

# Exploring the Role of Race in Social Cohesion in Two Rural Communities of South Africa

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## Abstract

Globally, race and social cohesion in urban areas have received significant research focus. However, it may appear that scholars have not paid adequate attention to the role of race as a facilitator or barrier to social cohesion in rural areas. Thus, the aim of the study was to explore the role of race as a facilitator of, or barrier to, social cohesion in two South African rural communities, namely, Lambert's Bay, Western Cape, and Philippolis, Free State Province. The study uses some of the tenets of critical race theory to interrogate the issues of race in South African rural communities. A qualitative research design was utilised to gather in-depth knowledge of the participants' views. Nineteen participants participated in the face-to-face interviews conducted with the stakeholders and parents of both communities under study. The data was analysed thematically and five themes were identified, presented and discussed in the results: (1) Experiences of other racialised groups, (2) Experiences of immigrants, (3) Race as a factor influencing cohesion, (4) Experiences of racial discrimination, and (5) Fear of marginalisation and exclusion. Additionally, the findings highlighted physical separation and segregation between races



as barriers to race relations in the communities. The study highlights that segregated communities limit interracial interactions, and rather foster intolerance, which in turn fuels racism. As a result, these factors have negative consequences on social cohesion in South African communities.

**Keywords:** Race, Social cohesion, Rural community, Critical theory, South Africa

## Introduction

The relationship between race and social cohesion has become a significant issue in recent academic and policy debates. Accordingly, it is extensively researched that race among community members plays a critical role in social cohesion given the history of South Africa that was characterised by racial segregation (Inkeri, 2019). South Africa has a history of oppression and racial segregation, and it was recently pronounced as the most unequal country in the world (World Bank, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that race still plays a pivotal role in impeding social cohesion in South African communities. This is particularly due to the high prevalence of social exclusion, polarisation, and related conflict resulting from migration and urbanisation, which has contributed to issues such as lack of trust and racial divisions among community members (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Migration and urbanisation in South Africa enhance diversity, creates heterogenous groups, encourages division and inequality, and ultimately, non-cohesive communities (Landau, Segatti, & Misago, 2011).

Therefore, the promotion and ultimate achievement of social cohesion require a deliberate pursuit of various and appropriate characteristics. Depending on the context, these characteristics must be capable of contributing towards the realisation of a cohesive society. According to Cloete and Kotze (2009), social cohesion is a normative concept in the sense that it suggests action towards a goal, relying on a number of contributing factors and consequences. Cloete and Kotze (2009) further add that social cohesion is promoted through a conducive environment for, or implementing certain actions towards the goal. Thus, social cohesion emanates from deliberate actions, practices, aspects or a combination of various aspects. Arguably, the promotion of social cohesion ordinarily takes different dimensions, depending on the social, political and economic context and challenges afflicting a particular situation, environment or spatiality. For the South African context, Ratele (2015) suggests that for social cohesion to be relevant, it must be anchored on a variety of interventions designed to overcome persistent historic and contemporary geography of segregation, which has engendered social divisions and equality.



Literature further highlights that social divisions and inequality entrench unjust outcomes that are instrumental in eroding, among other things, social relations (Todes & Turok, 2018). Understandably, this creates a serious problem in communities because social cohesion and the role of race among people, in any place, are at the centre of everyday life in a community. For this reason, exploring race as a factor hindering social cohesion in small rural communities has not received adequate attention (Lefko-Everett et al. 2018). Previous research has mainly focused on race in the cities rather than rural communities. Therefore, to address this knowledge gap, this paper, presents an exploration of race as a barrier or facilitator of social cohesion in the rural communities, of Lambert's Bay and Philipolis, given the different dynamics of rural and urban communities in South Africa.

