

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**



EMS Faculty

Department of Political Studies

**Thesis title: Intra-race identity formation in democratic South Africa: an investigation of the “coconut”**

A Mini-Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in the Department of Political Studies, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), University of the Western Cape.

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**Date: 2 March 2022**

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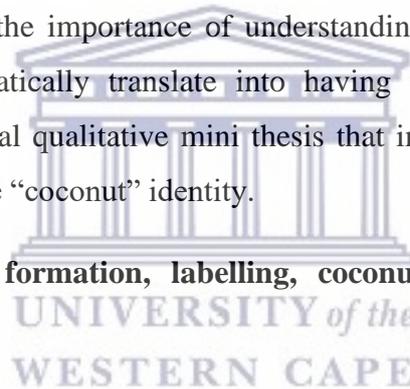
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## **Abstract**

Post-apartheid South Africa has strived for change through the implementation of preferential procurement policy legislations such as the Black Economic Empowerment Act, Employment Equality Act, as well as the right to education for all has opened opportunities for many who were previously disadvantaged. Being black in apartheid South Africa meant being middle class came with many constant difficulties of negotiating boundaries with community members that were not middle class and spaces that were middle class but white, thus raising several racial dynamics not experienced at 'home.' Being black in post-apartheid South Africa has also come with difficulties of constantly evolving social identity changes and categorisation. This mini thesis aims to analyse dynamics within black culture, which includes issues of identity labelling and social categorisation within black communities. The investigation aims to highlight that boxing black people as being homogenous, is misguided. The study looks to point out the importance of understanding that coming from the same racial group does not automatically translate into having the same group membership experience. This is a conceptual qualitative mini thesis that investigates the conditions that give rise to the formation of the "coconut" identity.

**Key words:** class, identity formation, labelling, coconut, Black community, post-apartheid



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# Table of Contents

DECLARATION

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context pg.1

1.2 Significance of the Study pg.3

1.3 Research problem pg.3

1.4 Research Question pg.3

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study pg.4

1.6 Methodology pg.6

1.7 Research Methods pg.6

1.8 Outline/Structure of thesis pg.7

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL EXPOSITION OF RACE AND IDENTITY  
FORMATION IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 “Coconut” (colourism) labelling on a global scale pg.8

2.1.2 “Coconut” labelling in South Africa described pg.11

2.2 “Coconut” described pg. 13

2.3 Conceptualisation: “Coconut” labelling pg.13

2.4 Structural changes contribution to labelling pg.17

2.4.1 Colonial structures linked to labelling pg.17

2.4.2 Apartheid structures linked changes to labelling pg.18

2.4.3 Post-apartheid structures linked changes to labelling pg.18

2.4 Politics of identity in Democratic South Africa pg.20

2.5 Societal categorisation contributing to labelling pg.22

2.6 Conclusion pg.24



## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Social Identity Theory (SIT)	pg.25
3.2 Self-categorisation theory (SCT)	pg.26
3.3 Identity	pg.27
3.4 Cross-cultural hybrid identity	pg.28
3.5 Weber's Theory on Class	pg.29
3.5.1 Class	pg.29
3.5.2 Status	pg.30
3.6 Conclusion	pg.31

## CHAPTER FOUR: BLACK-ISH SITCOM AND COCONUT NOVEL BY KOPANO MATLWA

4.1 Black-ish sitcom	pg.33
4.1.1 Season 1 episode 20: Switch Hitting	pg.34
4.2.1 Season 5 episode 10: Black Like Us	pg.36
4.2 Constructions of labels in South African	pg.37
4.2.1 <i>Coconut</i> novel by Kopano Matlwa	pg.37
4.2.2 Let's Talk Colourism: How Do We Define Beauty?	pg.42
4.2.3 The People vs The People	pg.43
4.3 Conclusion	pg.45

## CHAPTER FIVE: SEDIMENTING THE "COCONUT" LABEL

5.1 Underlying themes and dynamics between Black-ish and Coconut	pg.46
5.1.1 Economic position	pg.46
5.1.2 Income	pg.47
5.1.3 Class position	pg.49
5.1.4 Language	pg.51
5.2 Internalised Oppression	pg.53
5.4 Conclusion	pg.55

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Recap of Study pg.56

6.2 Summary of findings pg.58

6.3 Conclusion pg.59

BIBLIOGRAPHY pg.60



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces and sets out the context of the research; it spells out the significance of the study, identifies the problem and specifies the methodology and theories that are used.

### 1.1 Background and Context

The transition to a democratic political system in post-apartheid South Africa has been accompanied by many changes in the political, economic, and social spheres of the country. This democratic imperative has aimed to redress the past apartheid legacies of economic exclusion and marginalisation. For Pillay (2014:8) improving the basic conditions in which people live, should in turn create a better life for all. In line with this, South Africa's post-apartheid state has implemented policies that would progressively work in alleviating poverty and inequality. To achieve this, South Africa has taken on the role of a 'developmental state' which encourages state intervention with clear economic and social objectives. There has been no set description of how or what a developmental state should look like and developmental state policies that work for one country may not necessarily work for another (Craig, 2017).

Part of democratic South Africa includes a Constitution and a Bill of Rights, that promotes the rights and privileges of all citizens in the country by declaring among other things fundamental human rights such as the freedom of expression, basic education, freedom to make political choices including forming a political party, having free, fair and regular elections that allows all citizens to make their voices heard; "one vote, one voice" (Asmal, 2007). These changes have resulted in the country seeing exponential growth in the black population's social mobility. It cannot be disputed that some of these changes have been positive. However, these changes have also been accompanied by growing inequalities. These growing levels of inequalities have since taken intra-racial divisions, apart from the country's historical inter-racial inequalities of the apartheid era (Seekings & Nattrass 2002 and Leibbrant et al., 2010). This, for Keswell (2004), Gumede (2010) and Leibbrant (2011) should not be interpreted as inter-racial inequality being eroded but must rather factor in that there is a growing number of black people moving into different social strata that are affording many a life that would otherwise not be possible under the apartheid regime. Added to this has been the constant identity struggle that young black South Africans face who have been categorised as not being "black enough". This saw the emergence of labels such as "coconut" directed at young people for certain behaviours, way of speaking (accents),

dressing or even dancing. These labels came from their peers or even family members who do not necessarily agree with their behaviours associated with these labels. Some young black South Africans have rejected such labels while others have embraced them and opted to redefine their narrative.

This has resulted in the construction of new social categories where black South Africans who have moved into the once white dominated middle class are subjected to intra-racial labelling by members of their own group. For example, black children who have been fortunate enough to attend private or ‘former model C’ schools, live in ‘suburbia’ areas and have been generally labelled as well-off have been ‘boxed’ into the social category of being a “coconut”. The “coconut” identity intra-race social categorisation has been derived from black people’s ability to afford moving between two worlds in society. For Southall (2017) being black in apartheid South Africa meant that being middle class came with many constant complexities of negotiating boundaries with community members that were not middle class and spaces that were middle class but white, thus raising several racial dynamics not experienced at ‘home’. Whereas being black in post-apartheid South Africa comes with complexities of constantly evolving social identity changes and labelling.

For De Coninck (2018), with being in this ‘newly’ formed middle class that was previously dominated by whites only, comes with a change in social labels that are often assigned to people by society and at times by people within their social group. Some of the new privileges enjoyed by black South Africans to-date include accessing spaces that allow this new social categorisation to take place. As a result of these new economic liberties, one’s blackness starts being interrogated within their group because of this new mobility. Many of these complexities arise from/could be attributed to the socio-economic and political impermanence of this social class position, resulting from the constantly shifting membership to this class. With, the focus of this mini thesis is on how intra-race labelling has played itself out in post-apartheid South Africa; and how with each change of regime comes structural changes that lead to changes in societal and people’s behaviours.

## **1.2 Significance of study**

Under apartheid, South Africa’s population was categorised into four main groups namely whites, coloureds, Indians, and blacks. While these categories do not have official status in the country, they continue to be used in demographic statistics. There has been vast literature looking at how these categories compare against each other, with little comparison of

dynamics within and of these groups. What this mini thesis does is to look at identity dynamics within a particular group; it looks at their intra-group complexities and challenges. This study specifically aims to address differences within the black community by addressing issues of intra-racial labelling. The study aims to highlight the importance of understanding that coming from the same group does not automatically translate into having shared lived experiences. People may come from similar cultural backgrounds, communities or even households but they experience life differently.

### **1.3 Research problem**

To understand social dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa, this mini thesis zooms in on the public and private narratives that surround the conditions that raise the construction of being labelled a “coconut”, tracing the way this label has changed over time. Some have taken offense to being labelled as a “coconut”, while others have embraced this label with pride in the aim of changing the negative narrative attached to it. While the coconut debate has been dominated by issues of black youths being fixated on white assimilation, this study will be zoning in on intra-racial social categorisation. This is because unlike during apartheid where social categories were fixed, enforced and static to four racial groups, post-apartheid South Africa has seen a new wave of changing social categorisation, which is an outcome of social mobility.

Research on the middle class is often motivated by an interest in the political, economic, and social benefits associated with the term, with little verifying whether the selected empirical approach is aligned with such supposed benefits. The deliberate homogeneous grouping of black people has taken away their agency in explaining that coming from the same group does not often translate into shared group identity. This mini thesis looks at why one’s blackness is often diminished and subject to extreme interrogation because of their access to certain economic liberties. The mini thesis investigates what conditions give rise to the formation of the “coconut” label, within the black community in South Africa.

### **1.4 Research Question**

What conditions facilitate the rise and formation of the “coconut”?

#### **Sub-questions:**

- Under what conditions does the formation of the “coconut” occur?

- Why does there appear to be a hierarchy of what constitutes blackness?
- What implications are there for intra-race identity formation in South Africa?

## **1.5 Research Aims and Objectives**

The study seeks to explore the idea of identity formation and labelling in post-apartheid South Africa, with the aim to understand how they are constructed in society. The study investigates and explains the formation of intra-race identities by interrogating the persistent dichotomies of insider versus outsider views of social constructed identity formation and labelling. The study seeks to explain the complexities within the black racial category by addressing issues of labelling in intra-racial group settings.

### **1.5.1 Objectives**

The objectives of this mini thesis are to:

- Analyse and breakdown the differences within the black community by addressing issues of identity labelling and formation.
- Investigate how the theoretical approach of hybrid identity as a starting point can be used to tease out how identity formation has framed itself within democratic South Africa.
- Illustrate the different instances of labelling because of moving into the middle class.
- Lastly, the study will make use of self-categorisation theory (SCT) as the main theory in the study which is derived from the social identity theory (SIT). Other theories and concepts that will be used to substantiate the argument include identity theory, cross-culture hybridity, colourism, and class.

## **1.6 Methodology**

This section aims to give a detailed analysis of the type of qualitative research design applied in the study. The study makes use of the critical research paradigm which is a form of conviction research. It is designed not just to explain or understand social reality but to change it (Grant and Giddings, 2002). The main aim of this investigation is to explain the formation of intra-race identities by interrogating the persistent dichotomies of insider versus outsider views of social constructed identity formation and labelling.

A qualitative research design is used for this mini thesis. This is because qualitative research approaches provide tools for researchers to study complex social phenomena within their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008). When the approach is applied correctly, Baxter and Jack (2008) believe that it becomes a valuable method for research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop recommendations. Choosing to use a qualitative research approach for this study has enable the study to apply the radical paradigm to its full extent, with no linear confinement or expected outcome to achieve as opposed to if the study used a positivist approach. This is especially because social ideologies are constantly evolving and producing different or more refined outcomes. This study is a conceptual case study design. A case study design allows researchers to give details on specific subjects such as a person, group, place, event, organisation, or phenomena. This is partly because the study is conducted within specific social contexts, which in this mini thesis is South Africa. A qualitative case study approach enables researchers to choose from several different case study designs (see Baxter and Jack, 2008:547), but for the purpose of this mini thesis, the study used an explanatory case study design.

Any research design has its advantages and disadvantages. Using a case study design allows the researcher to apply a variety of methodologies and rely on a variety of sources to investigate a research problem. This approach narrows complex broad issues into researchable examples. This design can extend experiences or add strength to what is already known through previous research (Yin, 2003). The design allows researchers to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of the concepts, theories, and extension of methods. The design can also provide detailed descriptions of specific and rare cases. Using a case study design allows researchers to simplify complex concepts. The disadvantage with case study designs is that they are usually context specific, a single or small number of cases offer little basis for establishing reliability or to generalise the findings to a wider population of people, place, or things (Yin, 2003).

Findings may be biased due to the extent the researcher is exposed to the issue being studied. It is difficult to replicate findings. The limitation the study faced was finding The Coconut sitcom clips on any online platform. As a result, this led to the novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa being used as a substitute source in its place to have a South African example in the study. A significant limitation is the ability of not being able to conduct an empirical study.

## 1.7 Research methods

Secondary sources to be used but not limited to will include:

- newspaper articles: We are ‘coconuts’, but there’s levels ‘bru’ by Katleho Sekhotho (September 2015); ‘I’m either too black or not black enough’: One teenager’s experience by Ariel Brown (April 2019); SLICE: I may be a ‘coconut’, but I am still black by Zinhle Belle (March 2020).
- journals articles: “Coconuts” and “Oreos”: English-speaking Zulu people in a South African township by Stephanie Rudwick (2008); The uneasy boundary work of coconuts and black diamonds by Lieve de Coninck (2018); ‘Coconut’ Notes: Discursive Constructions of Race Identity in South Africa by Stephanie Rudwick (2010).
- Video clips of the sitcoms: “black-ish, mixed-ish and coconut”. Let’s talk colourism in Black communities.
- Books: *Coconut* by Dr Kopano Matlwa (2008); *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* by Natasha Distiller (2012)

## 1.8 Outline/structure of thesis

### Chapter 2: Historical Exposition of Race and Identity Formation in Apartheid South Africa

The chapter gives a brief historical analysis of identity formation in Apartheid South Africa how racial segregation in the country has attributed towards the identity struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Now in post-apartheid South Africa, radical socio-economic changes of the past two decades have triggered a new discourse of intra-racial social categorisation and stratification. Focus will be among black South Africans and their intra-racial dynamics.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This chapter will be primarily founded on a few theories and concepts that will be utilised to explain how the construction of the “coconut” identity plays out in social categories. The theory includes the social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT) that places emphasis on the social context and how intra-group categories are constructed. This will be expanded through the theoretical premise of the identity theory which will show the multiple aspects that are inherent and influence an individual’s identity. Concepts such as

cross-culture hybridity, colourism and class will be used to show how changes in people's social contexts facilitate the making of a new identity from the fusion of two or more sedimented identities. Therefore, concluding that the construction of the coconut identity is a direct result of the social changes in a country.

