

Race and the Micropolitics of Mobility

Mobile Autoethnography

on a South African Bus Service

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Abstract

This article takes an autoethnographic approach in exploring the micropolitics of mobility with particular reference to race, class, and identity on one South African bus service. For his daily commute between an inner-city Cape Town suburb and a worksite near the metropolitan edge, the author explores personal, embodied, and political dimensions of mobility in a context where race continues to dictate the expected parameters of mobility practice. When socioeconomics might allow for private car ownership and use (and when time-geographies almost require it), the autoethnography at the heart of this article requires the author to question the politics of choosing not to drive; to be a public transport passenger when one is expected to be a driver. In spite of the author's intentional status in the member group of bus passengers, experience of six months of everyday bus use sheds light on hidden dimensions of mobility inequality. It contributes toward filling a gap in empirical evidence on contemporary bus passengering and the continuing role of race in contexts of visibly differentiated and differentiating everyday mobility.

Keywords

autoethnography, bus transport, mobility, public transport, race, South Africa

The *Bus for Us?*

How will I get to work? This was a question that I posed to myself as I accepted a new academic post in the suburb of Bellville, Cape Town. Over the previous four years I had grown accustomed to walking to work from the inner-city suburb where I live—a practice that allowed me a guaranteed exercise regime and a means to observe the city around me at the speed, proximity, and scale afforded to the pedestrian. While I could stretch my budget and purchase a car, I opted for what was considered by friends and colleagues to be a more radical strategy: traveling by bus. “You can’t take the bus!” some warned me. My proposed commuting strategy provoked similar repeated comments. The



unspoken issues were bound in a complex relationship between race, gender, class, safety, and convenience that complicate the South African transportation landscape, as well as the normative discourses of mobility that privilege some practices while restricting others.¹ My bus travel takes place in a society where communities and the mobility strategies accessible to them continue to be distinguished by race, and where the infrastructure of post-apartheid urban life favors automobility for the privileged.² Although South Africa's apartheid-era racial classification system is gone, the box that I continue to tick defines me as "white." By consciously choosing the bus as the mobility strategy for my daily commute, I abraded a set of expected norms based on my identity as a white, middle-class professional man, and encountered pressure as I went ahead with my plan not to be a driver, but to be a passenger in a conveyance meant for an "us" that did not include "me."

The aim of this article is to explore the micropolitics of mobility on one South African bus service. Reflecting on six months of ethnographic observations taken through daily use of the Golden Arrow Bus Service (GABS) in Cape Town, I intend to offer four principle contributions to the mobilities literature: First, I shed light on the complexities of mundane mobilities in public transportation as mediated through race, class, and other markers of



Figure 1: The bus for us? The start of the author's journey at Mowbray Terminus

identity. The experience of mobility in contemporary Cape Town remains firmly entrenched in the racialized spatiality of the past, where a white urban (and coastal) core is contrasted by a vast peripheral edge where the majority black and coloured population endure long daily commutes to work.³ By capturing the mundane experience of mobility, my second contribution is to demonstrate the performative nature of movement and stasis that plays itself out in often small ways on a public conveyance, as evidenced through the performances of boarding, ticketing, sitting, moving, and alighting. Third, this article contributes to debates on mobile methods, responding to Peter Merriman's caution about the conflation of "methods for mobilities research" and "mobile methods" by using traditional methods of social science in a mobile environment⁴—moving *with* the social world I am exploring, while at the same time grappling with my complete membership in the social world I am seeking to understand. Fourth, I contribute to a body of literature speaking from the global South about the nature of moving in and through the South African city. I seek to evidence the mediating factors of race and identity in the use of public transportation through my membership in the microcommunity of the bus.

