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On the Interpretive Work of Reconstructing Discourses and Their Local Contexts

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Abstract: Many strands of discourse analysis conceive discourses as relatively large structural connections. They are thus able to comprehend seemingly scattered phenomena as articulations of macro-level structures. Their focus on the macro-level of analysis, however, comes often at the neglect of the local contexts in which discourses are reproduced and employed. Action and interpretation are not only instructed by discourses, but also by local systems of relevance of resilient groups, communities or organizations.

In this article, we develop interpretive strategies to distinguish between discourses and their reproductive local context. Based on a case study that analyzes students' narrations about their experiences of the transformation process at a higher education institution in South Africa, we reconstruct the "ethnographic context" of these narrations. We demonstrate how the use of a specific discourse—thematically linked to "race" and "culture"—is shaped by local groups, in our case by student residences at this higher education institution. We frame our case in social-constructivist terms and pursue a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse.

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1. Introduction

This article explores the interpretive work involved in or associated with reconstructing discourses and their local contexts. As a form of secondary analysis, it is based on a case study focusing on "inter-group relations" on the main campus of a South African university. The term "inter-group relations" should be read in the context of the recent history of integration efforts on the campuses of higher education institutions (universities)." In this context, "intergroup relations" refers to the relations between racially defined "population groups" formerly defined by apartheid legislation. "Race," "culture" and "ethnicity" remain important interpretive repertoires in contemporary mass media and politics. Many issues in the current South African everyday life are connected in some way or the other to the racialized past. Efforts to overcome this racialized past are often faced with the problem that without using the corresponding population categories of the apartheid era to address the associated inequalities, effective change will be limited. To an ordinary participant of everyday life in South Africa, "race" may still appear as a pervasive reality, and he or she might run the danger of seeing issues in racial terms even when there is no basis for it. [1]

We approach "race" from a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (KELLER, 2008). Thus, the application of a social-constructivist framework is to some extent self-evident. But as just indicated, such a perspective is not at all evident in the everyday context in which this research took place. Referring mainly to BRUBAKER and COOPER (2000), we reframe "race" and the connected notion of "racial groups" in a social-constructivist way. Situated within the phenomenologically informed approach of sociologists such as BERGER and LUCKMANN (2000 [1966]), this perspective does not deny the reality of any given social phenomena of interest, but views the process of objectivation and the resulting objective reality as something achieved and maintained through *social* organization and reproduction—in this sense, the "the reality of race [...] does not depend on the existence of 'races'" (BRUBAKER, 2002, p.168). [2]

The social-constructivist reframing relates directly to the interpretive work of reconstructing discourses, as discourses are not necessarily viewed as the only or main systems of relevance that structure everyday experiences, but as possible ones amongst other local ones. We demonstrate our analytic strategy of distinguishing between discourses and a local context with its own action and interpretation problems. This involved collecting additional data on the "ethnographic context," as the previous main data set was collected in focus group discussions that were used as a "self-contained method" (MORGAN, 1988, p.24). The collection of additional data was not geared towards a "full-fledged" ethnographic case study, but constituted a retrospective effort to account for the

local context. The interpretive work further necessitates the translation of a theoretical concept—discourse—into analytic categories, i.e. into categories that can be adequately employed for data analysis. We show how we translate "discourse" into categories in such a way that they fit into an existing approach of thematic analysis. This process of reconstruction focuses only on a specific aspect of discourse analysis, on the substantive core of the discourse (and not, e.g., on its historic formation), and is limited to the case at hand. As will become evident, the substantive core of the discourse does not consist of elaborate and sophisticated constructs—as it may be the case when scientific or literary texts are used as data—but of basic interpretive resources that need no further explanation when employed in everyday life. We demonstrate how they are intertwined with the local context. [3]

Our reflections in this article are structured as follows: We first briefly outline the case at hand (Section 2), describe our social constructivist approach to "race," "groups" (Section 3) and to discourses (Section 4) and then lay out the analytical framework for the translation of discourses into manageable categories of data analysis (Section 5). In Section 6 we present some of the findings: the core of the discourse and how the discourse is intertwined with the local interaction context. We conclude with a short discussion of our findings (Section 7). [4]

2. The Case

2.1 Transformation of higher education

Higher education in South Africa has undergone big changes since the country's first democratic elections in 1994 (SOUDIEN, 2008, p.665). The apartheid government, coming to power in 1948, had legalized the historically informal race-based admission to universities. The extension of the University Education Act in 1959 allowed for the development of racially and ethnically based universities:

> "The apartheid-government institutionalized a higher education landscape consisting of 21 universities, 15 technikons and approximately 140 single-discipline and vocational colleges serving the fields of nursing, education and agriculture, all of which were structured along racial lines of admission and tuition" (SOUDIEN, 2008, p.665). [5]

