism, is that they vote for 'multiracial' or 'black dominated' parties, rather than the DA, which (in spite of it's multiracial support base) is perceived as a 'white' party, since it's leader Helen Zille is a white woman. *Steven* responds by labelling *Ongama*'s rationale as racist, but asserts that he disapproved of the DA's election campaign himself, since "the DA's campaign was an attempt to slander Zuma, and they offered no alternative". This statement by *Steven* functions as a partial defence of Zuma, in what he apparently sees this as an unfair form of canvassing on the part of the DA, even though in a prior comment *Steven* voiced his censure the ANC.

Michael's comment is indicative of the opinion that Zuma is a threat to democracy. He cites three reasons for this assertion. In his opinion Zuma "make(*s*) comments contradicting the core values of democracy". This may be a reference to a comment made by Zuma pronouncing that no other party would rule South Africa, which drew much criticism on the basis of the undemocratic attitude it evinces:

> "God expects us to rule this country because we are the only organisation which was blessed by pastors when it was formed. It is even blessed in Heaven. That is why we will rule until Jesus comes back. We should not allow anyone to govern our city when we are ruling the country" (Zuma, 2008 cited in Democratic Alliance, 2008).

The second reason *Michael* gives for considering Zuma as a threat to democracy is that he "can…make statements discriminating against ANYONE", which could be a reference to Zuma's statement, which denied that English speaking white South Africans are truly South African. "Of all the white groups that are in South Africa, it is only the Afrikaners that are truly South Africans in the true sense of the word" (Zuma, 2009 in O'Grady and Marrian, 2009). *Michael*'s comment could also refer to derogatory statements made by Zuma about homosexuals in reference to same-sex marriage as "a disgrace to the nation and to God" (Zuma, 2006). Zuma went further to say "When I was growing up, an *ungqingili* (*a homosexual*) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out" (*ibid*). These statements are unconstitutional in terms of provision 2c of section 16 (Freedom of Expression), Section 20 (Citizenship) and subsection 4 of section 9 (Equality).

Michael's third reason for considering Zuma as a threat to democracy in South Africa, that Zuma "threaten(*s*) (indirectly) militant action is of great concern", too could be interpreted as constitutionally inappropriate, also in terms of section16 provision 2c. *Michael*'s statement may be linked to the controversy surrounding Zuma's use of *Mshini Wam',* a Struggle song meaning "bring me my machine gun" (directed then against the ruling white minority), in his presidential campaign. *Michael*'s statement could also refer to the militant inflection adopted by some of Zuma's political allies. This is reflected in his support from the Umkhonto weSizwe Veterans Association (Majova et al, 2007), and comments by ANC Youth League President Julius Malema ("We are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma," Malema, 2009 cited in Ndlovu, 2010) and general-secretary of Cosatu, Zwelinzima Vavi ("We are prepared to die for Zuma," Vavi, 2009 cited in Chothia, 2009). For more discussion on the racial aspect of these comments, see *the myth of the inherent violence of black men* and *the myth of the inherent racism of whites*.

Michael's comments can be seen as political resistance discourse, somewhat ironically disqualifying Zuma as a worthy president, despite his majority support, on the basis that Zuma embraces undemocratic principles. Many of the statements in the text relating to Zuma likewise signal that Zuma's ascendancy is representative of the state of democracy in South Africa and the tensions and anxieties that accompany this.

(c) Zuma and HIV/AIDS

Tracey Chananie: And the tragic comedy begins. Don't forget to shower at least once a day

Tiego Mogano: I saw zuma taking nevirapine- anti-retroviral drugs from forest town pharmacy, Dnt worry he'll vanish.

The linking of Zuma to HIV/AIDS is informed by comments Zuma made in court during his rape trial, where he affirmed that he knowingly had unprotected sex with an HIV positive woman. *Tracey*'s comment links to Zuma's related statement that he took a shower to avoid HIV transmission after intercourse, a statement that has been condemned by AIDS activists. Zuma, who is former chairperson of the South Africa National Aids Council, was criticised by the Treatment Action Campaign, who said that Zuma's irresponsibility in this matter undermined years of AIDS education initiatives, and that the issue was larger than the personal risk Zuma's actions incurred, since "the president is not just any person. People look to him to set an example" (TAC newsletter, quoted in SAPA, 2010).