Mobility: Shaping Cities and Citizenship through Public Transportation

As a central defining feature of modern life, mobility can be understood through its role in shaping the city and the lives of its citizens.⁵ Mobilities are therefore relational, requiring a dialectic between mobility and immobility.⁶ There are critical relationships within constellations of mobility and the mobility systems themselves that deserve attention.⁷ This includes the relationship "between human mobilities and immobilities, and the unequal power relations which unevenly distribute motility, the potential for mobility."⁸ Such connections between power, citizenship, mobility, and belonging are clearly evident in the South African case where during apartheid the mobility of South Africa's majority populations were carefully controlled and segregated through separate systems of ticketing and conveyance.⁹

There is more to the experience of commuting, however, than what can be measured simply through the calculus of circulation and flow. Recent studies of public transportation in the South African city focus on service quality and flows rather than on bus passengering as an embodied experience of the city and its citizens.¹⁰ Seen through mundane mobilities in the form of public transportation, however, the experience and performance of mobility can also be used to shed light on the role that mobility plays in our understanding of place, identity, and subjectivity.¹¹ David Bissell focuses on train travel to understand the unfolding of everyday experiences of traveling with others on

public transport, but the bus as a site of public engagement and encounter has received little attention by scholars.¹² The “public” aspect of public transportation has much to do with collectives and their proximity, in a counterpoint to automobility that, according to Mimi Sheller and John Urry, is the “predominant global form of ‘quasi-private’ mobility that subordinates other ‘public’ mobilities of walking, cycling, travelling by rail” that has reshaped citizenship and the public sphere.¹³ Riding the bus, on the other hand makes possible “another mode of looking, hearing, seeing, and smelling that ‘eludes the discipline of automobility’ even as it reproduces it.”¹⁴ In her study of riding a bus in Birmingham, Helen F. Wilson speaks to the idea of “propinquity” and relational practice in the conveyance of a bus service, and to the negotiation of intercultural relationships that form relationally during everyday bus travel.¹⁵ Propinquity has to do with proximity and the collective, to moving *through* the city but also *with* others. Propinquity highlights the embodied aspects of moving in public transportation, being with strangers: sitting next to them, bumping against them, touching, avoiding, responding to the movements of the bus as well as the movements of other passengers and the objects they carry with them.¹⁶ Within the mobile platform of public transportation, tacit negotiations and intense encounter reveal relational practices that form in the context of being close to other passengers in the microcommunity of the bus.

The Passenger: A Mobile/Immobile Relational Body

The passenger is a mobile subject in passage. As Peter Adey et al. note, “in its predominant, contemporary usage passenger refers to a person in or on a conveyance other than its driver, pilot or crew.”¹⁷ A passenger is not simply a “body that is travelling within a motorized technology of transit.”¹⁸ A passenger is a mobile subject with relationship to other mobile and immobile subjects in the passenger’s proximity. To understand the embodied experience of passengering, we must therefore consider the relational aspects between the subject of the passenger, the mobile practice, and the space(s) in which they move, as different passenger bodies are positioned within constellations of mobility in diverse ways.¹⁹ The journey of a passenger is not idle time, nor is the passenger an inert, inactive subject. Time as a passenger can be productive time, for catching up on work or performing “myriad forms of mundane activity that people may enact while waiting, from drinking and eating to reading, talking and listening to music.”²⁰

The passenger is an individual member of a larger and fluid assemblage that Colin Symes refers to as a microcommunity.²¹ The formation and performance of microcommunities on public transport is ever-changing as new members join, leave and reposition themselves within the constellation of moving bodies and objects on the bus. Awareness of one’s body is part of

being a passenger, and the negotiation of bodies with other bodies by way of diverse “embodied tasks” is a requirement of being part of the mobile assemblage.²² Bus travel is an experience characterized not only by the sense of movement but also by the physical feeling of vibration as the body is in contact with the moving vehicle.²³ The mobile experience of public transport is thus an embodied one and cannot be separated from multiple dimensions of identity, foremost among them in the South African example being race.

The *Omnibus*: South African Bus Services

Early history of the bus in South Africa is reviewed by Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth Van Heyningen and Nigel Worden and by Peter Coates who chart the growth of public transportation in Cape Town from horse-drawn trams to the buses of today.²⁴ In both past and present, race is one of the principal signifiers of difference in South African mobile practice. While there was evidence of segregation in South African railways from 1910, buses were mobile sites of racial mixing until 1953 when an Act of Parliament forbade whites from sharing any vehicle with a member of another race group.²⁵ The racial ideology of apartheid was translated to bus services in Cape Town, both within individual buses as well as through services separated by race.²⁶ What then followed during the apartheid era of the mid-twentieth century was a system of public transportation in which segregation shaped the ways that passengers, waited, boarded, and were conveyed to their destinations and in which conflict and contestation against the state were played out.²⁷ The experience of public transportation in South Africa has been explored with both great sensitivity and in depth by Gordon Pirie who discusses both urban and rural contexts.²⁸ From horse-drawn trams to the omnibus and the birth of GABS, the growth and development of bus travel in Cape Town has been documented by academics and the industry alike. Billing itself as the “Bus for Us” and “Cape Town’s favorite bus service since 1861,” GABS has been in operation for more than 150 years.²⁹