#### **Chapter 4: Black-ish sitcom and *Coconut* novel by Kopano Matlwa**

This chapter will analyse *Black-ish*, an American sitcom and *Coconut*, the novel by Kopano Matlwa. The real-time show and novel are produced in two different spatial settings looking at how black people living in democratic societies have internalised conflicts that exist as a by-product of these countries' systematic racism, classic capitalist system and patriarchy that has in turn contributed to the formation of labels. The satirical sitcom *Black-ish* and novel *Coconut* give a visual representation of the different intricacies faced within black communities, with the many contemporary changes especially in post-apartheid South Africa birthing intra-racial conflicts, which in turned laid foundations for the construction of the "coconut" identity.

#### **Chapter 5: Sedimenting the "coconut" label**

This chapter will give an analysis of the two case studies pointing out the underlying themes and differences between the two. Using the theoretical tools and concepts explained in chapter 3, the analysis aims to highlight how mobility within the black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa has played an instrumental role in the construction of the "coconut" identity label. Lastly, it sums up how the construction of the "coconut" identity has been crystallised and sedimented over the years through aspects of economic position, income, class position and language inscribed in its identity.

#### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter will give a recap of the study's research problem, research design and findings. It highlights some of the puzzles that emerged within the study and gives a closing argument concluding that the construction of the "coconut" identity label within black communities' results from the economic mobility attached to the rise of the black middle class.

## **CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL EXPOSITION OF RACE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Introduction**

This chapter gives a brief historical analysis of identity formation in apartheid South Africa of how racial segregation in the country has contributed towards the identity struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Now in post-apartheid South Africa, radical socio-economic changes of the past two decades have triggered a new discourse on intra-racial social categorisation and stratification. Focus will be among black South Africans and their intra-racial dynamics.

### **2.1 “Coconut” (colourism) labelling on a global scale**

With this social description of race, comes colourism which has been used to question or attack one’s racial identity. Colourism is a term that was developed in the United States 1982 by Alice Walker in her broad spectrum of work. She described the term as a phenomenon of individuals being treated with prejudice based on their varying degrees of their skin colour, which has been typically demonstrated in inter-racial and intra-racial favouring of lighter skinned individuals over darker skinned individuals (Rupiah, 2018: n/p and Nittle, 2020). This has caused division and alienation among intra-racial groups, with those with darker skin tones feeling like they do not belong. They not only face racial discrimination from those outsiders of their communities but also face alienation from those who are meant to understand and accept them because of their shared history (Rupiah, 2018: n/p). Colourism is one of the many ways in which racism manifests itself within black communities. It is an act of discrimination based on skin colour and hair texture, with its ideology being deeply rooted in European culture, which has manifested itself in every country and culture they invaded and exploited (Staples, 2008). It also became prevalent throughout European colonial and imperial history in countries such as Brazil and India.

The legacy of colourism is evident in public forums such as television shows (which will be detailed in chapter 4) and the movie industry, which has for the longest time preferred to cast light-skinned people of colour (Golden, 2005 and Staples, 2008). For Knight (2015) skin-colour biases affect people’s perceptions and interactions on many levels subtle or loudly. In the 1950s, American social psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted “The Clark Doll Experiment” in which they sought to challenge the Supreme Court’s monumental

decision in demanding racial integration in American public schools (Knight, 2015). The Clark's challenged the court's existing opinion that "separate but equal" public schools was constitutional by testing whether African American children were emotionally and psychologically crippled by attending segregated schools (Knight, 2015). This study showed that young people of colour were well-aware of their nations disdain against all black people, with discussions amongst the sample group revealing colour-conscious banter between the students reflecting their unconscious and unspoken biases in favouring the light-skin dolls. Another example of colourism is that of assistant Professor Edward Fergus at New York University who conducted a study on Latino high school males. Fergus (2009:342) found that Mexicans and Puerto Rican males with light-skin tone were perceived as white and sometimes treated more favourably as opposed to boys of the same ethnicity who were darker being perceived as black and often experience more discrimination. The boys in the study not only navigated the world as Mexican and Puerto Rican, but each navigated different racial experiences based on external reactions of their skin colour (Fergus, 2009).

Colourism in India plays itself out within marriages and other pop culture media spaces such as Bollywood. Actress Nandita Das, a Bollywood film star, became the new face of India's "Dark is Beautiful" campaign, similar to the "Black is Beautiful" movement in the United States (Flygalash, 2015). Nandita in her interview by Savvy Sista details the many ways in which colourism in India implemented through media, especially in Bollywood has created a space where darker women in India are found less attractive. Das herself has often faced challenges in her field where directors and make-up artists would try to lighten her skin colour for roles in which she plays educated, upper-class women. This in turn perpetuates the stereotype that lighter skin tone women are more successful and educated. Dr Radhika Parameswaran, a professor at the University of Indiana, states in an interview that colourism plays a key role in institutions such as marriage, as women with fair-skin are preferred while darker-skinned Indian women are rejected. She conducted a study in which she found that the emotional and psychological effects of this were tremendous (Flygalash, 2015). Many women she spoke to had thoughts of suicide or attempted suicide because of the trauma and stress resulting from this discrimination; these women also frequently bleached their skin, with skin-bleaching products target women between the ages of 15-30 years old (Flygalash, 2015). Companies have capitalised off this institution of discrimination and targeting younger women viciously.

Brazil is another example of a country that faces issues of colourism, seen throughout the country's social fabric. In Brazil, the institution of colourism almost perfectly reflects what is happening in America because of the deeply rooted history of slavery in both countries which still haunts the nations through institutional racism and oppression (Nolen, 2015). Brazil had racial legislations that discriminated against darker-skinned Brazilians by referring to them as "pretos" which meant black and "pardos" which meant brown. Pretos who are also known as Afro-Brazilian were largely categorised by their skin tone and prominent African features. Pretos in Brazil are racially profiled by the police; their appearance mocked and murdered 2.4 times more than white people in Brazil (Nolen, 2015). Afro-Brazilian women are extremely racially discriminated and oppressed, sexualised, and harassed.

In South Africa, colourism has played itself out in many instances. For example, on a political level, the Economic Freedom Fighters in their quest to expose former Minister of Home Affairs Malusi Gigaba's lies and ties to the Gupta family they began to engage in what is described as McCarthy-style rhetoric of questioning of whether he is "really" South African because they deemed him too dark to be a citizen (Rupiah, 2018). This tracks back to how minority citizens particularly from the northern part of the country were not spared from the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks. These ethnic minorities who were deemed too "dark" to be citizens have experienced how living in South Africa can be a violent process where for Nittle (2020) and Staples (2008) the inclusion in the country's democracy is intricate and confusing by being labelled by certain sections of society as not belonging here.

For South Africa, colourism is linked to nationality. Gigaba's skin tone is too dark; therefore, he is not a "real" Zulu (Rupiah, 2018). The insinuation made by EFF members about the former Minister's origin and citizenship in this instance reflects the underlying issues of colourism in South African society. Calling him an "unpatriotic pathological liar" suggests that the former Minister is some sort of Manchurian candidate who has infiltrated the country for a foreign master. The term Manchurian candidate refers to a person, especially a politician who is seen as being used as a puppet by an enemy power. The term is commonly used to show disloyalty or corruption whether intentional or unintentional (Condon, 1959).

Taking this a step further, the 'yellow bone' phenomenon in South Africa is informed by the same logic as in the case of former Minister Malusi Gigaba. The term 'yellow bone' has gained significant popularity amongst the country's young black people appearing on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook as a hash tag and used in everyday

conversation when referring to light skin black people. The term has been used as a supposed positive description of beauty, suggesting that ‘yellow bones’ are beautiful but derive this beauty from the fact that they are light skin (Scott, 2014). Back in 2017, former Minister of Police Fikile Mbalula during his speech made a distasteful remark about men killing beautiful women in the country. With gender-based violence being a touching issue and South Africa having one of the highest statistics of sexual assault and abuse in the world, one would expect the former Minister to have been less callous with his approach and choice of words. In a video clip that caused a social media frenzy over his comments where he said a man was recently arrested for killing “such a beautiful girl, a yellow bone” referring to the late Karabo Mokoena who was murdered by her boyfriend (The Citizen, 2017).

The criticism on social media was the fact that many women in South Africa are abused and murdered, but few cases receive such intense media coverage that Mokoena’s has with some suggesting the reason being many may not have been as “attractive” as her. The former Minister arguably played into this narrative, implying that “beautiful” people are somewhat important and do not deserve to die in such a gruesome manner (The Citizen, 2017). The term “yellow bone” has been criticised by many for implying that lighter skinned black women are supposedly more aesthetically attractive than darker skinned black women. Many questioned whether this was about beauty, or a crime committed, while others were shocked at why Mbalula would be trying to crack jokes with such a serious matter while the victims’ family was still in mourning. This description of beauty reveals several issues. Firstly, it reveals how some black people have internalised white supremacy notions of beauty standards. Secondly, it reveals how racism as a system of oppression can function without the presence of white people through intra-racial discrimination (Scott, 2014). The notion of ‘yellow bone’ lastly, reveals psychological effects on white supremacy on black people in how some have formed these unhealthy ways of qualifying beauty.

### **2.1.1 “Coconut” labelling in South Africa**

Racial issues in South Africa are a legacy of colonialism and apartheid, which both contributed to the country’s contemporary challenges of inequality and discrimination. For Gqibitole (2019:239) South Africa’s failure to have honest and open discussions on issues of race and racism has led to increasing tensions not only between racial groups but within racial groups too. Racial segregation during apartheid saw black South Africans being socially categorised as a single static homogenous group, leaving little room for any group

agency. This was far from being true as South Africa has over 10 different ethnic groups. Now in post-apartheid South Africa, radical socio-economic changes of the past two decades have triggered a new discourse of intra-racial social categorisation and stratification (Rudwick, 2010). One of the results of the more pronounced changes includes the emergence of the term “coconut” which has been serving as a racial identity label in this black intra-public discourse.

It has been common cause that writing on South African society presents unique challenges in terms of racial terminology. The word ‘black’ in South Africa is generally taken to mean a person who is of indigenous black African, of Indian or Asian descent, or who is of mixed racial ancestry. For this study however, it will be necessary to refer to specific racial identities but, unless otherwise stated, the word black will refer to what the government calls “black African” speaking constituencies unless otherwise stipulated.

Before this discussion continues, it is important that the term black class also be defined even though it will not be the focus within the study. The term black class lacks a broadly acceptable definition that entails a straightforward approach in finding the class's identity (Africa Check, 2018). But for the purpose of this study, black class will refer to the definition that was referred to by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, under the leadership of the late Steve Biko (Biko, 2004). Before 1994, South Africa's historical communities were made up of a racially segregated society, which identified as African (Black), Indian and Coloured (Southall, 2016:2). This was actively seen through the implementation of the 1913 Natives Land Act which saw black people losing ownership of their land and its wealth. Another policy that was implemented by the apartheid government was the Bantustan policy. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 ushered in a system that formalised the territorial separation of the Black majority from Whites in the countryside as well as Indians in Natal and Coloureds in the Western Cape (Wolpe, 1972).

Even though these groups shared the commonality of racial oppression, they were differently oppressed. For instance, the development of the Indian merchant trading in Natal allowed them to be ahead of the black South Africans, with the colour ban Act restricting blacks to the homelands (Southall, 2016). Therefore, for this study, the ‘black class’ who were restricted to the homelands will be the focus. This study understands the above stated groups are all classified as being African, but as highlighted above, the focus is on black people particularly

who received extreme deliberate stagnation from their ability to be part of the country's economy, as they were only allowed to work or live in certain spaces.

## **2.2 “Coconut” described**

Simply broken down with no figurative connotations, the term “coconut” was derived from the actual coconut fruit which is brown on the outside and white inside. The term is described by Erasmus (cited in Majavu's Race and Class, 2007) as being figurative in literature referring to those who are not seen as ‘black enough’. This includes but is not limited to black youths who most likely have attended former Model C or private schools, which are said to speak a certain way, dress and display white people's mannerisms. The term often reflects negative sentiments towards black people who are perceived as wanting to assimilate into whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; Gqibitole, 2019 and Rudwick, 2010). The concept of “coconut”, which gained its currency in post-apartheid South Africa, is often used to refer to black youths who in most cases can neither speak their home language or identify with and practice black cultures. The term has marked them out as cultural deviants, often questioning their authenticity, and at times used to isolate these black individuals, as well as ridiculing them for acting ‘white’ while their skin is black (Sekhotho, 2015 and Belle, 2020).

## **2.3 Conceptualisation: “Coconut” labelling**

Working from the definition above given by Erasmus (2007), being called a “coconut” by those in the same black social group because of a said ‘twang’ when speaking English or ones mother tongue according to Belle (2020) has placed many black South Africans into an isolated bubble where one is often seen as “not black enough for the black kids” – a phrase used by Aries Brown, in an article on BBC online (Brown, 2018: n/p). Common characteristics of a “coconut” as mentioned above seem to be speaking ‘fluent’ English, acquiring a good education from former model ‘C’ schools, and living in suburban areas (Brown, 2018 and DiAngelo, 2018). As a result, “coconuts” supposedly ‘neglect’ their African traits such as collectivism to fit in and rather gravitate towards ‘whiteness’ which is associated with privilege, progress, and opportunities because of the country's past legacy. The association of these characteristics with whiteness when critically analysed stem from these said privileges during apartheid being afforded to white people only and denied to people of colour. Linking this back to the study, Matlwa (2007), Hlongwane (2013), Phiri (2013) and Pather (2016), all believe that expanding literature in the field of post-democratic identity in South Africa with particular focus on intra-racial dynamics is important, especially

for black South Africans who face daily struggles of navigating their new identities post-1994. This is because in today's progressive society, it is concerning that the characteristics of a "coconut" cannot exist to strengthen black people's position in society. This negative stigma for Belle (2020: n/p) persists and reproduces the use of "coconut" in a derogatory manner.

For example, in the novel *"Coconut"* by Kopano Matlwa published in 2007, dissects the intricacies of life in the 'new' South Africa by focusing on the challenges faced by "born free" black South African youths. The story follows two main characters Ofilwe and Fikile who come from two different backgrounds, one being privileged while the other is mired in poverty; they challenge the myth of "born frees" in South Africa (Matlwa, 2007). Both deal with the effects of racism and discrimination, while trying to navigate the fault-lines of the said rainbow nation. The focus of the book is Matlwa mapping out how both these young girls suffer from what she refers to as "whiteache", which Matlwa (2007:136) describes as the girls not wishing to only "pass" as white but to physically be white. "Coconut" in this instance connotes the girl's sense of loss of self-identity and group membership seen through the great lengths each goes to, to assimilate into white spaces.