Despite these assertions, it would appear that at least some members of the newsgroup are educated enough about HIV transmission to consider Zuma's remarks as ludicrous and have thus not been influenced by his shower statement.

The comment by *Tiego* in the text is interesting even if we do not credit the 'truth' of the claim. In terms of current South African law, if the assertion that 'Jacob Zuma is HIV positive' appeared in other forms of media, such as television or print, this would be regarded as slander. In the new media however, despite the Internet Service Providers Association's code of conduct, there is no illegality in *Tiego* making this statement via this post-modern medium. This may be due to the fact that Internet is not governed by the imperatives of reason and objectiveness, but in the post modern tradition can be seen as "Pure noise…, a pure implosion, a black hole where all meaning and messages are

absorbed in the whirlpool and kaleidoscope of radical semiurgy… of inertia and apathy"
(Kellner, 1995:237 in Fourie, 2008: 253), and therefore lacking in credibility.

(d) Reactions to Zuma as President

Mandilakhe Siyongwana: WE'VE FAILED.....WE'VE REALLY REALLY FAILED.
HERE COMES THE DOWNFALL OF OUR OH SO
BUTIFUL COUNTRY,ZUMA IS CLOSE, HE'S HERE
TAKING OVER...KILL ME FAST SUM1!!!!!!

Roxy Rodrigues: No0o0oo0o0o0o0o0o0o0!!!!!!!!!!! I dont want zuma 2 become
president!!!!!!

Carel Steenkamp: OOOooooh hell, no we have a corrupt-rapist for a
president. Only in our banana republic!!! Our politic's are a
JOKE damnit!!!

Brian Mpumelelo Sithole: There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists
have been saying that since 94... The people have spoken.
Long Live the President.

Mosa Moamogoe: An economist cudnt make our economy grow. I wonder
how people expect a person who has a third grade to help
our economy.

With the exception of the somewhat ambiguous comment by *Brian*, the newsgroup's
reactions to the election results express disappointment and dismay. It is significant,
given the discourse identified earlier in the analysis linking anti-ANC sentiments to white
racism, that both black and white South Africans are upset by Zuma's victory when it is
officially released.

The reaction by *Mandilakhe,* "KILL ME FAST SUM1!!!!!!", may be considered as the most hyperbolic negative reaction to the news of Zuma as president elect. The fact that this comment originates from a female contributor may link this excessively pessimistic comment to the gender implications involved in the election of a man accused of rape as president of the country. Women's Rights Division executive director of Human Rights Watch, Liesl Gerntholt, said, "Mr. Zuma's comments about women during and after the trial, including about how women should dress, clearly indicate that he holds very problematic views about the roles of women and men in society," (Gerntholt, 2009, in Human Rights Watch, 2009). Zuma's appeal to Zulu culture in his defense may be a contributing factor in *Mandilakhe*'s apparent fear, since her given name suggests that she is a Zulu herself.

Mandilakhe's remark, "WE'VE FAILED.....WE'VE REALLY REALLY FAILED," does not specify in what particular she considers South Africa to have 'failed' by electing Zuma, which could imply that she feels this as a general failure with far reaching consequences too numerous to name. It may also refer to South Africa as a young democracy, which would indicate that *Mandilakhe* considers the nation as vulnerable.

In *Roxy*'s comment "No0o0oo0o0o0o0o0o0!!!!!!!!!!!" indicates an extremely negative response to the election of Zuma in it's use of seventeen 'o's, some of them capitals, and ten exclamation marks.
Carel's comment begins with "OOOooooh hell, no," using mildly vulgar language to convey his dissatisfaction with the election results. This statement could be linked to the US Vietnam War protestors' chant "Hell no, we won't go," which is appropriate since *Carel*'s statement echoes the political defiance associated with that slogan. Although *Carel* does not include "we won't go", if his comment was inspired by it, this may link to discourses already alluded to in the text about 'white flight' from South Africa.