### **Segregation and Social Challenges in South Africa**

South Africa historically promoted legalised racial exclusion, spatial segregation, and ethnic and tribal divisions due to a colonial and apartheid past. These exclusions and divisions have legally created and enforced racial and ethnic enclaves formalised and reinforced by spatial and social fragmentation and polarisation. Unfortunately, spatial and social forms of separation and exclusion continue to persist in South Africa today. Hence, Turok et al. (2021) highlight that the literature has consistently demonstrated the visible failures to undo the persistent racial exclusionary spatial patterns, social segregation and marginalisation in South Africa. Segregation, divisions, and exclusion are described by Mogoeng (2016: 3,) in the case of *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another*, ZACC 19 as “irrational differentiation” designed to perpetuate racial domination and intolerance. Literature is replete with views highlighting the consequences of the failure to undo the exclusionary spatial patterns inherited from the past (Pieterse, 2009; National Planning Commission, 2011; Turok, 2013). In particular, the World Bank (2019) reiterates that South African communities are among the most unequal and visibly polarised societies in the world. It is for this reason that the social, political, and economic consequences of urban spatial segregation have been widely documented. Suffice to highlight that the current urban and rural spatial segregation continues to negatively shape the socio-spatial structuring of society. According to Kiguwa and Langa (2015), the pervasive spatial and social fragmentation contributes towards weak social relations, conflict, mistrust, and marginalisation. Though significant achievements have been made since 1994, communities as sites of social intercourse continue to lack diversity, interaction, integration, and solidarity. Thus, it is proving to be difficult to achieve a South African society that is equal, united, non-sexist, and non-racial. Particularly, the lack of social compact and cohesiveness in communities is significantly weakening the constitutional aspiration of nation building (National Planning Commission, 2011). Hence, the National Strategy for Social Cohesion (2012) infers that the promise of transformation remains elusive.



The need for social cohesion is widely considered as a strategic requirement to transform the South African society. Njizela et al. (2017) add that social cohesion is envisaged to promote tolerance, social interaction, inclusion and solidarity in communities. There is consensus in the literature, indicating that social cohesion in South Africa is relevant and appropriate for enhancing social relations and cooperation between people, irrespective of their race, class and locality (Lefko-Everett, 2016) It is also regarded as the way to build inclusion, peace and solidarity. Therefore, it is important to contextualise race within the context of social cohesion in South Africa.

### **The Meaning of Social Cohesion**

The concept of social cohesion has increasingly gained traction in organisations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), the World Bank, the Club of Rome, and the Canadian Federal Government. Despite its global appeal, “there is no single accepted definition of the term internationally and locally” (OECD, 2012: 53). What has been observed, however, is that the concept of social cohesion has multiple definitions which prevent its meaningful measurement and application (Bruhn, 2009). Equally, many of the definitions of social cohesion emphasise its role in terms of conflict management and resolution (Search for Common Ground [SFCG] & United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015).

Quite significantly, social cohesion is said to denote the extent to which groups, such as communities, are bound together by harmonious relations, work together, and feel obligated to act toward a common purpose (Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). It is commonly regarded as promoting a shared sense of morality, values, and common purpose; levels of social order; extent of social solidarity created by income and wealth equalities; social interaction within and across communities or families; and sense of belonging to a place (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). Similarly, Chipkin and Ngqulunga (2008) indicate that many governments in the post-colonial context undertook social cohesion projects as a nation building project. Therefore, the significance of social cohesion is vastly acknowledged as being at the heart of what humanity currently needs (Forrest & Kearns, 2001).

In South Africa, social cohesion is increasingly being seen as critical to the objectives of the developmental state, which, it is argued, requires a social compact to rally all sectors of society together around a common national vision of transformation (Ballard, 2019). Equally, social cohesion is perceived as having potential benefits for South Africa. Palmary (2015: 63) asserts that “social cohesion in South Africa is uniquely understood as a project of nation building”. Consequently, social cohesion is regarded as the way to build a cohesive society anchored on inclusion, peace, and solidarity. It is widely regarded as an effective way of addressing segregation and exclusion, which continue to reproduce and reinforce racial, ethnic, and tribal identities of the South African society.



This approach to social cohesion is relevant to South Africa's socio-political context. Its appropriateness is reflected by its accurate understanding of the divisions, conflict, and exclusions between and within its communities in South Africa. Similarly, it is made appropriate by the need to; consider and harness relationships between people, irrespective of their diversity, as well as the intention to promote interaction to reduce conflict based on race, ethnicity, and class, and respond to the current high levels of social exclusion and polarisation (Palmary, 2015). It is crucial to emphasize that social cohesion is not always better in societies with more inter-racial interaction. In some cases, even with less social interactions, a community can actually be more cohesive. Social integration may be more closely correlated with inter-racial relationships. However, according to the contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), an increase in positive and long-lasting contact between members of various groups (like racial or ethnic groups) lowers intergroup prejudice and improves relations between historically divided communities. Additionally, social engagement is a prerequisite for social cohesion in South Africa (Hofmeyr & Govender, 2015) and may help people of different racial groupings come to a consensus on matters pertaining to transformation programs intended to lessen inequality.