Ofilwe who is born privileged; goes above and beyond to be liked and accepted by her white peers. Held to high esteem by the elders in her family because of her privileges and her eloquent English, Ofilwe is exempt from doing chores that are divided amongst the cousins (Gqibitole, 2019:241). This superiority complex, however, starts to fizzle out when the very peers she holds to high esteem constantly remind her of her blackness in social settings, questioning and alluding that her family's wealth may be a result of corruption. When Ofilwe realises that her white peers are not who she thought they were, she decides to embrace her blackness, but her black peers are not as welcoming as she expected. As she struggles with her identity, this leads her down a dark hole where she begins to contemplate suicide (Matlwa, 2007:61-62). Fikile on the other hand, has a deep seeded hatred for her poverty-stricken upbringing. She dreams of living in affluent areas and takes active steps to physically changing her appearance to look 'whiter'. She wears green contact lenses, blonde wigs and uses skin lightening creams. Unbeknown to her, she self-annihilates herself in this quest to 'whiteness' which isolated her further from both worlds (Gqibitole, 2019; Hlongwane, 2003 and Phiri, 2013). The takeaway point from this is that being black whether privileged or not, one is in a constant struggle with their self-identity due to societal labels which later result in internalised conflicts and oppression.

*Shakespeare and the Coconut* by Natasha Distiller (2012), like the “*Coconut*” by Matlwa (2007) focuses on white assimilation. Particularly focusing on chapters’ 4 and 6, this speaks to how post-apartheid South African schools in some ways have laid the foundation for many black youths’ identities conflict. Distiller (2012:100) grapples with understanding the cultural significance, ideology and identity work that is being done by having students study ‘Shakespeare’ in South Africa today as opposed to Sol Plaatjies. For Distiller (2012), this perhaps points to the ongoing limitations of the education systems conceptualisation of culture and institutional racism. Chapter 6 on the other hand, further maps out South Africa’s rich Shakespearean literary and political history. Since the days of missionary schools, Shakespeare has been part of colonial Africa. Looking at Shakespeare in South African literature, history is one way to look afresh at the country’s cultural politics, particularly in the current context where racial identities are being hardened and simplified. As such, Distiller (2012:144) believes this has helped the country to think through the idea of the “coconut” and what it stands for which is a proficiency in English, economic mobility, and class privilege as an important component of South African social history.

Scholarly literature on “coconut” has not given much focus on either labelling within black groups, categorising black youths as either being fixated on assimilating into whiteness or black youths’ accepting this label by their peers and changing its negative connotation. The study adds to this existing literature by investigating how intra-racial labelling has become prominent among black South Africans. Engaging further across literature, a common theme seen when the term “coconut” appears is that the term at times is often used negatively to interrogate one’s blackness due to certain aspects of their lives, especially with regards to their socio-economic status. This then raises the questions of whether or not there are certain measures in place that ‘qualifies’ authentic blackness. This is because for Gqibitole (2019), Rudwick (2010), Hlongwane (2013) and Phiri (2013), “whiteness” has played a significant role in altering the way in which identity formation and privilege unravel itself within black communities. With certain economic and social privileges such as well-maintained schools, suburbia areas, cities and jobs that were preserved for whites only during apartheid, the transition to democracy opened these barriers for the vast majorities’ inclusion. Other scholars that speak on “coconut” with particular focus being on black youth assimilation into whiteness include Hlongwane (2013) in “In Every Classroom Children are Dying: Race, Power and Nervous Conditions in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut*”. To clarify, Hlongwane (2013) investigates how Ofilwe and Fikile experience a racialised nervousness like that experienced

by Nyasha in colonial Rhodesia in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Phiri (2013) in "The Dialectics of Race in South Africa: Interrogating Images of Whiteness and Blackness in Black Literature and Culture", speaks on how whiteness has been standardised in the images and imagination of race and culture for black people. His investigation questions the efficacy of "whiteness" that has been positioned as the inevitable mirror on and of blackness, especially in post-apartheid South Africa. Nazir (2006) in "Anti-Racism and the "New" South African Educational Order" investigates how the shift from 'race' to ethnicity in schools in their attempts to be more multicultural have stereotyped, homogenised, and generalised black identities. The remnants of the past for these scholars are still very much prevalent in institutions such as schools and have dire consequences on social cohesion.

Contrary to what has been mentioned above, the term "coconut" for others is not viewed as a badge of disgrace but rather worn with a sense of pride while attempting to change the negative narrative that comes with it. For example, Panashe Chigumadzi's TedTalk (2013): "A new self-identity" and lecture delivered at Wits University in Johannesburg in 2014 appropriates the term "coconut" to dismantle the fantasy of a colour blind, post-racial rainbow nation. Chigumadzi (2013) starts off the discussion detailing her experience as a young child dealing with institutional racism in schools and having been privileged for most of her upbringing. Her definition of the term "coconut" is a person who is "black on the outside" but "white on the inside". This term in South Africa came into popular usage in apartheid's dying days as black children entered formerly white-only schools. Chigumadzi (2014: n/p) further states that at best, "coconut/s" can be seen as "non-white"; at worst, they are "Uncle Toms" or "agents of whiteness".

Choosing to appropriate the term and self-identify as a "coconut" was a result of Chigumadzi believing that it offered an opportunity for refusal. It was an act of problematising herself and others within the landscape of South Africa as part of the black middle class; a supposed buffer against more "radical elements". Instead of becoming the trusted mediators between blacks and whites, "coconuts" are now turning to conceptions of blackness and mobilising anger at the very concept of the rainbow nation. The fantasy of a colour-blind, post-racial South Africa has been projected onto "coconuts", but their lived experiences are far from being free of racism. Chigumadzi's (2014: n/p) research focuses on exploring why some "coconuts", despite their privileges, and are joining their working-class comrades in black anti-racist struggles yet refuse to acknowledge how they too benefit from the system. She

believes that not acknowledging one's privilege allows for the continued colour-blind belief in the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The proximity to whiteness allows one to begin to critique it in ways that are not as easy to do when on the outside. "Coconuts" are of course privileged socio-economically by this very proximity to whiteness. Yet, it is those experiences of whiteness as a system that causes much pain. Katleho Sekhotho's article in 2015 titled "We are 'coconuts', but there's levels 'bru'" shared the same sentiments as Chigumadzi (2014) in identifying as coconut. Sekhotlo (2015: n/p) argues that embracing the term allows one to be honest in acknowledging that they are too "benefactors of white privilege". Denying one's "coconutism" is the very mechanism that allows some to perpetuate the free spirit; the candid race-does not-matter-to-me attitude. When in fact race matters and it will always be an issue given the country's past. Agreeing with Chigumadzi and Sekhotho, that accepting and acknowledging your privileges as a black South African allows people to accept the label "coconut" without feeling attacked or offended. This may in turn facilitate the much-needed discussion around intra-racial societal labelling within groups. The next section of this mini thesis will speak on how each era of structural change in South Africa contributed to social categorisation and labelling, all of which contribute to the conditions that rose and facilitated the formation of "coconut".

## **2.4 Structural changes contributing to labelling**

### **2.4.1 Colonial structures linked to labelling**

South Africa has faced numerous structural changes from colonialism and apartheid that were only beneficial to a minority group over the majority, to transitioning to democracy in attempts of including all citizens regardless of their racial background. Colonialism and apartheid structural changes according to Titmuss (1976) and Jordan (1997) resulted in 'diswelfare', which meant that the policies that were implemented actively sought to disempower and disenfranchise or unjustly favour one group over another. With the fast growth of capitalist industrialisation and structural changes in European societies because of improved technology placed tremendous pressure on them to find sustainable ways to increase investment, raw materials and profits was one of the motivating factors for the conquest of Africa. The industrial revolutions rapid changes to the Europeans socio-economic operations increased their demand for raw materials as mentioned previously prompted colonists move out of their immediate territory to claim direct control of many African state's economies and political administrations (Iwereibor, 2002; Oyebade, 2002; Ocheni and

Nwanko, 2012). This resulted in dominant capitalist modes of production dissolving the pre-capitalist African mode of production because it threatened the conditions of reproducing cheap migrant labour-power and thereby generating intense conflict against the system of segregation (Van Niekerk, 2013 and Wolpe, 1972). In these conditions, segregation gave way for the apartheid regime to provide specific mechanisms for maintaining cheap labour-power through the elaboration of the entire system of domination and control and the transformation of the function of the pre-capitalist societies.

South Africa later gained independence in 1910 when the British Parliament surrendered its political control over South Africa to its white minority. Through this arrangement, imperial Britain gave power to a minority to rule over a majority (Alcock, 2003; Motala and Vally, 2017 and Mzala, 1988). The Union Constitution of 1910 signified a community of colonial interests where non-white South Africans were not only excluded from it but were made subject to it. White Europeans had become settlers forming a colonial community in 1652 with the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck. The 1910 Union Act did not change that colonial status, as the Constitution itself was motivated primarily by the desire to maintain the colonial status of the black people and the use of their cheap labour (Iwereibor, 2002; Ocheni and Nwanko, 2012). South Africa gaining its independence did little for most of its population or their identities as they still lacked independence, political and economic freedom. Power was not fully transferred into the hands of the masses; but rather into the hands of the white minority and later in 1948 Afrikaner nationalist of the National Party of apartheid who maintained ownership of the country's political choices, wealth, and resources. For Mzala (1988) the oppressor was no longer an outsider but now lived side by side with the oppressed occupying the same territory.

#### **2.4.2 Apartheid structures linked to labelling**

The national setting of South Africa during apartheid was heavily based on racial segregation. For example, Mzala (1988:5) used the development of industrial gold mines that opened during the late 19th century. The industry entry level required skilled workers but because mines wanted to maximise profits, unskilled workers were employed and exploited through low wages. This was a result of many not possessing the necessary skills which in turn resulted in a structural relationship between labour and capital of one group being privileged over another, which for Mzala (1988:6) created social structures of internal oppression. Racial segregation and group labelling was adapted by the apartheid regime as a means of

separating the whites from the non-whites. A Population Act of 1950 was also implemented that demanded people to be registered according to their racial groups which included whites, blacks, coloureds, and Indians (Alcock, 2003; Southall, 2016 and Masipa, 2018). With this, people were treated differently according to which racial group they belonged to, affecting the type of jobs people could occupy; the type of school's children could attend, and areas people could live in.

Hendrik Verwoerd, who became the prime minister in 1958 at the time further redefined apartheid policies which he referred to as separate development. This included the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 where ten Bantu, Bantustan's homelands were created (Masipa, 2018). The separation of black South Africans from each other was to enable the state to make claims that the country had no black majority, thus reducing the possibility of black South Africans unifying to fight against them. Other segregation policies enacted included but not limited to be the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Separate Representation of Voters Act, 1951 (Masipa, 2018).

The conflict of capital and labour was important politically to white South Africans, while the excluded majority were more sensitive to the violation of their national equality and the presence of national domination which was to the national question. For example, poor white Afrikaners whose farms were no longer generating enough income for them to survive moved from their rural areas to urban industrial areas where many were employed in mines by the virtue of the colour-bar (Mzala, 1988). Not only this; but they received higher wages than their black colleagues for doing the exact same work even though they too were not adequately skilled. The nationalist regime that came into power in 1948 offered a hard solution to this crisis. Instead of pursuing what appeared to be the inevitable liberalisation and de-racialisation of the South African society, the nationalists proceeded to freeze the existing segregationist framework into the institution of apartheid. Thus, apartheid was very much about maintaining migrant labour, and extending the economic and political benefits of cheap and controlled workers not only for the mines and farms but also for rapidly growing manufacturing sector. In essences, during colonialism and apartheid South Africans were faced with an inter-racial struggle (which later affect intra-racial relations) that was focused on ensuring that whites remain superior to any other race in the country through segregation.

### **2.4.3 Post-apartheid structures linked to labelling**

South Africa's democratic imperative was aimed at readdressing its past apartheid legacies of economic exclusion and marginalisation. In line with this, South Africa's post-apartheid state implemented policies that would progressively alleviate poverty and inequality. To achieve this, South Africa has taken on the role of a 'developmental state' which encourages state intervention with clear economic and social objectives. There has been no set description of how or what a developmental state should look like and developmental state policies that work for one country may not necessarily work for another (Van Niekerk, 2013 and Craig, 2017). For Craig (2017) a developmental state defined in broader terms focused on generating high economic growth rates, promoting structural change in production patterns, and implementing welfare policies to achieve social equity. It is characterised by having strong state intervention and extensive regulation and planning. Social segregation laws and policies were dissolved, allowing all South Africans to live, work and study in institutions that were closed off to the majority. Although racially motivated residency policies were officially reversed in 1994, there remain certain class barriers that follow the old inter-racial struggles alongside intra-racial struggle. This is due to previously white-only areas opening to racial integration by enabling the growth of the black population in the economic sector allowing many to improve their standard of living. In turn, this has led to numerous intra-racial disparities and conflicts such as identity labelling because of associating certain privileges that were predominantly enjoyed by the country's white minority.

## **2.5 Politics of identity in Democratic South Africa**

As mentioned throughout this chapter up until 1994, millions of non-white South Africans were subjected to economic oppression, social segregation, and freedom of movement. This changed when the country had its first democratic election which was a steppingstone towards a more integrated society. The country's democratic transition has restructured its political, economic, and social setting - with its democratic imperative being aimed at readdressing past apartheid legacies of economic exclusion, marginalisation and improving the basic conditions in which people live in that will in turn create a better life for all (Pillay, 2014). The dawn of democracy also saw black South Africans slowly making their way into the country's economic mainstream. This in turn saw an increase in black people occupying the middle class, previously dominated by white minority (Mkandawire, 2005 and Pillay, 2014). This has been one of the most visible changes in the country's post-apartheid society. In line with this, South Africa's democratic regime implemented policies that were aimed to progressively diminish poverty and inequality. The African National Congress (ANC) regime

did not try to enforce a static national identity, but the state has allowed the people to re-image their own identities. Through policies such as the BBE, Employment Equity Act, and Affirmative Action Act just to name a few opened the economy to black South Africans who were previously disadvantaged (Campbell, 2017).

Identity politics in South Africa is an inevitable feature seen in the country's political, social, and economic life. This is especially because of the country's colonial and apartheid past. Along with this the discrimination based on gender, sexuality and race cannot be avoided even in post-apartheid South Africa (Jankie, 2019). Identity is meant to be an expression of an individual's authentic self but, in the hands of the racial thought police, under the guise of social justice, identity has become the denial of people's individual agency "in the name of cultural authenticity" (Cardo, 2015: n/p). South Africans have mastered the art of labelling as seen in the sections above. In democratic South Africa, aside from the label "coconut" other labels include tenderpreneurs, black diamonds and recently "clever blacks".