More recently, Pirie has explored the dimension of race in mobility, and highlighted the lack of research on the intersection of race and mobility in South Africa and the influence that racialized mobility can have on social integration and justice.³⁰ Drawing upon the American context of segregation, Sieler investigates the role and effect of race in transport history, and highlights the need to draw attention to intersections of race and mobility, where race has been used to assign degrees of mobility and immobility to the traveling public.³¹ Over the course of the late twentieth century, as apartheid began to lose its grip on the division of society, the opportunities for individual and collective mobility across racial groups begins to change, and in some sense, the landscape of transport shifts with it, along with our understanding of the

role of transportation in shaping post-apartheid urban life.³² More recent studies of South African bus services focus on bus rapid transit (BRT) systems and the policy mobilities that have shaped their uptake and development in South African cities.³³ In contemporary South Africa, buses compete for passengers with minibus taxis and private transport options such as private automobiles. Those who choose not to take the bus cite problems such as poor facilities at bus stations, the level of crowding on the bus, security at bus stops, and security on the walk to and from the bus stop as the major inhibitors of bus use.³⁴ Such well-known challenges were the reason that my choice of the bus prompted reactions.

Bus services in present-day South Africa have been explored from a service quality perspective using quantitative methods. Ayanda Vilakazi and Krishna Govender take a structural equation modeling approach to understand the perception of service quality in Johannesburg, and Prince D. Ugo focuses his attention on Cape Town's MyCiti BRT in order to understand the potential for commuter uptake of the new system.³⁵ What is lacking in recent studies of public transportation, however, is an understanding of the embodied and political nature of mobility and the social and cultural implications of bus travel.³⁶ Extending beyond quantitative, rationalized approaches to the experience of bus service is critical on account of the political nature of mobility, and because of the related politics of "obduracy, fixity and friction" that surround it.³⁷

While my focus on the everyday bus service in South Africa may be a departure from current studies of mobility in the South African city, my autoethnographic approach on a South African bus service is preceded by N. P. van Wyk Louw's unpublished musings on another Cape Town bus service in the early 1940s.³⁸ Louw's "In die bus afgeluister" [Overheard on the bus] as examined by Sanders, shares the same mobile platform as my study but is written from the other side of the apartheid divide.³⁹ Louw's reflections on bus travel in Cape Town were noted during World War II when ethnic and racial segregation was already cemented on the South African landscape, but also when the omnibus in Cape Town comprised "the only place in S.A. where one can find samples of our entire population" in an otherwise racially divided land.⁴⁰ Louw's reflections took place on a bus service of 1940s Cape Town, on the author's daily commute between his home on the Atlantic Seaboard in Clifton and the University of Cape Town. Uniting our two mobile ethnographies on the bus is a method that is centered on participant observation and that is open to the embodied sensations of being mobile in the bus.

Methods

My autoethnographic method was focused on observing mobile phenomena during approximately 175 hours of bus travel carried out over a six-month

period between January and June 2015 on the Mowbray–Bellville bus route operated by GABS.⁴¹ The route takes passengers from a suburb that has long been an important transfer point for residents from Cape Town’s southern suburbs and those on the Cape Flats. As a self-appointed member of the bus-riding public, my personal experiences, observations, and insights allow me to draw conclusions about the nature of mobility on a South African bus service, without any pretense of burden or detachment.⁴² As the primary tool of research, my autoethnographic observations took place in close proximity to the bus riding public, as a member of that public. The necessity of propinquity in the bus exposes the observer to a cross-section of society, as was the case with Louw’s journey, noted by Sanders when he adds that “the bus is thus a place where *all* of the city’s people gather, or at least where their ways meet and paths cross.”⁴³ My observations focus on the environment inside as well as outside the bus, where the mobile, elevated platform of the bus allows for a degree of unencumbered and anonymous observation of the city outside.