### **The Issue of Race**

Race is a sensitive and complex concept that is highly debated by scholars. Lopez (1995) emphasises the power of race in our society. Race dominates our personal lives. Every part of our daily lives can be understood through the experience of race. López highlights that our very ways of talking, walking, eating and dreaming are ineluctably shaped by notions of race. López (1995) further summarises that race mediates every aspect of our lives. 'Race' is a social construct brought into existence both in and through discursive practices and is only real in that it is experienced as real (Puttick, 2012). In the South African context, some of the persistent race narratives relate back to apartheid. During apartheid, racism was institutionalised in policies and practices based on ideologies and beliefs of racial superiority (NPC, 2011). In accordance with this ideology, the South African population was divided into racial categories; white, Indian, coloured and black people. Based on these categories, the society was constructed to impose and institutionalise white superiority and supremacy in every sphere of life (NPC, 2011). It was done in such a manner that discriminated against the majority of the population. Although racism was abolished in 1994, social attitudes and access to resources remain largely race based. Furthermore, the remnants of racism remain visible in spatial divisions of human settlement. Despite an elaborate legislative process to deracialise spatiality in South Africa, the literature is replete with evidence of the failure to undo the exclusionary spatial patterns inherited from the past (NPC, 2012a; Pieterse, 2019; Turok, 2012). Correspondingly, Steyn and Ballard (2013:2) found that:

The demise of formal measures of racial segregation previously enforced by apartheid has not resulted in an unproblematically integrated society.



South Africa remains a deeply divided society, and even as the fault lines shift and reconfigure, some scholars argue that the spatial distribution of housing and communities in cities and towns remains relatively unchanged.

It is clear from the above quotation that past and contemporary spatial divisions and social segregation continue unabated. The reality is that certain areas in cities continue to be territories of predominantly homogenous races (Banaji et al., 2021). South African cities today are still marked by social and spatial fragmentation as well as unacceptably high levels of inequality (Brown-Luthango, 2020). According to Brown-Luthango (2020), apartheid spatial planning policies have been entrenched in recent times by inappropriate regulation, confusing and often conflicting policy priorities, thereby, inevitably making these cities hostile places, which make different groupings in these areas to feel unwelcomed, untrusted, unvalued, unaccepted and a sense of ‘unbelonging’.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) is “an exciting, revolutionary intellectual movement with a radical approach that put race at the centre of critical analysis” (Roithmay, 1999:1). CRT provides a different and much-needed approach to thinking about the contemporary challenges of race and racial domination (Modiri, 2012). It not only centres race at the core of its analysis, but it also recognises other forms of oppression, namely, class and gender, which have important implications for people (Howard, 2008). Race and racism in this study are not located exclusively in social relations that refer to prejudices and discriminatory behaviour based on skin colour, but rather racial oppression as institutionalised and systemic. One of the methods used by CRT is called counter-storytelling. It is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told “including people of color, women, gay, and the poor” those on the margins of society) and a tool for analysing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse (Delgado, 1993). The study uses CRT to examine the notions of race as understood by the participants and creates a platform for the counter-storytelling of the accounts of experiences of race and racism in the rural towns of Lambert’s Bay and Philippolis. It gives a voice to those who have been silenced by white supremacy. It further serves as a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of colour continue to experience in rural towns of South Africa (Villenas et al., 1999).

The substantial social, political, and economic effects that race has on the lives of both the privileged and the oppressed are, nonetheless, acknowledged by critical race theorists. Critical race theorists understand that race is a social construction, but they also identify the actual, palpable effects of racism (Abrams & Moio, 2009; McDowell & Jeris, 2004). The effects of racism can be seen in the history of colonization, apartheid (McDowell & Jeris, 2004). Delgado and Stefancic (2012), argue that CRT scholars do not conceal their work



under the deceptive claim that it is neutral and unbiased. CRT's overarching goal is to look into, dismantle, and ultimately eradicate racist systems and disparities in order to bring about a "more egalitarian state of affairs" (Bell, 1995: 902) (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). The foundation of CRT is the conviction that "scholarly resistance will lay the groundwork for wide-scale resistance" and that "the standards and institutions created by and fortifying white power ought to be resisted" (Bell, 1995, p. 901). Despite the fact that there is no established list of CRT principles.