Subsequent questions that come to mind when the name "clever blacks" come are whether the term "clever blacks" refers only to black educated people? If so, were former liberation leaders "clever blacks?" Were the well-educated Sisulu's, Tambo's, Bikos, Mandelas etc regarded as such? Were the thousands of struggle leaders who obtained their education in different countries during exile "clever blacks?" Would the class of 1976 students under the Bantu education system that fought for better, equal, and quality education be considered as such blacks? Secondly, does the term refer to any black person who questions the government or private sector? This is because former president Jacob Zuma popularised the term when many black South Africans were not pleased with his Nkandla homestead financing and the expensive security upgrades it had received (Phetoane, 2017: n/p). The term was coined back in 2012, when former President Zuma insulted urban blacks who he had deemed "too clever", saying: "They become the most eloquent in criticising themselves about their own traditions and everything" (Writer, 2016: n/p). The main question then becomes why black South Africans in post-apartheid receive such backlash for calling out leaders when not performing their duties have been negatively labelled or those living a privileged life being labelled as "coconuts".

Going back to the "coconut" example referenced earlier in the chapter, "coconut" for example is also representative of a new generation in post-apartheid South Africa. It features two black teenage female protagonists in a newly emergent multi-racial society, who find

themselves in an in-between space where they are either “too black to be white” or “too white to be black” (Spencer, 2014). Similarly, to intra-racial internal conflicts, group labelling is a world of ambiguity and conflict in which many experience tension between various ethnic African ideals and global western values of whiteness, between life in the township and the cosmopolitan promises of the city in-between a traditional prioritising family and community and the allure of self-invention (Spencer, 2014). In such a world, many struggle to resolve dilemmas of identity involving language, cultural rituals, and the aesthetics of beauty.

## **2.6 Societal categorisation contributing to labelling**

Social categorisation in South Africa is not a new phenomenon as it is seen during colonisation and apartheid. Social categorisation refers to classifying people into groups based on characteristics such as nationality, age, or race. Krueger (2001) describes social categorisation as a process by which people categorise themselves and others into different groups. This is because categorisation has been seen as a concept that simplifies perceptions by detecting inherent similar relationships or through imposing structures or even both, at times. The main adaptive function of this phenomenon for Krueger (2001) is that it either permits or constrains otherwise ‘chaotic’ inductive inferences. People have attributed these group features to individuals by stereotyping them as belonging to a particular group as opposed to singling out the individual. This is because social categories rest on detecting patterns of similarity and their coherence being a matter of resemblance such as in families. Some social categories are thin as their coherence rests on either arbitrary or socially constructed labels (Krueger, 2001). Whether the category is family resemblance or socially constructed there are two groupings that are socially problematic and biased as they one gives intra-group favouritism and two perceptions of out-group homogeneity such as in the case of intra-racial labelling.

Objects are categorised to be understood and identifiable. In a very similar way, people are categorised to understand their social environment. Social categories like black, white, and Australian, Christian, Muslim, student, and bus driver are used because they are useful. Assigning people to a category that is telling of things about those people, as mentioned with the bus driver example. This is what forces many to realise that no matter how hard they work or how well they speak, they remain black. This is arguably what forces “coconuts” to become conscious; and in the end, what forces “coconuts” to join in the call for Rhodes to

fall. Similarly, many find out things about themselves by knowing what categories they belong to.

Linking this to the study, in South Africa, race exists in a spectrum due to the variations in cultures, ethnicities and different upbringings. The mindset of trying to box racial characteristics was used by the apartheid government to justify their oppressive treatment. What is apparent throughout this chapter is that labelling has a long-rooted history in South Africa traced as far back as colonialism, apartheid, and currently democratic South Africa, as seen in section 2. of the chapter.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, South Africa has seen each era come with different structural changes which have in turn directly affected the country's socio-political economy. Each era came with different social categorises and racial tensions due to segregation, especially during colonialism and apartheid. However, what has remained constant throughout each structural change is the social categorisation and labelling of people. This is seen from the inter-racial labelling in apartheid and colonialism to intra-racial labelling in black communities in post-apartheid South Africa. The latter continues to play itself out in black communities, with many either accepting these labels or defying their meaning by rejecting them because of the stereotypes attached to these names as seen with the likes of Belle (2020), Chigumadzi (2013), and Sekhotlo (2015). For them, denying one's social position continues the cycle of what facilitates the rise and formation of the "coconut" identity because of the colour-blind belief that South Africa is this big rainbow nation with no problems. To paint a visual picture of what has been mentioned above, the following chapter will be looking at how the changing history and various identities in post-apartheid South Africa have been inscribed in the social identity theory (SIT), self-categorisation theory (SCT) and the concept of hybrid identity, class, and colourism which in turn gives rise to the construction of the "coconut" identity.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

This chapter is primarily founded on a few theories and concepts that are used to explain how the construction of the “coconut” identity is formulated in social categories. The theories include the social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT) that places emphasis on the social context and how intra-group categories are constructed. To expand this theoretical premise, identity theory will be used to show the multiple aspects that are inherent and influence an individual’s identity. Concepts such as cross-culture hybridity, colourism and class will be applied to show how changes in people’s social settings facilitate the making of a new identity from the fusion of two or more sedimented identities. Thus, concluding that the construction of the “coconut” identity is a direct and sometimes indirect result of the social changes in a country.

### 3.1 Social identity theory (SIT)

Social identity theory (SIT) has a strong focus on how people’s social contexts affect their inter-group relations, which is a bit paradoxical for (Hornsey, 2008:205), because the ideas were framed by an experimental paradigm in which context was completely removed. Henri Tajfel (1978) changed this narrative when he formalised SIT in collaboration with John Turner (1979) arguing that “human interactions range on a spectrum of being purely interpersonal on the one hand to purely inter-group on the other” (Hornsey, 2008:206). What they meant by this was that a purely interpersonal interaction first involves people who relate entirely as individuals with no social category awareness. Inter-group interaction on the other hand is interaction purely group related, where one’s individualism is suppressed by the salience of group membership. For these two scholars, the move from interpersonal interaction to inter-group interaction shifted how people saw and interacted with one another. Many experiments have been conducted with results showing people favouring those who have a shared cultural and social history with them more than those they are not connected with even after the hypothesis of the experiment would be revealed to participants; their decision remained the same (Hogg and Reid, 2006). This resulted in the birth of the theory of categorisation as people started to view themselves differently from those they did not identify with or what Hornsey (2008) and Turner and Reynolds (2012) termed ‘self-concept’. On an interpersonal level, self-concept comprises individual attitudes, emotions, behaviour, and memories that are distinct to one’s personal identity. On an inter-group level, self-

concepts consist of one's social identity derived from an individual's self-image that is derived from the social categories to which they belong/ascribe to (Brown and Hewstone, 2005 and Hogg, 2000).

For Tajfel and Turner (2004) the motivating principle in favouring one's group lies in the positive desire to secure self-categorisation. Social comparison work done by Festinger (1954) states that groups are not islands, they become real, psychologically, when defined and compared to others. Groups strive to maintain a positive distinctiveness between their individual intra-groups as compared to their out-groups (Terry, Hogg and White, 2000). The question then becomes what happens when one no longer identifies with their social self-concept or their group members no longer accepts them as one of their own? Linking this back to the research question of the study, especially with regards to the social changes brought by democracy in post-apartheid South Africa where black people who were previously excluded from certain privileges are now able to move freely socially into different areas, schools and careers that were exclusive for the white minority. The dawn of democracy destabilised black South African intra-group alliance as people now experience different realities to their group members, which has in turn built the foundations to construction of the "coconut" identity.

### **3.2 Self-categorisation theory (SCT)**

As mentioned above, SIT argues that inter-group relations are based on interactions of groups cognitive, motivational, and socio-historical considerations. Turner (2004) took the social identity theory a step further than just inter-group relations and included an intra-group process, which is the basis of this study. The self-categorisation theory (SCT) takes into consideration intra-group relations. Although SIT and SCT have similar elements such as social identity perspectives, SCT looks at intra-group inclusiveness (Hornsey, 2008; Turner and Reynolds, 2012). SCT has three main elements which includes the self-concept also seen as the super-ordinate category of human identity, intermediate level of self as a member of a social group (social identity) and lastly subordinate level of personal self-categorisation based on interpersonal comparison of personal identity (Turner and Reynolds, 2012). For Hornsey (2008), individuals choose which level they prefer according to their intra-group relations. The question of which level becomes more prevalent than the other according to SCT, occurs when individual's social realities change and depending on this change, individuals choose which of this self-category/identity best 'fits' their new reality referred to as 'comparative fit'

(Turner and Reynolds, 2012). SCT takes highly into account an individual's social context and believes in the ability of one to self-define how they relate to a particular situation or ascribe to group membership. In SCT, individuals have the freedom to interchangeably define their self-identity depending on their subjective social reality (Hogg and Reid, 2006). Thus, the construction of the “coconut” identity is formulated because of intra-group social realities changes.

### **3.3 Identity**

The definition of identity is not as straight-forward as it may first appear to be. Identity can mean many things in different settings and different disciplines. For this study, identity is understood from a psychology and political science view of people understanding and making sense of their everyday settings, themselves, activities, what they share and how they differ from each other (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:4). A person's identity is made up of a combination of characteristics from their own, to family, to society. Identity like culture is constantly changing. For example, a person can be a spouse, teacher, or a driver for their children while at the same time is a politician fighting injustices against women and children (Christopher, 2012). At the same time a person's race and being from a particular class also influences one's identity. In short, identity is made up of multiple factors with the individual being a subject to their circumstances and an agent that can influence different parts of their lives that they present to the world (Christopher, 2012 and McLeod, 2008). Through migration and transnationalism, culture and linguistic knowledge has been shared resulting in people being multilingual moving away from the pre-modern notion of monolingualism (which will be discussed in the cross-hybrid identity section below). Thus, the progressive dissolution of traditional societies and the parallel rise of modern individualism according to Leilde (2008:6), has opened another dimension in which various layers of identity construction are viewed.

Scholars such as Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Steyn and Distiller (2008:4) argue that identity is neither natural nor biological, but rather a social construct by individuals in society based on their knowledge of who they may be and how they perceive themselves. For example, Carbaugh (1996) cited in Goldschmidt (2003:206), states that the “who am I” may be dependent to an extent on “where I am”. Despite the diversity of people's identity, the individual usually has an overarching identity that they lay claim to. The process of identification for Steyn and Distiller (2008) comes into existence by an act of being through

the process of performance. For instance, a person, who holds the idea that they are black, believes that they are black and ‘acts’ being black (Mdluli, 2018). This identity is very much linked to a person’s ethnicity, heritage, and language; although at times also affected in terms of group membership by factors such as age, gender, religion, and socio-economic group (Burke, 2004; Goldschmidt, 2003 and Van Stekelenburg, 2013). The idea of identity has also been a dilemma as it has no set definition to it that truly captures the essence of the concept or its many manifestations. This comes because of the concept constantly being examined, explored, and experienced differently by people at a national, local, institutional, and individual level because of cross-cultural hybridity; and often depending on the setting, a different identity many emerge which will be further expanded in the following section (Booyesen, 2007 and Klandermans, 2014).

### **3.4 Hybrid Identity**

Cross-cultural influences through colonialism and globalisation have produced hybrid identities. At a basic level the term hybridity describes a merger of two or more cultural influences that create a new identity (Yazdiha, 2010). Expressed in various cultural contexts, hybridity is often seen in-between spaces of art, media, science, and technology. For Smith and Leavy (2008:3) the creation of hybrid identities resulted from a reflexive relationship between the local and global societies, with cultural elements being incorporated to create a new hybrid culture. But with this comes the uneven integration of human life resulting from power and hierarchy of the globalisation process (Pieterse, 2004). For instance, language according to Yazdiha (2010:33) has long been bound in definitions as a symbol of exclusion. Not only that, but it has also been used to connect with others in social settings and communicating with language has a meaningful performance that requires an audience to observe and absorb the language. During colonialism, as the coloniser’s language especially English became dominant in national institutions, which breed a sense of ‘otherness’ being instilled in locals as their language and means of communication was taken away (Yazdiha, 2010).

With the end of both colonisation and apartheid in South Africa, English and Afrikaans have remained part of the country’s official languages. A question that has been asked by many scholars such as Mamdani (2005); Yazdiha (2010); and Prah (2018) just to name a few, is whether the colonised can reclaim a long-lost language or has the language of the coloniser become their own. Frantz Fanon in his book “Black Skin, White Mask” (1967) addresses the

power of language and its formation of people's identity. He states that when people speak, they assume a culture that supports the weight of civilisation (1967:17). Speaking the language of the oppressor/coloniser whether by choice or coercion brings a certain shift and evolution in the meaning of culture. Reason being the language no longer 'belongs' to the coloniser but it now relies on the colonised to give it shape (Yazdiha, 2010). With a new set of performers now using the language, it no longer exists in its pure form and shifts its meaning. For example, in post-apartheid South Africa, English continues to dominate as the chosen language of communication in most sectors. Some schools have qualified it as being students' official home language without offering additional languages to those who may have it as a third or even fourth perfect medium of communication. This therefore contributes to the enabling of the rise to the formation of the "coconut". The following section will look at how class mobility in South Africa contributes to the construction of the "coconut" identity.

### **3.5 Weber's Theory of Class**

There are many theories and definitions of class, with different ideologies. For this study however, the definition of class that will be applied is the Weberian ideology by sociologist Max Weber who puts emphasis on the fact that social stratification is influenced by multiple factors. With income or the exchange of human capital for income being a factor Weber touches on, the use of his theory in this study is important as it will allow the study to map out how class and status in relation to income plays a significant role in how the rise of the middle class contributes to the construction of the "coconut" identity which is the basis of this study.

#### **3.5.1 Class**

Under communal and societal action is Weber's definition of class. As mentioned earlier in the introduction of this section, the particular focus of this study is on the Weberian theory of class. Weber defines class as being based on purely economic terms. For him, according to Gane (2005) and Shortell (2017), a person's class situation is based on a person's market situation, with those who share the same or similar class situation being more likely to experience similar life changes. Weber identified three key elements of class that allow actors to live a certain standard of living. The first for Weber is a specific causal component of an actor's life chances. Here, the possession/ownership of property defines class difference. Property owners according to Weber's theory have a definite advantage over others as they

have access to sources of wealth creation by virtue of property ownership. For example, entrepreneurs have access to commercial wealth, while others gain wealth by virtue of investments and renting land (Gane, 2005). The second element of class are those who do not own property in which Weber defined their contributions as being measured by their acts of service as workers in the labour market, who in term receive an income that will influence their standard of living (Kharas, 2017 and Shortell, 2017). The third element for Weber is class interest and it not necessarily translating into uniformity in social action, as neither communal nor societal action is the inexorable result of class interest (Kharas, 2017 and Shortell, 2017).