I am not simply observing the city while moving through it. I also constitute the city through my own practice of mobility as Jensen argues.⁴⁴ Therefore, my autoethnographic approach is one that reveals embodied and political dimensions of mobility through the “armature” of the bus service while it also speaks to my own reading of the city and my position within it. As an observer I have also paid attention to the sonic dimensions of mobility through the sounds involved in moving and stopping the bus, and the conversations that take place before and during conveyance. My observations have been tuned beyond listening, to include sensing smells, drawing attention to tactile sensations, the vibrations and jarring stops/starts of a bus in motion.⁴⁵ Merriman signals a note of caution when pursuing methodological innovation in what Sheller and Urry consider the “new mobilities paradigm,” as he warns against the abandonment of tradition methods of social science research in favor of what may be regarded as more innovative mobile methods.⁴⁶ In spite of the static nature of much social science, Merriman argues the merits of traditional methods including diaries, autobiography, ethnography, and interviews among others in mobilities research. Whereas Louw sketched his musings into a red Croxley notebook, mine were recorded in field notes on the mobile platform of an iPhone. In both cases, the observer status is deeply embedded in the social world under study, in what is called “complete member researcher” status.⁴⁷

The Journey

My journey begins in the Cape Town suburb of Mowbray at an “interchange,” a multimodal transport node linking a range of public transport services:

trains from Cape Town's Metrorail; minibus taxis; and Golden Arrow buses. Mowbray provides a useful site for research on mobility as a confluence of multiple mobilities performed by a heterogeneous community of travelers. For Golden Arrow buses, Mowbray is a terminus, an "end" but also a beginning of the service in question. On my first day as a bus passenger I look for the sign indicating the Bellville service, but it is missing. The queue of passengers waiting at the start of the unnamed route is a mix of young, old, professionals, and student-types. The start of my bus journeying is tinged with self-consciousness. Fellow passengers looked at me quizzically. As the only white person in the terminus, was I out of place in this mobile environment? I wondered if my fellow passengers questioned my motives for catching the bus. My unease was sparked by the fact that I also did not understand how to be a bus passenger in this context, with little knowledge of schedules, ticketing processes, or etiquette on the bus. Although bus travel would be normal for someone of my race and class in other contexts (Europe, parts of North America), my race in addition to the fact that I lacked knowledge of the essential infrastructural and institutional moorings for legitimizing my role as a bus passenger set me apart from my fellow travelers.

Boarding

Boarding a bus is mediated by the "mooring" of the bus stop, the immobile infrastructure required for mobility to happen.⁴⁸ It is one aspect of bus travel that differentiates it from minibus taxis in South Africa that stop to collect and drop passengers at will. It is thus necessary to be immobile in order to be mobile on the bus.⁴⁹ Bus drivers themselves recognize the limitation that such moorings have, and they often compensate for it by collecting and dropping passengers at locations other than designated stops.⁵⁰ On the Golden Arrow service, the Conditions of Carriage clearly link boarding with designated stops.⁵¹ Boarding is a relational performance that is often mediated by race and gender, and sometimes physical ability. Boarding is a performance that includes deference to women and older people, myself included, as the queue operates differently depending on who is boarding:

The etiquette of boarding is differently applied. It's an odd combination of jockeying for position, "sizing up" the queue competition, and performing a variety of identities: gender, rank, race, age. Men defer to women in the queue, holding back as they board. Sometimes I'm offered preference, by young male students—all of who[m] are black or coloured. They frequently greet me with "Hello, sir" as I wait. I do my part in this performance by letting women step ahead of me. As the women in front of me board I can feel the male students waiting for me to proceed up the stairs to have my clipcard punched. I board, the queue of men fall in behind me.⁵²

The physical characteristics of the bus can also mediate the performance of boarding. Although there are modern additions to the fleet with low-slung chassis providing an easy platform for boarding and alighting, all of the buses on my service require a steep climb of four to five steps from the pavement. The aged, obese, or physically challenged often struggle to board.