"[W]e have a corrupt-rapist for a president. Only in our banana republic!!! Our politic's are a JOKE damnit!!!" *Carel* calls South Africa "our banana republic". This term is usually associated with third world nations run by a small corrupt elite, economically

dependent on very limited agricultural commodities, such as bananas. Because of the corruption of the government in such cases there is usually no separation of powers, which may link to earlier insinuations in the text that Zuma escaped conviction due to political interference in judicial processes.

"An economist cudnt make our economy grow. I wonder how people expect a person who has a third grade to help our economy," is *Mosa*'s response to Zuma's presidency, possibly indicating that the question of the economy is imperative to him. By "an economist", *Mosa* may be referring to former minister of finance Trevor Manuel, and comparing his level of education with Zuma's, thus drawing attention to what may be considered one of Zuma's weaknesses as a presidential candidate.

Brian's response, "There goes the country's economy... Bloody pessimists have been saying that since 94... The people have spoken. Long Live the President," is perhaps ambiguous, and derives intended meaning from which part one puts an ironical reading on. If the first, then *Brian*'s response is the only pro-Zuma reaction to election results in the text, and "bloody pessimists" may refer to white pessimism since *Brian* specifies "since 94", which is when South Africa came under black rule in its first democratic election. If the racial implication was intentional, the fact that *Mosa*'s (the name implies a black male) comment was 'pessimistic' too, would appear to detract from the validity of *Brian*'s implied racial dimension of pessimism for the economy. In this case "the people have spoken… Long Live the President" is a comment celebratory of the outcome of the democratic election.

If one lays the ironic stress on the second part of *Brian*'s comment, the meaning is opposite and may be interpreted as scornful of those who labelled ANC detractors as 'bloody pessimists', as the Human Development Index for South Africa has slipped from 90th in the world to 120th since the ANC came into power (Seekings, 2006: 4). With this reading of *Brian*'s comment, the latter part may be construed as expressing doubt over the judgement of the masses in determining leadership in democratic processes. In this case, *Brian*'s statement "Long Live the President" could be seen as drawing parallels

between South Africa under Zuma, and countries such as Zimbabwe, where a democratically elected leader becomes a dictator and effectively rules the country till death.

Conclusion: South Africanness

This section is derived from comments about South Africa as a nation as well as information gleaned from prior aspects of the critical discourse analysis which illustrate South African concerns and preoccupations. This brief recapitulation also serves the purpose of a conclusion to the chapter.

South Africanness is associated with violence and killing in the text, in comments by both black and white members of the newsgroup. Werner says "SA is a killing country" in agreement with *Sanele*'s statement, "....I GUESS KILLING ITS IN OUR BLOOD NOW (FACT)". *Sherene,* however, claims that this is not a uniquely South African trait, and the implication is that South Africa is no worse off in this regard compared to other nations, is reflected in her statement "its in the humans blood to kill… makes this nation so different?" As the theme of violent crime is prominent in the text, this reflects that contributors are concerned about this tendency and their comments reveal that the government is considered as negligent in its failure to effectively deal with crime.

Negative perceptions of South Africa are present in the text ("THE COUNTRY IF (*is*) FUCKED" – *Sanele*), however most of these comments are tempered with some positive slant. *Mandilakhe* says "WE'VE FAILED.....WE'VE REALLY REALLY FAILED. HERE COMES THE DOWNFALL OF OUR OH SO BUTIFUL COUNTRY," where the use of "OH SO BUTIFUL" stresses positive aspects of South Africa and its multicultural identity. Even *Carel*'s comment, "OOOooooh hell, no we have a corrupt-rapist for a president. Only in our banana republic!!! Our politic's are a JOKE damnit!!" cannot be considered entirely negative, since he identifies himself with the nation, referring to "*our* banana republic" and "our politics". This aspect of the language gives the impression that despite the country's flaws, he is committed to his identity as a South African.