### **3.5.2 Status**

Although not denying this class uniformity of social action, Weber simply puts emphasis on the element of unpredictability in any of this happening. Along with class for Weber come status groups which he linked to a common style of life. With the income people earned or wealth they obtained from being owners of means of production, this allows many the leisure of maintaining a certain lifestyle connected to prestige (Gane, 2005 and Kharas, 2017). The members of a social class often view each other as equals, while treating those from different classes differently. This is because they are classified as having similar values, norms and to an extent worldviews in life and their economic status in terms of the market economy (Gane, 2005). Social classes often arise because of division in labour, with each social class and economic position in the community defined by their wealth and income, education, occupation. Weber argued that previously, classes were divided based on two similarities among people, namely one their market situation: where a person is in the economy of a society. Two are life chances: the chances of a person achieving a certain materialistic and non-materialistic goals which are highly valued in a society (Gane, 2005). For Weber instead of polarising people into two extreme opposites of the have and have nots, he argued that the rise of the middle class takes place because of a dissatisfaction with economic structure. Weber believed that classes in society can be roughly classified into one: the propertied upper class, two: the property-less white-collar worker, three: the petty bourgeoisie and four: the manual worker class (Gane, 2005).

Weber's framework accounts for differences in wealth fostered by family wealth as well as the exploration of other social classes in-between. His framework states that class interests and conflict are not always homogenous and can be caused by differences in power

economically or politically, dominance and status. The theory observes that differences in society are inherent elements of capitalism that are maintained through primary political factors. Moreover, Weber's framework explains best the emergence of the new class as seen in post-apartheid South Africa, which has afforded many black people a lifestyle that is different from to some of their intra-group counterparts. This rise in the black middle class contributes to the construction of the "coconut" identity because of the changing social realities and experiences of those in the same intra-group.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the construction of the "coconut" identity as shown in this chapter is explained through a range of theories and concepts including the social identity theory (SIT), self-categorisation theory (SCT), cross-culture hybridity, colourism, and class. The multiple aspects of identity as mapped out in the chapter shows that the individual moves from their individual self-concepts to inter-group distinctiveness according to racial categorisation and ultimately intra-group assimilation because of ethnic relations. This is influenced by cross-culture hybridity which has resulted in not only multilingualism but a cultural rest in how intra-groups relate to each other and most importantly to language. This is seen through several black youths assuming a new culture of speaking English in a certain potent accent setting many such as Ofilwe, Fikile and Chigumadzi as explained in chapter 2 apart from members within their black communities. This meta-contrast ratio of categorisation has maximised their intra-group differences creating the very basis for the construction of the "coconut" identity. The social mobility of black South African into a class that was previously dominated by white minority, working in jobs and careers that have allowed black parents to earn incomes that afford many to not only maintain a certain standard of living, but live in suburban areas has resulted in certain internalised conflicts that exist as a by-product of the country's systematic racism to filter its way into black communities in democratic South Africa as shown with the colourism examples. The main take away from this chapter is that although identity social categories and racial ideologies are both subjective and arbitrary, the theoretical premise on which the construction of the "coconut" identity is birthed points to there being multiple factors at play that laid the building blocks to this unique label within black communities.

The following chapter focuses on the case studies: of the sitcom *Black-ish* and the novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa. The case study will be zoning in on how *Black-ish* an American

sitcom and the *Coconut* novel by Kopano Matlwa, provide a visual account of identity related conflicts that we find within black communities. The cases also highlight the many contemporary changes in post-apartheid South Africa and the intra-group conflicts that contribute towards the construction of the “coconut” identity. The study highlights specific instances in both settings to show how the “coconut” identity manifests itself and is attached to people by members of the community.



## **CHAPTER 4: BLACK-ISH SITCOM AND *COCONUT* NOVEL BY KOPANO MATLWA AS CASE STUDIES**

### **Introduction**

This case study will be based on *Black-ish* an American sitcom and *Coconut* novel by Kopano Matlwa. The real-time show and novel are produced in two different spatial settings looking at how black people living in democratic societies have internalised certain toxic behaviours and shining a light on various internalised conflicts that exist as a by-product of these countries systematic racism, classic capitalist system and patriarchy that have in turn contribute to the formation of labels. The satirical sitcom *Black-ish* and novel *Coconut* give a visual representation of the different intricacies faced within black communities, with the many contemporary signposts and foundations that point to the creation of the “coconut” changes especially in post-apartheid South Africa.

### **4.1 Black-ish**

*Black-ish* is an American sitcom created and directed by Kenya Barris based loosely on his personal life. The sitcom is known to not shy away from heavy topics by confronting them in different episodes. The sitcom premiered in 2014, and follows a family led by a successful black man Andre ‘Dre’ Johnson (Anthony Anderson) and his wife, a qualified doctor surgeon Rainbow ‘Bow’ Johnson (Tracee Ellis Ross). Andre struggles to gain a sense of cultural identity while raising his family in a predominately white upper middle-class neighbourhood. The show revolves around the family’s lives as they try to juggle their personal identities, while navigating socio-political issues. To adjust into their new area, Dre tries to get his family to mingle with the neighbours to form part of a rapport with them in efforts to find their place in the neighbourhood. However, this starts to concern Dre as he worries that his family may have assimilated a little too much into their suburban lifestyle. He begins to question whether all his success has brought too much cultural assimilation for the family. To counter this, Dre tries to create a sense of ethnic identity for the members of the family that would allow them to honour their background while also embracing their privileges. In this chapter I have chosen two episodes which display these dynamics.

#### **4.1.1 Season 1 episode 20: Switch Hitting (No one way of being black)**

In this episode, Dre finds himself questioning his own blackness when a potential white executive (Jay) who is looking for their marketing expertise challenges him over his street

cred and picks inept Charlie to run a big urban market account. This episode is centred on exploring how black people handle transition in a new world that allows them into spaces that were previously white dominated. The transition can either be effortless or tough, especially moving between two worlds as black individuals (Adeyoke, 2019 and Katya, 2020). As a black man in corporate America, Dre's days at work are filled with awkward interactions from handshakes to conversations and behaviours that his white co-workers firmly believe black people do, which are founded on stereotypes that box black people.

These stereotypes however, placed Dre at an opposite spectrum as he does not conform to them which led to him being labelled as “corny”; similar to the “coconut” label black South Africans are given because they do not conform to the supposed stereotypical roadmap of how black people are seen to be. This is evident in the way Dre is also judged for his food choices (organic free range) he eats, how he speaks, and his overall mannerisms. Feeling pressured Dre invites the exec to his home for supper to prove he is not a “corny” black man, but things do not go as expected. Interestingly, Dre constantly picks on Bow for her choices in food, fashion, and how she speaks even more so because she is bi-racial. But now that the arrow is pointed at him, he is upset that his blackness is being called into question.

Dre: “Can you believe this Bow! This white dude is questioning my blackness.”

Bow: “Ahh, I wonder what it feels like? Somebody constantly questioning your blackness just because you misquoted the lyrics to Ain't no fun” (Black-ish, 2014:05:28-05:40).

Zoning in on Rainbow Johnson for a little bit; Dre constantly questions Bow's blackness because of her biracial background. Bow grew up in a mixed-race family with her white non-conservative Jewish father Paul (Mark-Paul Gosselaar) and her black mother Alicia (Tika Sumpter), living in a hippie commune where she and her siblings did not attend any formal school. However, this changed when the commune was raided, and her parents decided it would be best to move the family to the suburbs for a better life. This saw the beginning of Bow's struggles of constantly battling with her identity between being black and white. She struggled to navigate mainstream schooling in which her peers perceived her as neither black nor white and her hippie commune upbringing did little to bring her any solace. Bow's upbringing experiences illuminate the challenges of finding one's own identity when the rest of the world cannot decide where they belong. Circling back to Dre, seeing his outrage with his blackness being questioned, yet he does the same to Bow but excuses it as contexts not being the same shows how intra-racial labelling tends to be overlooked as jokes when one

misquotes lyrics but magnified when outsiders do the same when they question one's eating choices or how they speak. Dre's hypocrisy has come back to his doorstep in this episode when Jay and his co-workers question his blackness the same way he questions Bow's blackness (Black-ish, 2014:05:28-05:40).

Fast-forward to (16:50-17:55) of the episode, Pops encourages Dre to accept that transitioning between two worlds has allowed him to live a privileged life but also awaken internal reflections of his identity group membership.

Pops: "Listen to me son; don't let some white man convince you that your ability to move between two worlds is something you shouldn't be proud of."

Dre: "What?"

Pops: "Being able to switch it up is a necessity; and the way you do it, smooth son, smooth like a superhero. I mean I am almost jealous."

Dre: "How much of my scotch have you had?"

Pops: "Look! All I am saying is being able to switch it up has gotten you some nice things. This house, your wife, this scotch" ... and (Black-ish, 2014: 18:12-19:26) of the episode.

Dre realises that there is no one way of being black and just because he added veganism to his diet that does not make him any less black. He also realises that even though he has achieved success and lives a good life, being black in previously white dominated spaces will always require one to prove their worth just by the mere virtue of being black. Lastly Dre realises that one's ability in being able to transition between two worlds comes with positives in living a life of privilege and opportunity but also negatives in that one struggles with their identity and intra-racial conflicts. The overall take away from this episode is that the transitioning into white spaces, your food choice or misquoting lyrics does not remove your blackness; but rather one will always face challenges because they are black.

#### **4.1.2 Season 5 episode 10: Black Like Us (Colourism)**

In this episode Dre and Bow are furious when Diane's class photo comes back, and she is not lit up well. Although Diane does not want to make a big deal of this situation, her parents take this on with the school principal about the need for sensitivity towards all complexions. Along with this, Junior makes claims that there is unspoken colourism within their own

family which leads to things getting heated. The episode opens with American rapper Kendrick Lamar's *Complexion (A Zulu Love)* which speaks on complexion and how regardless of one's skin tone as a black person, it should not take away your all-encompassing beauty. The irony of the lyrics "complexion don't mean a thing" in this episode and in general does not apply because complexion means everything; especially in how some black people are treated depending on their skin tone. Starting off their morning routine as usual after getting ready, Dre heads downstairs to the kitchen where he proceeds to pour Bow a cup of coffee and when he hands it to her, he says "for you my half Nubian Queen" (Black-ish, 2018; 00:34-36). Again, in this episode similarly to the one above, Dre subtly reminds Bow that she is not black enough because of her biracial background. This starts off the colourism debate later in the episode in which Junior and Bow call out Ruby and Dre for their constant comments and jokes of them not being black enough.

Jack rushes in to ask his parents to pay for his class photos and if they could get him to school on time so he could achieve his perfect attendance sheet. A beaming mother, Bow looks at the pictures with so much pride and love without immediately noticing Diane (Black-ish, 2015:02:16-03:50). When Bow finally realises and notices that Diane is not lit well, she is extremely upset. Bow and Dre decide to call the school principal to set up a meeting to discuss this issue. This episode highlights the importance of understanding that black people come in many different shades of melanin according to Associated Press (2019) and Black-ish, (2018:02:18-03:52) with those who are lighter skinned at times being seen as the community's set standard of beauty often attributed to their lightness being close to white proximity. Often, looking different in black communities translates to being treated and discriminated against differently. This intra-racial discrimination explained in chapters 2 and 3 continues to grip black communities as they refuse to have open and honest conversations about this matter and how it affects people differently (Adeyoke, 2019). The Johnson family gathers in the kitchens and the oldest son Junior makes a casual remark that Diane will be fine because of the subliminal colourism in their family. This triggers a heated debate where they all exchange some words when Diane walks in and dismisses them all for not understanding the plight of being darker skinned, especially because she is the only darkest member in her family (Black-ish, 2018:13:43-19:28).

This links back to the section on colourism in chapter 3, which is a form of prejudice and discrimination based solely on skin tone; a seed that was planted by white supremacy and watered within black communities (Adeyoke, 2019 and Katya, 2020). With progress and

continuous efforts being made to end inter-racial prejudice in society, intra-racial prejudices have taken the forefront which comes because of human behaviour as explained in the social dominance theory (Fredrickson, 2003). Social dominance theory suggests that people in society belong to groups that have places in hierarchies and based on their place in the hierarchy they tend to behave a certain way to protect their status quo (Fredrickson, 2003). For Hunter (2007), Jones (2000) and Katya (2020), colourism lies within the second system of discrimination with the first being racial discrimination. As seen in this episode, the lighting used on Diane's school photo did little to complement her skin tone, but rather faded her into the shadows. The episode also tries to highlight the readiness of black communities to have open and honest talks about colourism and its effects, outlining its history and depth (Adeyoke, 2019).

These two episodes highlight the fact that there is no said roadmap of what it means to be black or instructions that guide one on how to be black. Being black and privileged does not exempt one from colourism or being labelled. One way or another, one is always reminded of their blackness even within their in-groups as seen in the two-episode synopsis mentioned above.

## **4.2 Construction of labels in post-apartheid South Africa**

### **4.2.1 *Coconut* book by Kopano Matlwa**

As explained briefly in chapter 2, *Coconut* by Dr Kopano Matlwa is a novel centred around two black girls growing up in two different class backgrounds in contemporary Johannesburg, South Africa. The book is broken up into two parts. Part one focuses on the Tlou family, with Ofilwe sometimes referred to as Fifi being the main protagonist. Matlwa (2007), details the family dynamics and how the Tlou family moved up the ranks and the constant contention of identity the kids face between the two worlds. Part two looks at Fikile, who is also a main protagonist, comes from humble beginnings but fights to attain a “coconut” identity. The two girls both struggle to grapple with their identities and group membership while navigating the tumultuous system of class, language, and race in post-apartheid South Africa (Matlwa, 2007).

Ofilwe, who was born into a privileged family, living in the suburbs of Johannesburg, comes from a nouveau emerging black middle class. Ofilwe: “Our family of four – Mama (Gemina), Daddy (John), Tshepo and I – has been coming to St. Francis Anglican Church ever since we

moved from a vaguely remembered Mabopane to Little Valley Country Estate. Our new home was much closer to my father's Sandton City offices and Tshepo's preparatory school. I was to begin nursery school that year and Tshepo grade one, although he should have been in grade two but was held back a year, because he did not speak English as well as his new, elite, all-boys' school would have liked" (Matlwa, 2007:6). Here Matlwa highlights how the Tlou's new class position has required them to assimilate to a certain standard of whiteness to be accepted which will be analysed in the following chapter.