Historically black institutions (HBI) were confronted with a range of challenges, amongst others drawing mainly first generation students from disadvantaged communities. Engaged in the struggle against apartheid, student bodies at HBIs organized strikes and boycotted classes, many of the students dropping out with those returning struggling academically. Refusals to pay student fees and fluctuating state subsidies led to critical financial situations at these institutions (p.666). As HBIs struggled with knowledge and material resource problems in the light of increasing student numbers, most new students were channeled into art, education and humanities. Efforts to transform the sector of higher education from the 1990s onwards were geared to "increase the largely untapped pool of black school-leavers in the system" (p.665). As a result of an effort to rationalize

the tertiary educational scene and to move away from the unequal past, a number of institutions have been closed, merged or re-organized. The current situation is still characterized by many challenges, amongst other the "un-problematized nature of the curriculum" (p.667), gender and race based unequal composition of the academic staff (predominantly white male), gender and race based unequal distribution of students in various disciplines and unequal numbers in successful graduation and enrollment in graduate studies.[1] [6]

2.2 University of the Free State

The University of the Free State (UFS), formerly known as the University of the Orange Free State (up to 2001), has grown out of Grey College that was founded in 1904 in Bloemfontein, the capital of what is nowadays the Free State Province (the former Orange Free State) of South Africa. As a historically white institution (HWI) and historically white Afrikaans university (HAU), it admitted its first colored and black undergraduate students in the 1980s. The UFS became a "parallel-medium" institution in 1993, offering all lectures in two languages, Afrikaans and English (before that, lectures were only held in Afrikaans). As part of the reorganization of higher education, two campuses were incorporated into the UFS that originally consisted only of the main campus in Bloemfontein: in 2003 the Qwaqwa campus, a former part of the University of the North, and in 2004 the South campus in Bloemfontein, the former Vista University. Currently 30,121 students are enrolled, 3,302 of them at the Qwaqwa campus, 5,090 of them at the South campus and 21,729 at the main campus. The student numbers at the main campus have grown significantly from below 10,000 at the beginning of the 1990s to 10,862 in the year 2000 and to 21,729 in 2013.[2] [7]

The student composition on these campuses still reflect the history of segregation in terms of those population categories that were institutionalized by apartheid legislation: While on the Qwaqwa campus and South campus, students attributed to the category "African" dominate with 99.76% and 84.58% respectively[3], on the main campus, 52.7% of the students are attributed to the category "African," 39.1% to the category "White," 6.2% to the category "Colored" and 2% to the category "Asian." The respective campuses thus differ from the average numbers for the entire university of 63.3% "African," 29.6% "White," 5.3% "Colored" and 1.9% "Asian." (The numbers for South Africa as a whole are: 79.2% "African,"

1 These are the percentages concerning the distribution of students in faculties at the University of the Free State for the year 2013 (we list only the percentages for "Africans" and "Whites"): education: 74% African, 20% White; humanities (incl. art): 73% African, 19% White; health sciences: 56% White, 38% African; law: 42% White, 43% African; economic and management sciences: 25% White, 66% African; theology: 65% White, 29% African; natural and agricultural sciences: 36% White, 61% African (Source: Institutional Information Profile of the UFS, http://heda.uovs.ac.za/downloads/II_Profiles.xlsx [accessed: March 14, 2013]).

2 Sources: Institutional Information Profile of the UFS, http://heda.uovs.ac.za/downloads/II_Profiles.xlsx [accessed: March 14, 2013] and the Annual Review of the Rector and Vice-Chancellor 2003 (http://apps.ufs.ac.za/media/dl/userfiles/documents/Publications/Annual_Review/10703-2003_Annual_Review.pdf [accessed: April 22, 2013]).

3 If not stated otherwise, these numbers reflect enrollments of the year 2013 (Source: Institutional Information Profile of the UFS, http://heda.uovs.ac.za/downloads/II_Profiles.xlsx [accessed: March 14, 2013]).

8.9% "White," 8.9% "Colored," 2.5% "Indian/Asian."[4]) Students are not only recruited from the Free State, but also from other provinces and regions, which is partially reflected in their home languages. These are, amongst others, Afrikaans, Sesotho, Zulu, English, Xhosa and Setswana.[5] [8]

In terms of the above mentioned population categories, most of the change in composition has happened at the main campus in Bloemfontein. The steep increase in student numbers transformed the UFS main campus from a residential institution where most of the students lived on campus to a commuting institution with most students living off campus.[6] The university administration launched two major efforts to transform student residences into "mixed" residences (they remain gender segregated, i.e. except for two newly opened residences at the beginning of 2013, all of the "junior residences" [for undergraduate students] on campus are female or male exclusively). The first efforts started in the mid-1990s, as the increasing numbers of "African" students led to the informal designation of residences for "black" and "white" students. These efforts were met with dedicated resistance from the students, leading to the formation of student organizations along race categories, violent clashes, massive protests and finally to the intervention of the police on campus. Within some of the residences, the students erected walls or barricades and created separate entrances. In an effort to calm the situation down, the administration ceased to demand integration and dedicated residences either for "black" or "white" students. Thus, only a few years after the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 and the abandoning of apartheid specific legislation, the student residences on the UFS campus were segregated. [9]