Related to *Carel*'s strong sense of South Africanness despite its problems, is the theme of 'white flight' from South Africa. *Ongama* concludes his statement on the perceived racism of whites in their alleged unanimous support for the DA with the comment, "If u dnt agree mayb jst follow all those who went to the UK, AUSTRALIA or u cn fight Zuma nt basd on his skin bt hs character by joinng a multiracial or black dominatd party." The white South African perspective is offered by *Andrea*, "Some of us don't want to immigrate, because we love the country, that's WHY we hate to see it falling into the hands of such an imbecile. How can you not see that????", and *Tiffany*:

> "but what i am asking is this: why is it that when we argue the point that the ANC has done jack for SA and we are declining into a third world mess, the answer seems to be that this is africa and if we want europe we need to go to europe. so is it not fair to assume that the lifestyle which we desire is not a priority for the majority here?"

I have argued, under the section of *the myth of the inherent racism of whites* that these statements are linked to discourse in the service of ANC power, since dissatisfaction with the government is popularly attributed to specifically white scepticism.

Despite the ambivalence which characterises South Africanness in the text, contributors do not present a picture of apathy, but rather one of celebrating the positive aspects of South Africa and while they may bemoan certain social and political concerns, the text contains enough hopeful remarks that the newsgroup does not read as a jeremiad.
"I think that this election points to a need 4 the country to come together to stand 4 what is right. The battle is not lost, we've made so many cracks. This is only the bgning," says *Zethu*, presenting a dimension of South African discourse reminiscent of those associated with 'the Rainbow Nation' on South Africa's emergence into the democratic era.

Tiffany's response to *Sanele*'s frustration with the crime rate exemplifies this spirit: "we can choose. and we can choose a better future. zethu is right...we choose to stand up and be proud citizens and do the right thing, one step at a time and we can see change." While these statements may be idealistic, they do represent a level of optimism in South

Africanness that is rather stirring. *Tiffany,* who at times belies irritation with the political status quo, appears to have a greater measure of faith in ordinary South Africans, saying, "we made it through our first election in 1994 without too much trouble...that's what makes us different :)".

Some measure of optimism for the political scene in South Africa is elicited by the election results which announce that the ANC "just fails to get two-thirds majority" (*Lorimar*). *Garg* comments, "Guys, things are getting much better. The ANC missed its 2 thirds majority and we now have Cope. 2 opposition parties are better than one! We're no longer in danger of turning into a one party dictatorship Plus, we can always move to the Western Cape and consolidate the Godzille..." The text reveals a strong affinity for the Western Cape, the only province under DA administration. *Mogamat* writes, "Dats a cool id evry1 jus move 2 WC best prov in da country," and is seconded by Reinhardt, "Great idea! Hopefully it spreads to other provinces as well so that we can hav a better country. Zille is my hero. Haha!". These comments illustrate that their enthusiasm for the Western Cape is derived from a sense of autonomy from the ANC under the provincial government of the DA.

The text reveals that in 2009, fifteen years since white minority rule ended, racial issues continue to consume South African discourse on every subject, with the exception of a xenophobic outburst which ironically seemed to have the effect of uniting black and white in the common defence of South Africa. The most dominant themes in the text were the *myth of the inherent violence of black men* and the *myth of the inherent racism of whites.* The latter appears to be linked to social backlash for a half century of apartheid, were racially discriminatory policies advanced white interests and supported human rights violations on the black majority, for the embracing of a more Afrocentric politically dominant discourse. Cain Hope Felder, academic supporter of Afrocentricism warns against radical tendencies in the pursuit of "re-establishing Africa and its descendants as centers of value":

> " Nevertheless, those of us who wish to advance multiculturalism and a kind of Afrocentrism as corrective historiography must beware of certain pitfalls:

A. Demonizing categorically all white people, without careful differentiation between persons of goodwill…and those white adversaries who consciously and systematically perpetuate racism.

B. Replacing Eurocentrism with an equally hierarchical, gender-insensitive, and racially exclusive "centrism"

C. Adopting multiculturalism as a curricular alternative that eliminates, marginalizes, or vilifies European heritage to the point that Europe epitomizes all the evil in the world; this results in a balkanization of ethnic studies.