Ticketing

Once onboard, it is the ticket that constitutes membership in the microcommunity. The complexities of *belonging* on the bus are quickly resolved in a passage from Louw, in which a black African man attests to his right to be on the bus because, as he says in Afrikaans, “ek betaal” [I’m paying].⁵³ For some, the bus is an impossible form of transport, as the fares exceed those of the minibus taxis. For others, like me, the impossibility lies in its contravention of normative discourses of mobility. The relationship between the passenger and the destination is reflected in a simple slip of white paper that emerges from the driver’s hand-cranked ticketing machine. Fares are paid according to distance traveled, with a single trip between Mowbray and Bellville costing in excess of 20 South African rand.⁵⁴ Once issued, the ticket displays the date, route, and fare paid, and it must be kept by passengers “until their journey has been completed and ... must be shown on demand to the company’s officials, failing which, the lawful cash fare must be paid.”⁵⁵ Issuing the ticket is part of the complex relationship the driver has with the passengers, the vehicle, other road users, and the pavement. He is at once a driver, a till operator, and a customer service representative.

A daily ticket is not the only way to “belong” on the bus. A passenger can also purchase, as I do, a multitrip “clipcard” for a series of journeys. Clipcards are paper tickets with multiple numbers (10, 20, and 48) designating the number of single trips for each card. The use of a clipcard demonstrates a more firmly entrenched relationship. It says that the passenger is a frequent user of the bus, and someone who may be seen as a more complete member of the microcommunity. A clipcard is also one way of saving money on the journey, insofar as the cost is nearly half of the cash price per journey. However, purchasing such a card also requires a larger outlay of funds at once—something that differentiates me from low-income populations who use the bus. For those passengers, a single-journey ticket is the only option, in spite of its higher overall cost per journey.

As the fare for the journey is determined by the destination I find myself eavesdropping, mirroring Louw’s “afgeluister” approach, to hear where my fellow passengers are going. Usually the destination is a place I know: Red Cross; Airport; UWC (University of Western Cape); Bellville. But often there are places that do not appear on my own mental map of Cape Town:

Comet Road; Lavis; Nico Malan. Most of the destinations along our journey pass through areas that were formerly designated for nonwhites under the apartheid-era Group Areas Act. As such, they are not areas that a white person like me would be expected to know, or to traverse on a daily basis. Such a racialized mental map of the city makes the unfamiliar destinations and my relationship to the passenger all that more interesting.

Sitting

Once onboard, I must decide where to position myself within the microcommunity of the bus. Variations in seating across a range of buses means that each journey requires a rapid assessment of the best place to sit.⁵⁶ Seats are often hard, with sharp edges trimmed in metal. On the outbound segment of my journey sitting in the first row of the bus, I am conscious of the fact that this was the area reserved for whites during the period of “limited bus apartheid” when segregation was organized by seating, not by the vehicles themselves.⁵⁷ In spite of the shared freedom for all passengers to sit where they choose, I cannot help but think that my choice appears to be based on racial privilege. Young people often join me in the empty seat next to me, but rarely will an older, black, or coloured person join me in the first row. Seat choice is subject to temporal aspects: time of day; where the sun is positioned during my journey; if I want the sun to keep me warm or I wish to avoid it on a hot summer day. On a cool clear morning, I sit on the right-hand side of the bus at the window heading toward Bellville; on a hot sunny day, I opt for the left side from Bellville to Mowbray. I choose to follow or avoid the sun, and so do my fellow passengers. This leads to lopsided configurations of passengers: everyone on the shady side, only those boarding later are unlucky enough to sit in the glare of the summer sun, in a sweltering bus without air conditioning. Whether or not passengers are willing to share their seat, the Conditions of Carriage prescribe that they do.

Sometimes I share with rotund *mamas* with parcels in their hands, often it is a young student. A row of adult men makes for very tight quarters, thighs tightly against each other's, knees often knocking. While I witness other passengers muscle in to the threesomes in their rows, my seatmates often gently settle next to me, with an apology for the proximity. Shoulders can be a problem, leaving one or two of the men to lean forward to make room. Men are less likely to sit next to me than females; those men who do I recognize as students from the university. One male student has grown accustomed to my presence on the morning service, and frequently joins me, engaging in a moment of “light sociality” that shapes my connection to the microcommunity of bus passengers as we set off on our journey.⁵⁸

Moving

The experience of bus passengering is rarely defined by comfort. In order to move in the bus, I move with the bus and with my fellow passengers, as my body interacts with the mobile assemblage of vehicle, passengers, and goods. Seated on the aisle in the first row, I am part of the embodied performance required of each passenger who boards or alights:

Some glide smoothly past me; others struggle with the size of their body, the parcels or bags they carry, or simply with the obstacles put in their way by other passengers ... their embodied performance of mobility becomes mine, as I respond to their movement or change my position to accommodate them and the movements of the bus itself.