## Methodology

- *Study setting*

The study was conducted in two rural towns, namely, Lambert's Bay in the Western Cape, and Philippolis in the Free State Province. Lambert's Bay is a small rural fishing town situated 280 kilometres north of Cape Town. Based on the last Census, it has a population of 6120 (Census survey, 2011). The Lambert's Bay population is predominantly composed of Coloured people (74.53%), followed by White (15.90%), then Black (8.97%), "other" (0.38%), and lastly, Indian/Asian (0.23%) people (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Philippolis is a small town in the southern Free State, 180 km south of Bloemfontein. According to the 2011 Census, it has a total population of 950 people, the majority of whom are Coloured (60%), followed by White (23%), then Black (14%), and then "other" (3%) people (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

- *Study design*

A qualitative explorative study was utilised to gain in-depth information on participants' (11 parents and 8 stakeholders) views. The participants in the study were accessed through a local non-government organisation (NGO) that offered social services to community members. There were eight stakeholders in Lamberts Bay and eleven in Philippolis. Participants in the study ranged in age from 21 to 61; there were 12 females and 7 males. The participants from the NGOs were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. Families and stakeholders are seen as fundamental agents that contribute to the general functioning of society, hence it was thought appropriate to use this sampling technique (Botha & Booysen, 2014). Data was collected via face-to-face interviews in the preferred language of the participant. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and identify themes and codes (Braun & Clark, 2006). In this study, the exploratory research design allowed the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the role of race in social cohesion.

- *Sampling procedure*

The purposive sampling methods were used to recruit participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants. Lambert's Bay in the Western



Cape and Philippolis in the Free State Province was used as the sample frame from which participants can be drawn. Participants were included if they met the following criteria: (1) if they were eighteen and older; (2) if they were members of the NGO that offered social services; (3) if they can speak and understand English, Afrikaans, or isiXhosa. Participants who met the above-mentioned criteria were selected to participate in the study. A total of 19, (12 females and 7 males) participants were interviewed. The majority of the participants were between 21 and 61 years of age. Table 1 below shows the characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

	<i>Demographic Characteristic</i>	<i>Participants (N = 19)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Females	12	63.1
	Males	7	36.8
<b>Age</b>	18 – 24 years	2	10.5
	25 – 35 years	4	21.0
	36 – 46 years	6	31.5
	47+ years	7	36.8
<b>Race</b>	White	6	31.5
	Black	5	26.3
	Coloured	7	36.8
	Indians	0	0
	Other	1	5.2
<b>Education Level</b>	High school	9	47.3
	Diploma/certificate	3	15.7
	Bachelors/honours	5	26.3
	Masters/doctorate	2	10.5
<b>Home language</b>	English	4	21.0
	Afrikaans	9	47.3





	Xhosa	3	15.7
	Zulu	2	10.5
	Other	1	5.2
<b>Place of living</b>	Lamberts Bay	8	42.1
	Philippolis	11	57.8

## Findings and Discussion

In the study findings, the participants identified themselves according to the apartheid race classification used in South Africa and this understanding of race informs every aspect of the person's life (Posel, 2001). The majority of the participants in the study identified themselves as Coloured, while 6 identified themselves as White, and 5 as Black. Despite the abolishment of the Population Registration Act (Act No. 30 of 1950), these racial categories are still largely applied in the everyday life of the citizens of the "new" South Africa (Posel, 2001). The Employment Equity Act (Act No. 55 of 1998) is a principal legal instrument for redressing the racial imbalances of the apartheid and reproduces the racial categories enacted in the Population Registration Act (Posel, 2001). This legislation names "Black people" as one of three "designated groups" identified as the targets for affirmative action. But "Black people" are in turn defined as those who were previously classified as "Africans", "Coloureds", and "Indians" (Posel, 2001).

### Theme 1: Experiences of Other Racialised Groups Different from their Own

The Group Area Act (Act 41 of 1950) employed by the apartheid government forced physical separation and segregation between races, having a direct impact on race relations. One of the stakeholders in Philippolis commented that:

Participant (Phil 1): *"The race issue, it's still a problem and we still have a long way to go".*

He then further added:

Participant (Phil 3): *"... honestly, I think that we have a long way to go, because we are trying, some races are trying to get along with other races, but I may not be uh... I just don't want to be specific about colour ... but it's about colour yeah, but certain communities... certain races are trying to get along but with the other one, they are ... still left behind, there still more work that we need to do ... some will try".*

This indicates that even though issues relating to race is ongoing and prevalent among communities. There appears to be, a shift towards the acceptance of people of colour in the community of Lambert's Bay is noted in the response of one of the research participants who articulated that:

Participant (Lamb 1): *"She feels much better towards Blacks"*.