Even with such privilege, Ofilwe struggles with her identity of being black and her ethnic heritage which is seen in the way she treats her mother's guest especially considering how in black ethnic cultures elders are greeted and spoken to with the utmost respect. Gemina: "It is a great embarrassing, Koko. Hayi! You should have been here to hear your little Ofilwe. Those women are my elders, not even I would speak with them in such a manner. 'Hi'. Just like that, Koko. 'Hi'. As if. You'd think she's doing them a favour by greeting them. Is a simple 'Dumelang bo Mama' too much to ask? It's not right, Koko. No, it is not right one bit. What kind of children am I raising?" (Matlwa, 2007:21).

Ofilwe struggles with a strong desire to 'fit in' because of her "coconut" identity. Although born into a life of good status, her transition between the two worlds is not smooth sailing. Ofilwe faces constant persecution by her older brother Tshepo, her peers and neighbours which leaves her feeling alienated by members of her own group. Ofilwe links beauty and personal appearance to certain white standards such as having long straight hair like her classmate Kate Jones. When at the hair salon, Ous Beauty would ask her if the relaxer chemical was burning her scalp, Ofilwe's response would be no because she wanted "every last tiny weenie curl straight" (Matlwa, 2007:4). Ofilwe: "I was not bothered by the tenderness of my scalp that sent quivers down my neck as the teeth of the comb slid past it... No, I was just delighted to be beautiful again" (Matlwa, 2007:4).

Ofilwe's "coconut" identity is so ingrained that she cannot speak her home language which is Sepedi (Matlwa, 2007). At first, not being able to speak Sepedi does not concern Ofilwe because to her English has gotten her certain privileges especially at family gatherings. She goes as far as referring to English as the language of "sweet success" (Matlwa, 2007:54). Ofilwe: "What has Sepedi ever done for them?" "Look at those sorrowful cousins of mine who think a brick is a toy. Look at me. Even the old people know I am special. At family reunions they do not allow me to dish up for myself." "Hayi! Sit down they shout. Get up and

dish out for Ofilwe, Lebogang!” ... “As soon as my schooling is over, I will come back and teach them English and then they will be special too?” (Matlwa, 2007:54).

Here, Ofilwe displays how naive she is to the realities of South Africa’s class inequality because of her class position. She mocks her cousins assuming they are unaware that the brick is not a real toy, but they worked with what was available to them because maybe their parents unlike hers are in a lower class. Or how she equates language, specifically English as a measure of intelligence and completely oblivious to the fact that South Africa has 10 other official languages in its constitution; displays Ofilwe’s deep rooted internalised oppression. However, as she grows up, Ofilwe starts to realise that she knows little about her heritage and an incident with Tshepo’s friends where they all blissfully reminisce about their past while being grateful for their current privileges leaves her feeling angry at them, Tshepo but mostly herself which leads her to question her “coconut” identity (Matlwa, 2007:58-59). When Tshepo’s friends were over for a visit, one of them questioned why Ofilwe cannot speak Sepedi.

Vuyo: “Ke mangy yo, Tshepo?” (Who is this?)

Tshepo: “This is my sister, Ofilwe”

Vuyo: “She looks like a ‘I want my Mommy!’” “Since I’ve been here, I’ve only heard this little girl speak English. Do you only speak English, sweetie?” (Matlwa, 2007:59).

Upset with this interaction Ofilwe tells her dad that Tshepo is calling her names, to which he responds that she should just ignore him.

Ofilwe: “Daddy, Tshepo is calling me names!”

Dad: “Just ignore him.”

Ofilwe: “He called me an Aunty Jemima Daddy.”

Dad: “What is an aunty Jemima?”

Ofilwe: “Tshepo says an Aunty Jemima is a sell-out. Daddy, Tshepo says I am a sell-out. He says I embarrass him and that I mustn’t ever come near him when his friends are around.”

Dad: “Just ignore him, Ofilwe.”

All these incidents begin Ofilwe's internal identity conflict, where she struggles with her "coconut" identity and who she really is outside of her class position.

Fikile on the other hand, prefers to be called Fiks is the opposite of Ofilwe. As mentioned above, she comes from a lower class than Ofilwe and lives with her uncle, the only family member who was willing to take her in after her mother died by suicide. Sassy and cheeky, Fiks looks forward to the day she finally achieves her "Project Infinity" ("coconut" identity) where she will be free from the shackles of poverty (Matlwa, 2007:117). Fiks aspires to achieve not only the "coconut" identity but assimilate into whiteness. So much so that she loathes being black and has a strong dislike for black people who she sees as always looking for handouts instead of working hard like white people (Matlwa, 2007). On her way back from work the train is moving slower than usual.

Fikile: "The train is moving slower than usual today, which is frustrating. Perhaps it has something to do with those cable thefts. Black people! Why must they always be so damn destructive? And to think, they have never invented a thing in their squalid lives and yet they insist on destroying the little we have. Just look at how scummy the townships are. Have you seen any white suburb looking so despicable? In some townships it is difficult to differentiate the yards from the garbage heaps. It really is a disgrace, a paucity of perspective" (Matlwa, 2007:134-135). Fikile strongly believes that individuals are responsible for the own success; however, she just like Ofilwe are naive to the structural barriers that the apartheid legacy left behind. To further the construction of her envisioned "Project Infinity" during a lesson in class before she dropped out of school, Mrs Zola asked the class what they want to be when they group up (Matlwa, 2007:135-136):

Mrs Zola: "And you, Fikile, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

Fikile: "White, Teacher Zola. I want to be white."

Ntombana: "You so stupid, Fikile, don't you know you going to be as black as dirt for the rest of your life! Tell her Mrs Zola, tell her she's going to be as black as dirt forever."

Fikile: "Shut up, Ntombana. Mrs Zola said we can grow up to be anything our hearts desire."

Mrs Zola: "But Fikile, dear, you can't change the colour of your skin. What I mean is that you can -"

Ntombana: "See, Fikile! You so stupid!"

Mrs Zola: “Ntombana, if you don’t keep quiet now I am going to have to send you out of my class.”

Fikile: “I will be white if I want to be white. I don’t care what anybody thinks.”

Mrs Zola: “But why would you want to do that, dear?”

Fikile: “Because it’s better.”

Mrs Zola: “What makes you think that, Fikile?”

Fikile: “Everything.”

This exchange highlights that Fikile is set in her ways of acquiring the “coconut” identity at the cost of trading in her group membership. Perhaps her use of skin-lightening creams was triggered by this exchange as well, where Ntombana referred to her being “black as dirt”. Fikile is particularly concerned about how she speaks and sounds. Although she can speak and understand her home language fluently, Fikile prefers to speak English to all those around her. Fikile: “It’s the things you take for granted that turns out to be the most important thing in your life. I really believe that. Life is just shady like that. Like, I’m just thinking, now. Your accent, for example. It’s not something most people give much thought to let alone wish to change. But for me, my whole life has become about how I speak, about what sounds the words make as they fall on the listener’s ear” (Matlwa, 2007:154).

Or why Fikile sees other black people, especially those of Mphe Batho township as being “hopeless and short-sighted” (Matlwa, 2007:118). Fikile: “I know what I want in life and am prepared to do anything in my power to get it.” (Matlwa, 2007:118). Just like Ofilwe, Fiks has built up internalised oppression which will be discussed in chapter 5. Ultimately, both girls struggle with the same issue; they are both forced to confront the ways in which their wishing to assimilate to whiteness has permeated into their thoughts, their self-identity, their group identity, and the way in which they want to live in the world. The two girls both struggle with navigating their shared group identities while also battling with internal conflicts regarding their self-concept. The following subsections will highlight alongside *Coconut*, how South Africa continues to struggle with white standards of the past that continues to affect people’s personal appearance, class position, aspiration, and self-identity.

#### **4.2.2 Let's Talk Colourism: How Do We Define Beauty?**

Intra-racial discrimination within black communities is a controversial subject. While some people prefer not to talk about it, others are firm in the belief that it does not exist. Seen in this online series “Let’s Talk Colourism: How Do We Define Beauty? #Views From The Bottom Up”; it is very much evident that black people discriminate against each other based on skin tone, hair and physique. The episode questions whether mainstream social media plays a role in determining what/how society sees as beauty, added to that how it views black beauty (Slikour Online, 2017). Musician Maya Christinah Xichavo Wegerif known professionally as Sho Madjozi and Nomasonto Maswanganyi popularly known as Mshoza as well as media personalities Sika Osei and Refilwe Modiselle talk about colourism in South Africa and their personal experiences and their definitions of black beauty by society and the media, narrated by Lee Kasumba.

This sit-down explores colourism in the entertainment industry and its consequences. These media personalities all agree that the concept of colourism is a socially constructed bias within black communities particularly against darker skinned people. The conversation looks at how media at times portrays what is deemed as “desirable” to its consumers. The narrative sold by the media continues to perpetuate already existing tensions within intra-racial labelling (Slikour Online, 2017). Colourism for these media personality and many scholars are identified as the country’s historical past legacy, as it was socially implemented during colonialism and apartheid through the concept of racial profiling (Katya, 2020 and Slikour Online, 2017). A consequence of this perpetuation has been skin bleaching, which has become a huge industry within the global beauty sector ranking in billions of dollars. This could be argued as a response to what Matlwa in chapter 2 refers to as assimilating into whiteness which in turn results in people being labelled as “coconuts” because they are perceived as not embracing their blackness. This episode illustrates that the “coconut” identity is influenced by numerous factors such as media, status, and class. Thus, to expect there to be a linear image of what it means to be black takes away people’s agency in establishing what being black means to them.

#### **4.2.3 The People vs The People**

“The People versus...” is an MTV Africa original three-part documentary series DStv channel 130 that tackled different South African issues directed by Lebogang Rasethaba and produced by Jasmyn Asvat. This trilogy premiered back in 2016 with The People vs The

Rainbow Nation, a documentary film that examined the country's black youth's continued struggle to access education which resulted in the widespread #FeesMustFall protest. In 2017, the second segment of *The People vs Patriarchy* dropped which highlighted the epidemic of violence against women which sparked the controversial hashtag #MenAreTrash. The third and final segment which is the main case study of this mini-thesis centres black love. *The People vs The People* features diverse youths from different backgrounds who tackle conversations on internalised oppression, self-worth, capitalism, mental health, and trauma.

The conversation starts off with highlighting how much black people have been harbouring years of pain and trauma, that those who are seen to have moved up the social ladder have often been labelled and seen as 'betraying' the rest of their in-group members. In turn this has created an unspoken rival war amongst black people (*The People vs The People*, 2018). The conversation in the doc-series is broken down into three topics of discussion. Chapter 1 in the doc-series titled "Internalised Oppression" which is the focus on this study and will be explained in chapter 5; speaks on how it contributes to the formation of the "coconut" identity, dwells on how the black community is in disarray within itself. This is because within blackness the idea of humanity has been removed and destroyed, with black people having been denied access to this humanity in the past. As much as black people have held on steadfastly onto the ideology of community and Ubuntu, they have also lost their sense of humanity towards each other. As a result of South Africa's past, people have internalised the idea of not being deserving of this said humanity or enjoying certain leisure's. This is evident in how black people treat each other, especially if one comes from a different social class as seen in the case of Ofilwe and Fikile (*The People vs The People*, 2018).

Chapter 2 in the series is titled "Self-worth and Capitalism", which dwells on the role of money and the financial safety that comes with it as explained in chapter 3 under the sub-heading of class and status. It is no secret that capitalism affects the way in which the world operates. It affects people individually and on an economic and political level, where the means of production are held either by the government or private individuals, with factors such as the price and distribution of these goods and services being determined by the free market.

For many in the docu-series such as the socialite Zodwa Wabantu, believe that having money opens many doors and affirms one's position in society. For example, coming from a disadvantaged background to performing and earning over twenty-five thousand a night for

Zodwa has enabled her to improve her standard of living (The People vs The People, 2018). The rest of the case members also believe that money gives one the ability to attend good schools, live in relatively safer suburban areas and have an overall good life. However, this comes with changes in how one's in-group members behave toward them as they are seen as no longer sharing the social group's identity. In doing so, many have been labelled as "coconuts" or snobs because of the change in their social status quo, which has led to many feeling like they ostracized by their own.

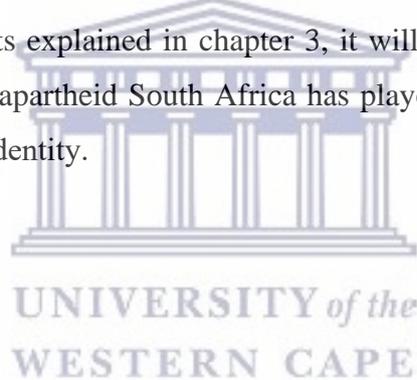
The last segment of the conversation chapter 3 is on mental health and trauma, and how black families deal with them. Depression in many black communities and families for a long time has been referred to as a "white man's disease" (The People vs The People, 2018). Speaking about one's mental health and trauma in black communities is never received well because some members of the public mock and ridicule individuals, referring to them as weak. As a result, mental health issues in South Africa often at times go untreated (Shoba, 2018). Often, those who suffer from mental health issues and trauma at times cannot afford professional help which leads to many suffering in silence. The widespread misinformation about mental illness also does little to open honest conversations in black communities and families on how to deal with these problems. Depression for black youths is sometimes seen as an act of irresponsibility or rudeness, instead of them being shown love, care, and compassion. "Parents often do not understand how you can suffer from depression, yet everything is provided for you" (The People vs The People, 2018). With common symptoms ranging from one feeling the need to isolate themselves to displaying irritability or anger as well as experiencing hyper-insomnia may be viewed as acts of defiance because people struggle to fulfil social expectations such as studying and performing well, completing household chores or being 'moody' towards elders (Shoba, 2018).

The cast believes that to deal with the negative effects of mental health and trauma, one needs to identify the problem or trigger, name it and work towards finding a solution (The People vs The People, 2018).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, what is evident throughout is that the construction of the "coconut" identity is a result of several social factors from intra-racial conflicts as a by-product of apartheid, social media, class position, language, and economic hybridity. All these factors big or small have played a significant role in the formation of labels within black

communities. The country's past legacy of apartheid has left many black South Africans struggling with internal scars that have in turn manifested themselves physically and evident in the way black people treat each other as seen in the novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa and supplementary source of *The People vs The People* MTV Africa docu-series. As a result, South Africa continues to struggle with a damaged sense of self as a nation, with families and communities grappling with the concept of continued constructed labels of those who they deem as being outcasts within their intra-groups. Even the sitcom *Black-ish* in an American setting illustrates how the effects of segregation continue to linger, with Dre being mocked by his co-workers for speaking a certain way and his dietary choices. Thus, the roadmap to blackness that has been narrated by white standards in the past has in turn been internalised by black people to their own detriment which has resulted in the construction of the "coconut" identity. The following chapter will give an overall analysis and discussion of the common themes and threads seen within the *Black-ish* and the *Coconut* novel cases studies. Using the theories and concepts explained in chapter 3, it will explain how mobility within the black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa has played an instrumental role in the construction of the "coconut" identity.