It was the proximity to embodied racial difference that moved some white Capetonians to support bus apartheid in the 1950s.⁵⁹ As we move through the traffic, part of what is generally an aggressive driving environment on South African roadways, I sense the embodied reply required of passengers in the bus: anticipating, leaning, and bracing. Bus passengering requires active participation by those who are otherwise thought to be immobile subjects in the vehicle, as we stabilize ourselves amid the jarring ride, leaning against the cabin, grasping at seatbacks, and sometimes clinging to each other.

Stopping and Alighting

The act of alighting from a bus is moored by the infrastructure of bus stops, and is contingent on the bodily performance of standing to press the bell; moving forward while the bus is still in motion, and alighting as quickly as possible. The performance is noted in the Conditions of Carriage, which provide some leeway that pierces the absolute dialectic of mobility and mooring as “Passengers ... may not get ... off the bus when it is moving or at any place other than recognized bus stops, except under the direction of an inspector, driver or other company official.”⁶⁰ However, the passenger’s relationship to the driver—in the language spoken, in their familiarity, can break the rules that normally govern the journey. On one particular service, the bus and its driver exhibited minibus taxi qualities,

Along Robert Sobukwe Road two passengers stand to alight. The male stands near the driver and asks to stop near the next robot. “Voor die robot?” [before the traffic light?] she asks, as his female companion shouts out an open window at a friend near the Pink Flats in Bishop Lavis. They alight. Further on a man and woman stand as if to prepare for alighting. The man also asks for a stop ... “Dankie driver,” he says, the same as one would in a taxi. The driver stops. The woman follows. A third begins to step off and she asks in English “Is

this a stop?" No, says the driver. She is not allowed to alight. We drop her at the next designated stop.

Alighting in this case demonstrates itself as a relational practice whose outcome is contingent on some sense of shared membership, identity, purpose, or embeddedness. Did the driver know the others personally? Do they regularly alight at the same point? Where can one person's journey end versus another? It is perhaps a matter of relationship.

Relationships: Micropolitics of mobility

Relationships between members of the ephemeral community on the bus are complex, with both temporal and spatial dimensions mediating its composition. In the temporal dimension: the day of the week; the time of the service relative to working hours and timing of lectures at the university; the month of the year, relative to academic calendar and school holidays; and the weather, especially in the case of rain where public transport users opt for private vehicles where possible due to the negative aspects of waiting in the rain. On the bus, relationships are bound by matters of propinquity, for being proximate to others in an often-crowded conveyance is something that bus travelers must accept. Often we must relate to each other through gestures, such as pointing to the bell to signal a stop if you cannot reach it, or with verbal language—complex in South Africa with eleven official languages. Passengers too come with their own linguistic identities and abilities. For many bus riders the lingua franca is English. As a white person, I might be expected to be proficient in Afrikaans in addition to English, but neither drivers nor fellow passengers will speak to me in Afrikaans; and never in isiXhosa, a language that I am not expected to speak on account of my race.

Relationships on the bus are not always congenial. Mobile preachers use the platform of the bus to spread their gospel to passengers through brief sermons and a mixture of guitar-accompanied song and prayer, against the protests of some while others sing along. Other factions of the microcommunity leave traces of their relationships on the bus in the form of graffiti, where

the seatbacks in front of me are covered in graffiti. One former passenger announces "Andile [with a star dotting the "i"] was here." "Rizqah" seemingly joined him too.

Were they passengers on different journeys, with only the traces of their mobility intersecting on the plywood seatback? Or did they know each other as members of the same, proximate mobile community?

Other passengers provide mobile numbers, adding "WhatsApp" as an invitation to contact. Another reminds passengers "YOLO: you only live once" ...

“rizqah,” who appears twice on the same seatback must be a frequent passenger on bus number 3150.

“Rizqah,” along with “Andile,” “mikhail,” and the “Under Cover Crew” opt for black permanent pen. Their scroll of indelible names offer hints of race and religion. It is a heterogeneous community of passengers. Their relationships to the journey remain, and the politics of the relationships are constantly negotiated as the journey unfolds. I am continuously reminded of race as my journey unfolds.