Similarly, another participant's response captures a more positive experience with engagements with Black people:

Participant (Lamb 2): *"I enjoy myself with them [Black people]"*.

It appears that this experience with Black people allows for critical reflection on her experiences with members of her own racial group. In this regard, she further stated:

Participant (Lamb 4): *"They believe they're better than you and higher than you, and they don't mix with you..."*

This alluded to the class struggles within the Coloured community which marginalised others. Another participant who previously lived in Botswana remarked:

Participant (Phil 4): *"I lived with them [Black people], and I think if you get to know them, you'll get to know that they are only people"*.

Contrary to the above statements, a participant from Philippolis commented that:

Participant (Phil 6): *"... the only time that I spend with them [Black people] is just to greet and have conversations, but I am not visiting them"*.

This clearly alludes to the ongoing disjointedness of communities with respect to racial connectedness. It also brings to light the day to day experiences of other racialised groups different from their own.

Furthermore, participant 7 from Philippolis shared that:

*"... the white people here, don't like to interact with us; most of the time ... they are on their own"*.

Similarly, another participant from Philippolis described the White community as:

*Participant (Phil 11): "... an exclusive community. The only interaction is when a worker ...in work situations"*.

These statements clearly delineate that the racial stereotypes ingrained in South African history play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of individuals towards those of different races. It gives the dominant group the power to shape public images in ways that



reinforce norms and define other groups (Brooks, 2009: 97). Racial stereotypes and oppression remain entrenched in post-apartheid society, which is evident in the responses of the participants.

Therefore, storytelling and counter-storytelling are central to the CRT methodology used in this study (Modiri, 2012). Yosso and Solórzano (2002:32) state that counter-storytelling is “both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told and a tool for analysing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse”. One participant openly described his perception of White people:

Participant (Lam 5): *“I have to be honest; in the past, I said I hated them [White people], because of what they have done to us. I was born and raised on a farm and I wanted to go to school and the owner didn't want me to go to school”.*

He continued telling the story of how his father responded to the situation:

Participant (Lamb 7): *“[M]y father put his foot down and we moved away from there [farm] to Lambert's Bay”.*

This participant expressed having great respect for his father who according to him “*challenged the oppressive system*”. Another Coloured participant from the Lambert's Bay community casted the blame of all injustice on the White people stating:

Participant (Lamb 7): *“I want to blame them [Whites] for all the injustice that goes on, I blame them for all the injustice, literally”.*

The participant further added:

Participant (Lamb 8) *“I don't have a problem with them [Whites], but some of them [Whites] are very racist and rude and some won't even greet.*

Moreover, one of the participants from Philippolis similarly declared that:

Participant (Phil 9): *“... more especially, White people they can't speak to us, even when you ask something, they will shout at you ... Sometimes I engage with someone who speak[s] nicely to you, then I would feel respected, but sometimes you get someone who wouldn't talk well and I would not feel okay”.*

Another from Philippolis remarked:



Participant (Phil 10): *"[L]ike the White people here, they don't like to interact with us most of the time ..."*

One of the participants stated that:

*"... as long as one race think superior of themselves against [an]other, as long inequality will prevail".*

He has a different experience with Black people:

*"So with the Black race group, you feel that you view each other equally, but with the White race group, it's the one more superior than the other".*

A professional person from Philippolis also commented that:

*"As a professional, [he] has difficulties to be respected, especially by the Whites. If I have difficulty being respected, even by my generation ... because I am not White. What can be expected from the ordinary person on the street?"*

From the participants' varied responses, one can therefore deduce that race relations are framed by both white and black racial patterns in South Africa. Additionally, racial identities and racial hierarchies have been woven into social systems like labour, social power, knowledge, and ideologies (Modiri, 2012). Noticeably, racial hierarchy is reflected in the narratives of the participants' experiences of white supremacy and internalised racial oppression.