## CHAPTER 5: SEDIMENTING THE “COCONUT” LABEL

### Introduction

This chapter gives an analysis of the two case studies pointing out their underlying themes and differences. Using the theoretical tools SIT, SCT and concepts hybridity, class, and colourism the analysis aims to highlight how mobility within the black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa has played an instrumental role in the construction of the “coconut” identity label. Lastly, it sums up how the construction of the “coconut” identity has been crystallised and sedimented over the years through aspects of economic position, income, class position and language inscribed in its identity.

### 5.1 Underlying themes and dynamics between Black-ish and *Coconut*

#### 5.1.1 Economic position

Equal opportunity is the foundation of any progressive democracy, with diversity being one of its main strengths. To narrow the gaps of inequality caused by segregation in the past, governments have worked towards creating policies that are more inclusive of its people regardless of their race. This resulted in policy changes both in South Africa, America and other democratic nations that required companies to apply Employment Equity, Affirmative Action and other state policies of inclusion that would push forward the advancement of all people that were previously marginalised from both political and economic participation (Pillay, 2014). When looking at the two-case studies Black-ish and the *Coconut* novel in chapter 4, a few things can be highlighted. From an economic position, the Johnsons and the Tlous (Ofilwe’s family) have both entered spatial settings that were previously dominated by white minorities and have been fortunate to achieve economic independence free from government dependency. Fikile and her family, however, are not as privileged as the Johnsons and the Tlous. Her grandmother who has been their main provider is a domestic worker and her uncle is a security guard. However, despite the odds Fikile is determined to achieve her “Project Infinity”.

Linking this back to the SIT theory which has its strong focus on how people’s social contexts affect their inter-group relations, the Johnsons, the Tlous and Fikile even though she is still aspiring to achieve this “coconut” identity, have all seemingly moved from their individualism being suppressed by the salience of their group identity membership. This is seen through Dre’s move from Compton and the Tlous move from Mabopane; both areas

were set aside for black people during segregation and apartheid. The families' economic mobility and privileges have allowed them the liberty to experience and pursue their economic interests, endeavours, and choices with limited interference from the state. For example, both families have acquired property of their choice without the use of fraud or theft and both families have the means to protect themselves from possible physical invasion from others. The move of the two families and Fikile's set aspirations (Project Infinity) points to them self-categorising, which results from SCT taking highly into account individual's social context and believes in the ability of one to self-define how they relate to a particular situation or ascribe to group membership. In SCT, individuals have the freedom to interchangeably define their own self-identity depending on their subjective social reality (Hogg and Reid, 2006). The Johnsons and the Tlous have thus carved themselves out of their past SIT group identity relations by firstly securing well-paying jobs, secondly changing their geographical locations, and thirdly having the children attend model C schools. All this is a result of their economic mobility due to the rise of the black middle class.

This has in turn opened both families' journey's in creating their own 'self-concept' that no longer conforms to their group's identity membership. Fikile on the other hand has not been fortunate enough to achieve middle class status but continues to self-categorise herself because she does not align herself through the eyes of her situation or that of her group members. She views herself as being different to an extent of referring to black people in her community who she deems 'below' her as "poor and black" while she is "rich and brown" and repeatedly states "I am not one of you" to solidify her stance (Matlwa, 2007:140). For Fikile, 'self-concept' is of utmost importance especially because she feels that her 'comparative fit' is with white people more than the people she shares a culture, language, class and even skin tone with. Here it is evident that economic mobility allows one the liberty that enables people to achieve a certain standard of living which in turn affects people's sense of 'self-concept' and group membership.

### **5.1.2 Income**

An income determines/affects the standard of living a person can afford and enables people the ability to transition between two worlds either smoothly or not. Weber puts emphasis on the fact that social stratification is influenced by multiple factors as seen in these two-case studies Black-ish and the *Coconut* novel, both in two different settings. For Weber income or the exchange of human capital for income plays a significant role in how the rise of the black

middle class contributes firstly a shift in an individual's economic and class status and secondly in relation to the study of the construction of the “coconut” identity. For instance, Dre works in corporate America for a well-established marketing agency. An expert in his field, Dre is well compensated and has extra benefits, while Bow is a qualified doctor specialising in surgery. The Johnson household has dual stable incomes which allow them the leisure of choice from where they live, to which schools the kids attend, which cars they drive, the kind of foods they eat, to even the scotch Dre drinks. The Johnsons incorporated veganism into the diet because of Dre’s high cholesterol and blood pressure (Black-ish, 2015). When Jay comes over for supper because Dre is set on convincing him that he is not “corny”; Jay arrives with the expectation of eating greasy soul food. In response to this Bow says: “Well nobody is going to be dying from my mac & cheese. It’s vegan; made of olive and tezz” (Black-ish, 2015:0:13:57-14:46). Here it is evident that income has allowed the Johnsons the choice of changing their diet because they can afford to do so. The Johnsons' class situation is based on their market situation, as both Dre and Bow exchange their human capital for lucrative remunerations.

The Tlou family on the other hand; the father has an IT company (IT Instantly) which won a Post Office tender. This propelled the family into a new income bracket that allowed the Tlous to send Ofilwe and her older brother Tshepo to model C schools. The mother, a nurse by profession, cashed in her early retirement because Mr Tlou felt that his wife was overworked. Now a full-time housewife, Gemina takes care of all the household tasks and gets a weekly allowance from her husband to top-up all household necessities.

Ofilwe: “Mama’s money is her own to be used on herself and nothing else because she is beautiful and it costs money to remain so” (Matlwa, 2007:79), referring to her mothers’ early pension cash out. Breakfast in the Tlou home is a delicacy of “cubed fruits, muesli and mixed nuts on a bed of low-fat granadilla yoghurt” (Matlwa, 2007:13). Interestingly, even though the family can afford to eat where they please, during the week, Gemina wakes up at 04:30 am in the morning to prepare breakfast that will be served at 07:00am for her husband which is samp that was left overnight to soften (Matlwa, 2007:79). The family lives a lifestyle of comfort and leisure; yet parents still seem to be fighting to hang onto certain traditions and beliefs arguably to hang onto certain identity traits from the past, to keep them grounded as they too continue to struggle with the transition between the two worlds. However, the Tlous Sundays, after church, are reserved especially for the Silver Spoon Coffee Shops English

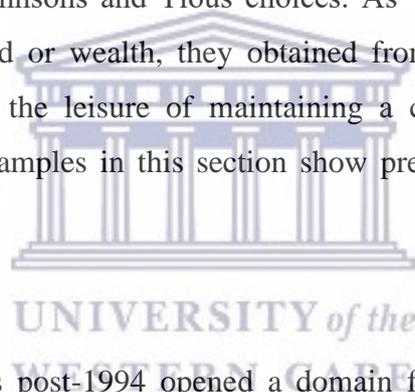
breakfast. Ofilwe and Fikile are not particularly fond of each other even though they barely know each other well.

Fikile: “Them. The Tlous. The family that I hate with everything in me. Where is Ayanda? This is his family, he knows I do not serve the black families, they're just an annoyance and waste of my time. Especially this specific family. I hate them. I hate them some much” (Matlwa, 2007:164). She goes as far as calling labelling them as one of these “BEE families”

Ofilwe: “Today, unlike other days, Fikile is our waitress. ... “I do not like Fikile. She has a strange air about her” (Matlwa, 2007:19-20). Here, their interaction even though not verbal towards each other, illustrates how in-group discrimination and labelling formation within black communities is a result of numerous issues such as differences in economic status and income. Along with class for Weber comes status which he linked to a common style of life. This is evident through the Johnsons and Tlous choices. As Weber’s theory mentions that with the income people earned or wealth, they obtained from being owners of means of production, this allows many the leisure of maintaining a certain lifestyle connected to prestige (Gane, 2005). The examples in this section show precisely what Weber meant by this.

### 5.1.3 Class position

In South Africa, state policies post-1994 opened a domain for the emergence of a black middle class. This economic empowerment according to Southall (2017) created a small but visible group of black capitalist participation. Black South Africans moved into new spaces both in a public and private capacity receiving well-remunerating jobs and education. This in turn allowed for a marginal decrease in inter-racial gaps but in turn increased intra-racial differences among black South Africans which created tensions seen through the construction of the “coconut” identity. The emergence of black people occupying space in a previously white dominated middle class has allowed many such as the Johnsons and Tlous the luxury of firstly increasing their agency and secondly, it has empowered them with the ability to navigate their own realities and potentials away from their group membership. This move in turn changed the two families’ class position as well. As highlighted in chapter 3, the Weberian approach of defining class has been visibly dominant in South Africa, seen through many children having the privilege of attaining a good education from former model C or private schools and consumption.



Weber identified three key elements of class that allow actors to live a certain standard of living. The first being for specific causal components of an actor's life chances, including the possession/ownership of property which both the Johnsons and the Tlous have acquired. This according to Weber's theory gives these families a definite advantage over others as they have access to sources of wealth creation by virtue of their property ownership. The second element of class are those who do not own property in which Weber defines their contributions as being measured by their acts of service as workers in the labour market, who in turn receive an income that will influence their standard of living (Kharas, 2017 and Shortell, 2017). Although Fikile does not own property, she offers her human capital in the labour market which in turn gets her an income. Her standard of living has improved to what it was before she started working. To her, this steppingstone points her in the direction of being close to her "Project Infinity". The third element for Weber is class interest and it not necessarily translating into uniformity in social action, as neither communal nor societal action is the inexorable result of class interest (Kharas, 2017 and Shortell, 2017). However, this has resulted in decreased in-group shared cohesive identity, which has in turn birthed the construction of label/s such as the "coconut".

This is evident when Tshepo Tlou takes the initiative to find himself a part-time job in a fast-food restaurant called Instant Fried Chicken. To mask his privileged background, Tshepo dresses simply to avoid being singled out by his colleagues (Matlwa, 2007:24). But he struggles to adjust between the two worlds when he realises that workers are treated poorly by not only the customers, but Isabella, their employer who addresses them with little to no respect. Appalled by this treatment, Tshepo decides to raise this issue with Isabella. However, he is ridiculed by his co-worker who says: "These model C children know nothing of the real world. They are shocked by the ways of Umlungu. It is good you have come to work boy. There is much you must learn" (Matlwa, 2007:24-30). Despite coming from a privileged background, Tshepo is not spared the realities of how black people are treated and seen as being incompetent by whites. Similarly, to Dre who felt he had to prove he is authentically black to Jay, Tshepo has learnt that even with his acute potent English accent, he is not exempt from the cruel treatment of black people.

Or how Stuart Simons, Ofilwe's schoolmate belittles her family's success and constantly humiliates her in front of their other school mates questioning her family's success and wealth. On one occasion Ofilwe's father picked her up at school. Stuart Simons: "nice wheels, Ofilwe, who did your father, hijack this one from?" directly questioning the

legitimacy of their class position (Matlwa, 2007:16). Here traces of racial prejudice namely colourism are evident and seen in how Stuart Simone treats Ofilwe's family wealth based on them being black. He associates their acquired possessions with crime because black people in the past were not allowed such luxury and freedom. If Ofilwe was light skinned one wonders whether Stuart would have subjected her to such treatment. Just like Dre, this highlights that regardless of your class position as a black person, acquiring similar assets and privileges to white people still require black people to prove their earnings because of their skin colour. Here, the study disagrees with Matlwa's notion of Ofilwe and Fikile wishing to assimilate into whiteness as explained in chapter 2. This is because black people can never fully assimilate into whiteness. Whiteness goes beyond just skin colour; it is a structural form of power that white bodies have had over 400 and odd years work in favour of their advancement (The People vs The People, 2018). If assimilating into whiteness was just about acquiring the same possessions as white people, Stuart Simons would not be mocking Ofilwe by asking if her father hijacked his Mercedes and the Tlous would not feel like outcasts on the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop even though they eat Sunday breakfast their religiously (Matlwa, 2007:30-31).

#### **5.1.4 Language**

Cross-cultural influences as highlighted in chapter 3 through globalisation have produced hybrid identities, particularly with regards to language which plays a role in how people formulate their identities. Language as stated by Yazdiha (2010:33) has long been bound in definitions as a symbol of exclusion; not only that, but it has also been used to connect with others in social settings. The Tlous are BaPedi, with the parents and Tshepo being bilingual as they speak both Sepedi and English, while Ofilwe speaks English. Interestingly, Ofilwe attributes her speaking fluent English to success so much that she never cared about learning to speak Sepedi. Ofilwe: "Is it because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently. I knew from a very young age that Sepedi would not take me far. Not a chance! I observed my surroundings and noted that all those who were lawyers, doctors and accountants, all movie stars that wore beautiful dresses, all the singers that drove fancy cars and all my friends who owned the latest clothing, did not speak the language that bounced berserkly from Koko to Tshepo to Malome Arthur to Mama and back to Koko again. I did not care if I could not catch it. I spoke the TV language; the one Daddy spoke at work, the one Mama never could get right, the one that spoke sweet success" (Matlwa, 2007:54). It is evident that Ofilwe prides herself in speaking English and to her, success without it is

unattainable. So much so that she is awful to her mother for her inability to speak proper English.

In her diary writings, Ofilwe quotes her mothers' responses word for word. From her poor sentence construction to her pronunciation of certain English words. While arguing over not being able to attend Tim Browning's sleep-over party, Ofilwe's mother tries to make her understand why they must attend the later principal's funeral.

Gemina: "It is respect, Ofilwe. Maybe she not know you or even me very very good. But these things we must do." ... "We appreciate each other. We support each other." (Matlwa, 2007:7). It is evident that the transition between the two worlds has afforded Ofilwe to have a good education, which in turn allowed her accent to be of a certain calibre of which her mother was not too fortunate to receive for herself. Taking this a step further, one could argue that Ofilwe is particularly embarrassed by her mothers' lack of formal education which is evident in the way she speaks to her, excludes her from attending parent-teacher evenings at school and generally tries to keep her away from her social life as much as possible. Ofilwe: "Mamas English is ghastly" (2007:51). However, her brother feels that it is important that Ofilwe does not revolve her whole identity around Eurocentric standards so much so that she looks down on anyone who cannot speak the language she deems warrants success. He believes that it is important as a black child to know your cultural heritage which he refers to as "Africanism" (Matlwa, 2007:5).