My interaction with two passengers, Dottie and “Priss” sheds light on the way that my race is read by others within this community.⁶¹ After boarding,

Dottie sits next to me and proceeds to chat, touching my arm, laughing. She quickly breaks the usual and unspoken rules: not speaking too much to fellow passengers; touching deliberately and often; and being somewhat loud (although in a very jovial way)....

Dottie is small—sparrow-like in her build. We’ve got lots of room in our three-seater, but she uses it all to her advantage to get closer to me. She asks where I come from, because she says she doesn’t see “locals” on the bus.

Her comments suggest that riding the bus is something that a South African of my profile (white, male, professional) would not, or perhaps should not do. My presence calls to question my identity with relation to bus travel, and the reasons that I have joined this microcommunity. She seems to question my intentions:

She tells me her name is Dottie, and her friend is “Priss”—because she is prim and proper, while Dottie is stoud [naughty] by her own admission. Dottie says that she is 71 and is looking for a man, and if I follow her from the bus, perhaps I can chase after her. She promises to run slowly! At that point I’m blushing and laughing, unexpected in this setting that is usually sober. Priss chimes in, as if to add a cautionary note: “You’re speaking to a lecturer, Dottie!”

I confirm Priss’s reading of me, but that does not stop Dottie from carrying on with her laughter. We continue our journey down the road until Dottie asks me to press the button for her, indicating our time together will soon end. Dottie and Priss are unique characters on my journey, and our interaction hints at the ways that passengers see me, my race, and my position within the community of passengers. My journey pierces the boundaries cemented into place in the apartheid era separating me as a white man from the city beyond.

Although my use of a car might have provided me with a greater degree of mobility, it would at the same time have limited my engagement with all but the road ahead of me and the motorists, other road users, and pedestrians around me. It would have limited me to the spaces of the city deemed appropriate to a white man—my private home, my private car, and my workplace—and the normative discourse of mobilities that would have governed

my movements. From my seat on the bus, I have achieved a perspective that I otherwise could not have as I move through the city and rub shoulders with fellow citizens across boundaries of race, class, and gender. Bus passengering in contemporary South Africa provides a strategy to stall the persistent *de facto* racialism that hinders social mixing, contact with others, and understanding across racial divides.

Conclusions

The results of my autoethnographic reflections on a South African bus service neither represent a general experience of bus travel in Cape Town nor exceptionalize it. They are simply the reflections of one member of the bus-traveling public, and are intended to illustrate the complex and embodied dimensions of bus travel that are revealed through the micropolitics of race and identity as they emerge through a series of relational practices. Bus travel as evidenced by this study fits into a broader politics of mobility, where race informs normative mobility practices. Abrading normative practice as I have through bus travel has exposed the embeddedness of the political in everyday mobility, revealing connections between power, citizenship, mobility, and belonging. My reflections address an interdisciplinary mobilities literature while also contributing specifically to a more nuanced understanding of the mundane mobilities of contemporary urban life in Cape Town and beyond, as the racial dimensions of public transportation are not unique to South Africa.⁶² Beyond the spectacle of bus travel related to the 2010 FIFA World Cup and its cosmopolitan BRT systems, I have attempted to illustrate the complexities of the mobility practice of a more ordinary form of public transportation in order to value the mundane dimensions—both temporal and spatial—of mobility as mediated through race, class, and other markers of identity. Through my autoethnographic narrative, my second contribution was to demonstrate the performative nature of mobilities as revealed through relational practices on a public conveyance. The rituals that were observed, the courtesies that were extended, and the relationships that were quickly formed and dissolved in the microcommunity of the bus illustrate the importance of relating to the materiality of moving people and objects while making a daily commute via public transportation in South Africa, as elsewhere. A third contribution of this article is a response to Merriman's caution about the conflation of "methods for mobilities research" and "mobile methods."⁶³ In this autoethnographic study, I have actively chosen to move with the social world that I have explored. I have attempted to understand the mobile community of bus commuters by being a passenger myself; not simply by moving with this social world, but also moving with it while employing traditional methods of social science research. Finally, my autoethnographic reflections contribute to a body of lit-

erature speaking from the global South about the nature of moving in and through the post-apartheid city. My findings demonstrate the mediating factors of race and other markers of identity on mobility in public transportation and highlight the opportunities for better understanding our cities and society through the use of public transportation and membership in the micro-community of the bus.