## **Theme 2: Relationships with Immigrants**

A growing number of immigrants have entered South Africa due to political instability in their home countries, with the perception of seeking business opportunities, and for economic reasons (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010). The participants shared their experiences of foreigners in their rural towns. It was found that the community maintained good relationships with foreigners. A stakeholder in Philippolis acknowledged that:

*"Personally, I don't have a problem with them only when they start doing shady things. The drugs, crime ... otherwise I don't have a problem with them".*

One of the participants showed feelings of empathy towards foreigners:

Participant (Phil 7) *"Having foreigners, we don't really know where they're coming from, and I always tell people if you run away from your home there's a reason for that, and these people are running away from the home so there*



*must be a problem, must be a problem in the country, so that's why they coming here for [a] better life".*

Another participant from Lambert's Bay expressed a positive experience when engaging with foreigners:

*Participant (Lamb 5) "I'm very easy about that because I went to Stellenbosch [University], and there we have plenty of international students, especially at the Theology Faculty, um, so I'm very easy about that".*

While another participant from Philippolis remarked:

*Participant (Phil 7) "Like those [foreigners] that own shops, they are the main people that are like supporting the community with their shops, so we buy from them, buy food from them, buy a lot of stuff from them ... There is a good relationship between us and the foreign-nationals that are staying with us here".*

There seems to be a wide range of opinions and experiences regarding foreign nationals entering South Africa. Additionally, there seem to be contradictory notions regarding the employment opportunities taken by foreign nationals. This assertion is reinforced by the idea that illegal immigrants compete with South Africans for work possibilities while also obstructing state efforts to control the housing, education, and health sectors (Vigneswaran, 2008: 135). As a result, the overall responses of participants were able to display the varied relationships formed with immigrants. Quite clearly, social cohesion does not promote coercion and conformity to the dominant group. It requires inclusivity, participation, and voluntary association as opposed to forced assimilation (Palmary, 2015).

### **Theme 3: Race as a Factor Influencing Cohesion**

Apartheid spatial patterns mean limited opportunity for sharing of space across races and class, and thus, there is still limited interaction across races. For social cohesion, attitudes and prejudices about different racial groups were crucial. It was clear that race still had an impact on the vast majority of the residents we spoke with. Race had a significant impact on both personal identities and group affiliations. Only two participants in the fieldwork, both white, declined to specify their racial identity and instead identified as South Africans. People were aware of the race of their neighbours. Even if race did not play any role in their neighbourhood general interaction or community activity, the closer social contacts and association groups were racially biased. Most of the respondents had their friendship links inside their own race group, and most of their leisure time was spent socializing in-racially.

One of the participants remarked that limited interaction across race should be maintained:



Participant (Lamb 2) *“No, that’s not a good thing that races mix. She expressed fear of invasion: “I just think that once they [Black people] are here, then they never want to leave. It’s not good”. Historically, “there was a time that we [Coloured and Black people] didn’t worry with each other, but now, in the [post-apartheid era], we are learning from each other”. Interracial engagement is accompanied by fear: “For some people, it could be threatening, it depends on how you look at it”.*

Contrary to the above, positive interracial engagement is expressed by one of the participants: *“... as enriching if your core values are strong and it’s not going to be threatened”.* Drawing on an example, she questioned: *“If I marry an African guy and sometimes you do what his culture does and sometimes do what my culture does. Why it cannot work?”*

One of the participants commented on the spaces of contentious engagements with other racial groups:

*Participant (Phil 4) “It depends on the place I am at, I often go out with my White friends who are also pastors, and we often talk about the inequalities in our churches, and it becomes arguments and often gets very heated but we often find a common ground”.*

Another described his engagement with White people as follows:

*Participant (Lamb 5) “I don’t mingle a lot with White people but those who mingle do not give off that [superiority persona]”.*

This is still a reality as stated by one of the participants: *“that people will communicate with each other but not live among each other”.* Racial segregation in society makes it difficult to overcome the racial default. Indeed, the less people are exposed to outgroups, the more strongly they differentiate between them—stereotypically (Banaji et al., 2021). As a result of these stereotypes, the participants do not consider cross-racial friendship. One participant stated in this regard: *“I’ve never really mixed with him [Indian], but I have no problem with them [Indian people].* This sentiment was echoed by another participant as follows: *“I don’t interact much with Black people”.* The Coloured participants expressed their racialised views of Black community members and Indians in more subtle ways but were strongly opinionated towards the White people. Race, therefore, remains a factor influencing cohesion within communities as these racial categories are still largely applied and recognisable in the everyday lives of people exposed to these experiences (Modiri, 2012).