Tshepo: "You will find, Ofilwe, that the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you may pretend, you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognise the thing you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much you have changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both" (Matlwa, 2007:93).

To further highlight what Tshepo meant by shun by both worlds, an incident at school leaves Ofilwe shocked that her "coconut" identity is being questioned:

Mrs Kumalo: "What language do you speak at home, Ofilwe?"

Ofilwe: "English Mrs Kumalo."

Mrs Kumalo: "No, Ofilwe, what language do you speak to your mother and father?"

Ofilwe: "English Mrs Kumalo" (Matlwa, 2007:57).

Another incident between Ofilwe and her former best friend Belinda had an argument in which Belinda alluded to the fact that Ofilwe's English is not as potent as she assumed it to be. The exchange between the two young ladies leaves a bitter taste in Ofilwe's mouth to a point where she cuts Belinda off.

Belinda: "Say 'uh-vin' Fifi. You back cake in an 'uh-vin', not 'oh-vin, 'uh-vin'."

Ofilwe: "This is boring, Belinda, let's see who can climb the highest up the tree."

Belinda: "No, Fifi! You have to learn how to speak properly."

Ofilwe: "I can speak properly."

Belinda: "No you can't, Fifi. Do you want to be laughed at again?" Come now. Say 'uh-vin'."

Ofilwe: "Uuh-vin."

Belinda: "Good. Now say 'b-ird.' Not 'b-erd', but 'b-ird'." (Matlwa, 2007:49).

This led Ofilwe to question her identity because one; she placed her entire identity on speaking English and two; transitioning between both worlds has left her seeking more belonging. Speaking the language of the oppressor/coloniser whether by choice or coercion for Yazdiha (2010) brings a certain shift and evolution in the meaning of culture. This is because when people speak, they assume a culture and in Ofilwe's case, she has assumed not only a new culture but a "coconut" identity that she now struggles with. Interestingly, Fikile who is very set in her ways of emulating white standards is fluent and understands her home language well even though she does not like to speak the language often. She finds no problem being shunned by her own and looks forward to the day her "Project Infinity" starts (Matlwa, 2007:109-110). Thus, cross-culture hybridity in this instance contributes to the construction of the "coconut" identity through language.

## **5.2 Internalised oppression**

What the study has discovered through these identified factors is what The People vs The People in chapter 4 terms as internalised oppression. Internalised oppression is a by-product or effect of living within an oppressive context whether in the past or present and is a condition necessary for the maintenance and perpetuation of oppression to occur (Pinkney, 2012 and Williams, 2012). Being a by-product of living in an oppressive context such as

apartheid South Africa, intra-racial labelling in post-apartheid South Africa does not come as a surprise. The country's historical contemporary experiences are a significant contribution of this.

For Williams (2012:23) cultural or societal levels of internalised oppression consists of the thought pattern, norms, beliefs, perspectives, values (explicit and implicit), and discourses that all contribute to the justification and reinforcement of this oppression. There is also an institutional and structural level of oppression which consists of laws, policies, processes, and practises of societal institutions that intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate this. Each level of oppression for Williams (2012) operates simultaneously, creating multi-layered, self-perpetuating systems that work to ensure that targeted groups remain in that said created category. Understanding the concept of internalised oppression, in part, helps to understand society and what happens to individuals who are positioned differently within society (Wieland, 2014 and Williams, 2012). Systems of oppression are often complex and subtle that many become blind to them, as such their behaviour sometimes unconsciously normalises certain habits and routines. The phenomenon of internalised oppression often results in divisions amongst in-groups. With stereotypes as all black people can speak their native languages fluently being generalised, individuals who cannot are judged negatively. This prejudgment takes away the individual's uniqueness because the "coconut" label has been attached to them by their intra-group members.

As people learn to be members of a group representing their social identity and members of society, they also learn unsaid rules, behaviours, codes and to an extent worldviews needed to maintain these existing systems of internalised oppression (The People vs The People, 2018). Internalised oppression is both an individual experience and a multiple and intersecting group phenomenon. This is because individuals and groups do not have monolithic experiences (Williams, 2012 and Pinkney, 2012). For example, two people of the same skin tone may both have incidents of internalised oppression connected to the colour of their skin. However, they could have a different social class such as Ofilwe and Fikile referenced in chapter 4. Their lived experiences differ in that Ofilwe's class position has given her status; with the "coconut" identity being all she knows yet struggles to 'fit in' with her peers at school who constantly questioned her class position and her brother constantly questioning her blackness. Fikile on the other hand, aspires to achieve the "coconut" identity which she named her "Project Infinity" struggles to identify with her family and her own community. Ultimately both girls acquire the "coconut" label in their two different experiences.

### 5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter illustrates that ‘white standards’ continues to affect the way in which black people interact with one another. Seen through the analysis of the Black-ish and the Coconut novel by Kopano Matlwa; the construction of the “coconut” identity is a result of numerous intertwined social factors of economic mobility, income, class position and language. Added to this the theoretical tools SIT, SIT and concepts class, colourism and hybridity have all contributed towards the construction of the “coconut” identity and have been crystallised and sedimented over the years. For instance, Ofilwe’s class position differs from Fikile but because Fikile aspires to attain the “coconut” identity, both girls are labelled by members of their community. Ofilwe is born into acquiring this label, while Fikile aspires to inherit the “coconut” identity which she names “Project Infinity” by any means necessary. Despite their differences, both girls continue to struggle with internalised oppression because of the country’s past and how they tie their ‘self-concept’ to their economic, income, class, and language beliefs. The two girls both struggle with navigating their shared group identities while also battling with internal conflicts with their self-concept. Similarly, Dre struggles to balance his transition between the two worlds but ultimately realises that there is no said roadmap of what it means to be black or instructions that guide one on how to be black. Being black and privileged does not exempt one from colourism or being labelled. The final chapter will give a recap of the study, giving closing thoughts of the main argument and reiterating that the construction of the “coconut” identity is a result of several factors.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter gives a recap of the study's research problem, research design and findings. It highlights some of the puzzles that emerged in the study and gives a closing argument concluding that the construction of the "coconut" identity label within black communities' results from the economic mobility attached to the rise of the black middle class.

### **6.1 Recap of study**

This mini thesis set out to investigate what conditions facilitate the rise and formation of the "coconut". As highlighted in the introduction, the research problem of the study was to understand the social dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa, zooming in on the public and private narratives surrounding the conditions that give way to the construction of the "coconut" label and how it has changed over time. The study picked up that scholarly literature on the construction of the "coconut" identity has not given much focus on labelling within black groups, but rather categorising black youths as either being fixated on assimilating into whiteness or black youths' accepting this label by their peers and accepting its negative connotation. The study worked towards adding to existing literature through its investigation on how intra-group labelling has become prominent among black South Africans. Engaging further across literature a common theme seen when the term "coconut" appears is that the term at times is often used negatively to interrogate one's blackness due to speaking English in a certain potent accent, as well as with regards to their socio-economic status.

This then raised questions of whether or not there are certain measures in place that 'qualifies' authentic blackness. This is because for Gqibitole (2019); Rudwick (2010); Hlongwane (2013) and Phiri (2013) "whiteness" has played a significant role in altering the way in which identity formation and privilege unravel itself within black communities. With certain economic and social privileges such as well-maintained schools, suburbia areas, cities and jobs that were preserved for whites only during apartheid, the transition to democracy opened these barriers for the vast majorities' inclusion. The study also saw that research on the middle class is often motivated by an interest in the political, economic, and social benefits associated with the term, with little verifying whether the selected empirical approach is aligned with such supposed benefits. The deliberate homogeneous grouping of

black people has taken away their agency in explaining that coming from the same group does not often translate into accepted shared group identity. The mini thesis investigated what other factors apart from one's potent English accent gave rise to the formation of the "coconut" label, particularly within black communities in South Africa.

A qualitative research design was used for this mini thesis. This is because qualitative research approaches provide tools for researchers to study complex social phenomena within their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008). When the approach is applied correctly, Baxter and Jack (2008) believe that it becomes a valuable method for research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop recommendations. Choosing to use a qualitative research approach for this study enabled the study to apply the radical paradigm to its full extent, with no linear confinement or expected outcome to achieve as opposed to if the study used a positivist approach. This is especially because social ideologies are constantly evolving and producing different or more refined outcomes. The study used a conceptual case study design looking at *Blackish*, an American sitcom and *Coconut* novel by Kopano Matlwa. The case study designs allowed the study to give a detailed analysis on specific subject's namely economic position, income, class position and language. The study looked at two different social contexts and how labelling in black communities is a by-product of its past injustices. Being a qualitative case study approach, this enabled the study to choose from several different case study designs (see Baxter and Jack, 2008:547), but for the purpose of this mini thesis, the study used an explanatory case study design.

The advantage of using this approach allowed the study to narrow a complex broad issue into a researchable example. Using this case study design allowed the study to apply a variety of methodologies and rely on a variety of sources to investigate a research problem. This design allowed the study to extend experiences and add strength to what is already known through previous research (Yin, 2003). It allowed the study to examine contemporary real-life situations with *Blackish* situated in American and *Coconut* situated in South Africa, thus providing the basis for the application of the concepts, theories and extension of methods which can be tailored to fit any social setting. The design can also provide detailed descriptions of specific and rare cases. Any study comes with disadvantages. With case studies usually being context specific, a single or small number of cases offer little basis for establishing reliability or to generalise the findings to a wider population of people, place, or things thus may require tailoring to suit the context in which the study will be carried out in (Yin, 2003). Findings may be biased due to the extent the researcher is exposed to the issue

being studied, however if the researcher is well read about the issue being studied findings may be similar.

The main limitation the study faced was finding The Coconut sitcom original clips on any online platform which were going to be used in comparison with Blackish. As a result, this led to the novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa being used as a substitute secondary source in its place to have a South African example in the study. A significant limitation of the study is the ability of not being able to conduct an empirical study.

## **6.2 Summary of findings**

The study sought to explore the idea of identity formation and labelling in post-apartheid South Africa as explained in chapter 2, with the main aim of understanding the different signposts that lay foundations to the construction of the “coconut” identity. The study found that “coconut” identity has always been around but throughout the years it has been crystallised and sedimented into a label with a name. Starting off with chapter 2, it highlights how the concept of social labelling in South Africa is not foreign and has been present during colonialism and apartheid. Bringing this to democratic South Africa, social labels have ranged from social labels such as “coconut”, “tenderpreneurs” and “clever blacks”.

The study saw that the “coconut” identity narrative revolved around the question of loyalty to one’s group membership. With people moving into different class positions because of the country’s democratic regime, allowing those in the rising black middle class free economic mobility, their intra-group membership loyalty began being questioned which gave rise to new labels within the black community. Throughout the mini thesis it is noted that labelling can either have positive or negative consequences, which in turn affects a person’s social identity that they carry with them for a lifetime. The construction of the “coconut” identity was always used in a negative manner to question one’s blackness. But over the years, the “coconut” identity label has moved from being perceived as negative to positive with the likes of Belle (2020), Chigumadzi (2013), and Sekhotlo (2015) as highlighted in chapter 2, all accept the label and reiterated that being part of the black middle class comes with privileges that one should acknowledge. For them denying one’s privilege is what continues to perpetuate in-group labelling because this allows for the continued colour-blind belief that all black groups are homogenous and experience the same life challenges which is not the case. Chapter 4 and 5 map out how transitioning between two worlds should not be seen as people being disloyal to the in-groups, because in the end, being black in previously white

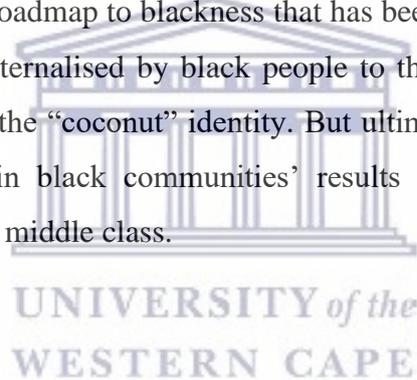
dominated spaces will always require one to prove themselves just by the mere virtue of being black. Ofilwe and Fikile in the *Coconut* novel by Kopano Matlwa are both testament to this; Ofilwe at school and Fikile at work.

The puzzles that emerged in the study is that apart from a person's fluent English accent, there are numerous other factors that should be considered such as economic position, income, class position and language that contribute towards the construction of the "coconut" identity. Using the theoretical tools SIT, SCT and concepts of hybridity, colourism and class reiterate the investigations position on the "coconut" label being a result of numerous interwoven social factors. Another puzzle that emerged is the matter of internalised oppression which is a by-product of living within an oppressive context whether in the past or present (*The People vs The People*). Being a by-product of living in an oppressive context such as apartheid South Africa, in-group labelling in post-apartheid South Africa does not come as a surprise. The country's historical contemporary experiences and the factors mentioned throughout the study have all played a contributing role to constructing the "coconut" identity.

This is because as people learn to be members of a group representing their social identity and members of society, they also learn unsaid rules, behaviours, codes and to an extent worldviews needed to maintain these existing systems of internalised oppression (*The People vs The People*, 2018). As Williams (2012) and Pinkney (2012) highlight, internalised oppression is both an individual experience and an intersecting group phenomenon. This is because individuals and groups do not have monolithic experiences. For example, two people of the same skin tone may both have incidents of internalised oppression connected to the colour of their skin. However, they could have a different social class such as Ofilwe and Fikile referenced in chapter 4. Their lived experiences differ in that Ofilwe's class position has given her status; with the "coconut" identity being all she knows yet struggles to find her 'comparative fit' with her peers at school who constantly questioned her class position and her brother constantly questioning her blackness. Fikile on the other hand, aspires to achieve the "coconut" identity which she named her "Project Infinity" struggles to identify with her family and her own community. Ultimately both girls acquire the "coconut" label in their two different group membership experiences.

### 6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the implications of continued group labelling in South Africa leave many young black people struggling to navigate their self and in-group identity membership, while dealing with discrimination from both their intra-group members and inter-racial out-group members. South Africa has not been immune to the legacy of its past. This has resulted in several social factors from intra-racial conflicts as a by-product of apartheid, which has contributed to the “coconut” label include one’s class position, language, and economic mobility. All these factors big or small have played a significant role in the formation of labels within black communities. The country’s past legacy of colonialism and apartheid has left many black South Africans struggling with internal scars that have in turn manifested themselves physically and evident in the way black people treat each other as seen in the novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa and supplementary source of *The People vs The People* MTV Africa docu-series. The roadmap to blackness that has been narrated by white standards in the past has in turn been internalised by black people to their own detriment which has resulted in the construction of the “coconut” identity. But ultimately, the construction of the “coconut” identity label within black communities’ results from the economic mobility attached to the rise of the black middle class.



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