D. Not differentiating between the different types of multiculturalism and Afrocentrism that exist." (Felder, 1994)

The critical discourse analysis illustrates that the white subject position appears to be frequently confined in topics with any proximity to race, since frequent recourse to 'the race card', feelings of 'white guilt' and the wish to be politically correct may limit what the white subject position is able to express (in terms of D'Souza & MacNeil's work on the silencing of discourses, 1992 in Van Boven, 2000: 267). Drawing on McKee (2005:16) I have argued that this may have a negative impact on democratic functioning. The perception, particularly held by white contributors, that South Africa's democracy is threatened may be related to the fact that they feel deprived of a voice to express their concerns.

With regard to the *myth of the inherent racism of whites*, however, it is necessary to state that some white contributors' comments did reveal aspects of residual discourse derived from apartheid ideology, although often sophisticated methods of veiling racist intent were also observable in the text.

The myth of the inherent violence of black men has proximity to this aspect of contemporary South African discourse, in that the high crime rate intersecting with the fact that the majority of violent criminals in South Africa are black males, leads to suspicion between the racial groups in the guise of self-preservation. If whites 'fear' black males, they are perceived as racist. Racism is perceived as the rejection of the

advances made since apartheid and fuels black-on-white forms of racism. In this way these racially bound myths feed off one another in what can only be described as a vicious circle of discourses.

Sanele's comments betray the fact that it is not only whites who subscribe to the myth of the inherent violence of black men. As a black man himself, *Sanele* appears to resent black males who justify the myth by engaging in violent criminal activities, possibly because he feels that he too is maligned by implication in this myth, due to his race and gender.

The proximity of race to political allegiance also appears to fuel racial tensions in the newsgroup. The DA, presumably by virtue of being led by a white woman, is perceived as the 'white' party. The fact that Zille is a woman may also be offensive to traditional African values, since those cultures generally do not welcome overt political participation due to gender norms.

The fact that over ninety per cent of the ANC support base is black means that this party is perceived as the party who protect black interests. The imbuing of this racial dimension to ANC identity appears to the benefit of the ruling party, since criticism of government policy or ANC party members is easily deflected by recourse to the race card and 'white' dissatisfaction. Of particular relevance is the comment made by Matsunyane, a radio personality: "We have every right to ask them (*the government*) what is going on and — because we are black — they can't play the race card against us," (Matsunyane 2010 quoted in Clayton, 2010). This illustrates that criticism of government is not peculiar to white South Africans, however, the strongly established discourse which relates black identity and ANC identity may serve to implicate black ANC detractors as race traitors.

Despite the title of the newsgroup, which would imply that the majority of conversation would revolve around Zuma, discussion directly relating to the ANC presidential candidate was limited. Most of the discussion that did centre on Zuma was focused on the rape and corruption allegations that had lately blemished his campaign. The other

dominant concern arising in the text relating to Zuma's bid for presidency was the perception that Zuma's past statements belied 'undemocratic' tendencies. This highlighted the concern felt by these South African contributors about democratic principles, expressing that they feel 'protective' of democratic South Africa.

Unsurprisingly, given the title of the newsgroup, reaction to the news that Jacob Zuma had been voted president elect was almost unanimously negative in the text. What was significant, however, was that both black and white contributors lamented his victory – the most ardent arising from the only South African black female contributor. Significantly, however, even these comments, which may be seen as epistles of gloom for the political future of the nation, were not devoid of patriotic references to "our" "BUTIFUL" South Africa.

The very act of joining this particular newsgroup, with its name delineating it as conspicuously South African in its subject matter, from the practically limitless array of choice offered by cyberspace, suggests the patriotism of contributors and implies the importance local matters have to them. The Internet is remarkable in its function of linking individuals from all over the world in a "global village" (Mcluhan, 1964 in Fourie, 2007: 95), and yet South Africans have chosen to band together in this newsgroup in order to share their perspectives on politics and society.

In conclusion I turn to the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Although Dickens wrote this a hundred and fifty years before this newsgroup was formed, the atmosphere evoked is so appropriate to this critical discourse analysis, as to prove the timelessness of human feeling with regard to times of political and social change. As Dickens is a far superior pensmith to me, I leave him to conclude the chapter:

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the

other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only." (Dickens, 1859:3)