#### **Theme 4: Experiences of Racial Discrimination**

“Racism is an organized system premised on the categorization and ranking of social groups into races and devalues, disempowers, and differentially allocates desirable societal opportunities and resources to racial groups regarded as inferior” (Williams & Mohammed, 2013:1153). It is described in the National Plan of Action document (RSA, 1996), Department of Justice, 2015:7) as “an ideological construct that assigns a certain race and/or ethnic group to a position of power over others on the basis of physical and cultural attributes, as well as economic wealth, involving hierarchical relations where the ‘superior’ race exercises domination and control over others”. Moreover, it is “a denial of people’s basic human rights, dignity and respect and its expression ranges from small, everyday acts of discrimination, through to barriers and omissions that may be inadvertently established at an institutional level, to acts of threatening behaviour and violence” (RSA), Department of Justice, 2015:7). One of the participants referred to how racial power relations play out in Philippolis as follows:

Participant (Phil 8) *“There are a few racists that are disrespectful, but it is not only across cultures, they fall in their own set up as well. I would say that they think that they are the kings of the town [they behave as if they are superior to the rest of the people]”.*

In CRT, racism is an integral, routine, and regular component of society and an ingrained feature of all facets of life, law, politics, relationships and discourse (Modiri, 2012). Experiences of discrimination/racism denote a lack of recognition in the community and disrupt belonging, inclusion, and participation. The participants provided descriptions of their experiences of everyday racial discrimination in public spaces, such as the bank and shops, and recreational spaces, such as golf courses. One of the participants communicated her concern regarding the increase in racism in Philippolis:

Participant (Phil 9) *“Unfortunately, in the last few months, I have noticed that racism is escalating. It is very sad to observe it. It’s about a small community and a small community should stand together and help each other. [It] does not matter what colour we are ... Unfortunately, the political parties put their stories out there just to get votes”.*

One of the White participants from Philippolis observed that

Participant (Phil 5) *“There is something interesting I have noticed ... an escalation of racism between the Coloured and the Black communities”.*

It would appear that participants from Coloured and Black communities are concerned about the use of terms that are perceived in the South African context as derogatory and offensive. Derogatory and offensive words have been used to abuse and oppress community members. Therefore, these names unlocked feelings of anger in an incident



that happened at a golf course, a public space, where the participant was a bystander. Although a complete study of Coloureds' perspectives of the racial hierarchy has yet to be conducted, existing research has detailed their sentiments toward White and Black South Africans, providing some insight into their claims. In this way, they view the Black racial group to be lower in the racial hierarchy than them (Pirtle, 2022). Brown (2000) details some of the factors shaping tensions between Coloured and Black people using qualitative interviews, including Black people's wariness of a Coloured racial group that has sided with Whites, and Coloured people's mistrust that Black people misplace their resentment of white supremacy towards them.

The person offended had a hearing disability. He shared the following:

*Participant (Phil 3) "I was very angry; I was so angry as if I wanted to hit him [White person]; this happened on the golf course. He [White person] apologised but I needed to go to the police station anyway, thinking about it, I'm getting angry. But then, eventually, what happened was he bought the guy over, he gave him 100 to 200 rand, and he [person with hearing disability] actually took the money, but he left the case just like that, and I think he should've made a case, and what made me the most angry is the guy was deaf, he couldn't hear very well, so he didn't really hear, but we, the bystanders, heard".*

A second participant added her experience as a bystander witnessing how a professional classified as Coloured is called "girlie" by a White woman and differently treated by the bank manager. Calling women 'girls' is patronising and infantilising. Infantilisation is an issue of power, where women are perceived as inferior, and therefore, less powerful to men professionally. This practice of calling a Coloured person "you" and "madam" in the same context denotes disrespect or inferiority, reducing the Coloured person in this situation to a non-person. Racial oppression is primarily an institutional and systemic problem. A Coloured female religious leader in Lambert's Bay shared her experiences of racial discrimination on a daily basis stating:

*Participant (Lamb 4) "If the White woman doesn't know that I am the religious leader in the community, then they will refer me as 'you', but if it's a White woman, then they will call her 'madam', so that's what I deal with every day".*

In light of the above, it must be established that infantilising labels directed towards girls are harmful and have the greatest impact in contexts where qualities of maturity, leadership, and adulthood are most critical, such as in workplace and leadership settings (Macarthur et. al, 2015).