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Notes

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10. Ayanda Vilakazi and Krishna Govender, "Exploring Public Bus Service Quality in South Africa: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach," *Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management* 8, no. 1 (2014): 1–10; Prince D. Ugo, "The Bus Rapid Transit System: A Service Quality Dimension of Commuter Uptake in Cape Town, South Africa," *Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management* 8, no. 1 (2014): 1–10.
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15. Wilson, "Passing Proximities in the Multicultural City," 635.
16. David Bissell, "Vibrating Materialities: Mobility-Body-Technology Relations," *Area* 42, no. 4 (2010): 479–486.
17. Peter Adey, David Bissell, David McCormack, and Peter Merriman, "Profiling the Passenger: Mobilities, Identities, Embodiments," *Cultural Geographies* 19, no. 2 (2012): 169–193, here: 178.
18. *Ibid.*, 170.
19. *Ibid.*, 184.
20. Juliet Jain and Glenn Lyons, "The Gift of Travel Time," *Journal of Transport Geography* 16, no. 2 (2008): 81–89; David Bissell, "Animating Suspension: Waiting for Mobilities," *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (2007): 277–298, here: 285.
21. Colin Symes, "Coaching and Training: An Ethnography of Student Commuting on Sydney's Suburban Trains," *Mobilities* 2, no. 3 (2007): 443–461, esp. 447.
22. Bissell, "Passenger Mobilities," 285.
23. *Ibid.*
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25. Pirie, "Colours, Compartments and Corridors," esp. 42–43.
26. Gordon Pirie, "Implanting Racial Ideology: Bus Apartheid in Cape Town," *Social Dynamics* 15, no. 1 (1989): 61–74.
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32. Pirie, "Reorienting and Restructuring Transportation in Southern Africa"; Czeplédy, "Getting around Town."
33. Astrid Wood, "The Politics of Policy Circulation: Unpacking the Relationship between South African and South American Cities in the Adoption of Bus Rapid Transit," *Antipode* (2014), DOI: 10.1111/anti.12135; Astrid Wood, "Competing for Knowledge: Leaders and Laggards of Bus Rapid Transit in South Africa," *Urban Forum* 26, no. 2 (2015): 203–221.
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37. Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," 29.
38. N.P. van Wyk Louw, "In die bus afgeluister," Holograph Notebook 2.X.10. J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch.
39. Mark Sanders, "'In die bus afgeluister': The Intellectual in the City," *Tydskrif vir letterkunde* 43, no. 1 (2006): 5–21.
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41. Andre Novoa, "Mobile Ethnography: Emergence, Techniques and Its Importance in Geography," *Human Geographies* 9, no. 1 (2015): 97–107.
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43. Sanders, "'In die bus afgeluister,'" 10.
44. Jensen, "Flows of Meaning," 140.
45. David Bissell, "Vibrating Materialities."
46. Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2006): 207–226; Merriman, "Rethinking Mobile Methods," 168.
47. Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 373–395.
48. John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000); Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, "Editorial."
49. David Bissell, "Animating Suspension: Waiting for Mobilities," *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (2007): 277–298.
50. Czeplédy, "Getting around Town," 72.

51. The Conditions of Carriage constitutes the binding legal framework under which GABS passengers use the service. They are posted prominently on all buses, often in the three main languages of the Western Cape: English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa.
52. This and other reflections below come from my fieldnotes
53. Sanders, "In die bus afgeluister," 13.
54. Single (daily) tickets can only be purchased aboard the bus, and the price can vary widely based on the driver's understanding of the complex ticketing zones that seem to have fluid boundaries. On many occasions during my bus passengering, disputes have broken out between driver and passenger over the varying ticket prices between the same destinations on different days.
55. The Conditions of Carriage are posted in each bus. Text is taken from the notice.
56. Buses are manufactured by the German bus maker Maschinenfabrik Augsburg und Maschinenbaugesellschaft Nürnberg (MAN)
57. Pirie, "Implanting Racial Ideology," 65.
58. Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (London: Wiley, 2002), 45.
59. Pirie, "Implanting Racial Ideology," 71.
60. The Conditions of Carriage, n.p.
61. Pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity.
62. Seiler, "The Significance of Race"; Seiler, "Race: A Key Category."
63. Merriman, "Rethinking Mobile Methods," 168.