## Theme 5: Fear of Marginalisation and Exclusion

Marginalisation is systemic and ultimately rooted in the matters of race in this study. Historically, Coloured people have served as an intermediate group between Whites and Blacks in South Africa (Brown, 2000). One participant, identified as Coloured, holds the belief that Coloured people do not have a place in the new social order:

*Participant (Lamb 3) "Yes, absolutely, Coloured people don't really know where they fit in; Black people doesn't really trust us and the White people also, so we are just in the middle and we also don't know where we fit in specifically, so we are just on a level"*

Equalising opportunities, fostering inclusion and redress, and promoting social cohesion are long term nation building objectives to achieve the vision of the 2030 National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011). To address the above-mentioned outcomes, legislation is in place to drive the transformation of the South African political landscape. However, the transformed legislation poses a threat as it could allow for the Black majority to compete with Coloured people for jobs, housing, and education. Brown (2000, p.204) states "believing that they [Coloured individuals] will lose opportunities associated with higher status than Blacks could lead some Coloured individuals to resist policies focused on the redistribution of resources". In this regard, one participant shared her experience:

*Participant (Lamb 7) "... and she's a bit higher, uh, a little higher educated, but three years ago so she [Coloured] had to fight for her position. Because a Black man that worked under [lower level] ... that now isn't on her level gets a management position, and then that was a bit of a quarrel".*

"The Coloured community is highly sensitive to issues of race and this sensitivity emanates, firstly, from their marginality in which race remains the primary form of social identification ..." (Adhikari, 2004, p. 173). "Not black enough, not white enough" has left the Coloured community with no sense of belonging. Secondly, their intermediate position in the racial hierarchy, which affects them both personally and as a group (Adhikari, 2004). The narratives of the participants expressed fear of marginalisation and exclusion in the new dispensation of South Africa:

A participant from Lambert's Bay opined:

*Participant (Lamb 1) "... we [Coloured people] are always pulling the short end of the stick. So, when the Whites were there, everything were for the Whites; now everything is turned around, now the Africans are there, so we are forever in the middle".*



The United Nations Report on the World Social Situation (2016, p. 18) mentions that “social exclusion entails not only material deprivation but also lack of agency or control over important decisions as well as feelings of alienation and inferiority”, as was confirmed in this study.

## Recommendations

This study offers the following recommendations that relate to the aspects of research, policy and practice.

**Research:** Race must be identified as an important aspect of social cohesion and is the critical question in the current study that begs further scholarship research. Therefore, future research should focus on understanding the concept as a composite of its makeup, as well as more importantly delving into the experiences of communities in relation to race, with a core focus that is inclusive of all its dynamics, which either influence and positively contribute towards social cohesion within communities or contrarily diminishes and creates further disparities. It is also recommended that community organizations conduct trust-building programs aimed towards families. These programs must aid families in unlearning social behaviours that perpetuate racial stereotypes.

**Policy:** The racial notions employed in the study are tied to the national identity of individuals. This is evident in the narratives of the participants in the two rural communities under study and should be considered in policy development from which supporting legislations and policy should emanate to ensure sustainable changes within communities to break the racial cycles linked to identity, segregation and marginalization within communities. When talking about race in the South African context, one cannot ignore the role that apartheid played in shaping race relations, identities, and dynamics in South African communities. Therefore, policy should be inclusive of reproach towards these disparities and rather be directed towards redressing these inequalities and enforcing methodologies driven toward social cohesion and equity to correct the continued indifferences experienced within communities.

**Relevance for practice** is developing strategies for programmes within communities which allows for breaking down barriers of injustices, misunderstood differences, and racial disparities. Interventions developed should be directed at promoting inclusive environments through service rendering to promote social cohesiveness in communities. Thus, Racial issues as a facilitator or barrier to social cohesion in South African communities require further research, consistent, strategic community engagements must be initiated by the government, NGOs, community organisations, religious bodies, and other relevant



stakeholders so as to alter and correct the perceptions of people and to encourage social cohesion amongst the different racial groups.

## Conclusion

This study is consistent with critical race theory, as participants constructed their community space where racism is taking place. The acts of racism experienced by the participants are met with resistance and treated as unacceptable and dehumanising. The interracial engagements induce a feeling of threat and anxiety in some of the participants in the study, particularly arising out of real or perceived competition over scarce resources which resulted from the process of redressing imbalances imposed by apartheid. Some of the participants have the fear of losing their social identity and relative positions in power and status hierarchies. Thus, in conclusion, many communities are still racially segregated and the concerns raised by race can be attributed to the historical system of exclusion and discrimination. Racial segregation diminishes contact and prevents meaningful interaction among the different race groups, thus reducing the capacity to build mutual trust and implementing common goals towards a cohesive society. Therefore, race as a barrier or a facilitator of social cohesion cannot be understood in isolation when we have to engage seriously with the notion of social cohesion. The study further reveals that problems of race and class involve structural inequalities. The study further demonstrates that using critical race theory empowers and gives a voice to those on the margins so that they can speak out about their daily experiences of racism.

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