In the mid-2000s, the University Council started a second wave of efforts to integrate residences. After an initial phase of research about life in residences conducted by external consultants, a residence diversity policy was adopted in 2007, stipulating for the "migration period" a "minimum racial diversity level in each existing junior residence of 30"[7] and then a 50:50 target (initially allowing students to move into another residence as the one they had been placed in). This policy was met with considerable resistance by the students who were, at that stage, also unsatisfied with other issues on campus. "White" students were mainly objecting integration, while "black" students were discontent with the top-

4 Source: Census 2011: Highlights of Key Results, Statistics South Africa (http://www.statssa.gov.za/Census2011/Products/Census_2011_Methodology_and_Highlights_of_key_results.pdf [accessed: April 22, 2013]).

5 Sesotho is the dominant language in the Free State province, Zulu in KwaZulu-Natal, Xhosa in the Eastern Cape and Setswana in the North West province. Afrikaans is the dominant language in the Western Cape and Northern Cape Province, and it is spoken by approx. 10% of the population in the Free State, Eastern Cape and North West and by 13% in the Gauteng province. But as speakers of all languages are spread across most provinces, the language does not necessarily indicate what province a student comes from.

6 The distinction between on and off campus can be relatively clearly drawn, as the campus is an area exclusively designated for the use by the university, completely fenced off from the surrounding residential areas.

7 Source: University of the Free State (2007). Increasing Diversity in UFS Main Campus Residences: A New Policy and Role for Residences, http://www.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00000/101_eng.pdf [accessed: April 22, 2013].

down approach of the administration. Considerable tensions built up, expressed in violent acts and protest marches, leading to another intervention by the police. At this stage, a video produced by "white" male students of the Reitz residence[8] became known to a wider public. The video, produced as part of a "cultural evening" in one of the residences, involved and depicted "black" university support staff in an insulting, debasing way. The video turned into a nation-wide affair, even attracting international attention, involving media coverage and causing strong protest in the university community and the wider public, leaving the image of the UFS severely tarnished. Partly due to the impact of the "Reitz incident," the then vice-chancellor resigned in the course of 2008. The perceived threat of additional negative media coverage considerably helped to weaken resistance against the second round of integration efforts.[9] After the Reitz incident, open and violent protests on campus faded relatively quickly. [10]

In 2009 and 2010, immediate measures were taken, some of them directly initiated by the new vice-chancellor's office, and in 2010, institutional capacity was created to implement the diversity policy, the efforts mainly geared towards the desegregation of residences, community building and the creation of alternative structures. The formal decision about the placement of new students into a residence was shifted to a large extent from the student run residences to the administration. Previously, the students of each residence would decide over who was to be accepted as new residents, the decision taken by the so-called "house committee" or "residence board," which was only staffed with students. In the quote below, these committees or boards are referred to as "residence management bodies." The current policy defines the following interest groups that have a say in students' placement in residences:

> "7% by the University Management, 3% by the Director of House and Residence Affairs, 10% by residence management bodies, 5% to holders of accommodation bursaries, 1% to students with disabilities, and 74% by Housing and Residence Affairs on the basis of a random selection."[10] [11]

The Housing and Residence Affairs Department will make sure that the 50-50 goal is achieved in the initial placement offering, as not all of these "input channels" deliver a 50-50 selection. In effect, there is still unequal representation. Some students do not accept their placement—mostly "white" students being placed in residences with a majority of "black" residents—and they move out and are not allowed to move into any other residence (i.e. they are forced to live off campus).[11] In addition to these categories, there are academic criteria for

8 Some of the student residences were and still are named after prominent Afrikaner political figures such as Abraham FISCHER and J.B.M. HERTZOG. F. W. REITZ was a former state president of the then independent Orange Free State Republic (the current Free State Province of South Africa).

9 See Footnote 24 for how students used this threat for their own purposes.

10 Source: University of the Free State (2011). Policy and Additional Regulations Concerning the Placement of Students in Junior Residences, Main Campus, http://residences.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00000/103_eng.pdf [accessed: April 22, 2013].

admission, pertaining to a high "level of achievement in respect of leadership, culture and sport."[12] [12]

2.3 Data collection

This article is based on the data of an empirical case study that was conceived and carried out in 2011 and dealt with the students' "emotional well-being," their views regarding "safety" on campus and how they experience "inter-group relations." These three aspects were researched in three separate sub-projects, but underpinned by the same methodological assumptions. Our analysis uses the data from the sub-project on "inter-group relations." The corresponding research report (KOTZE & RANAKE, 2011) reflected epistemological and methodological assumptions directed towards constructing a "realist tale" (VAN MAANEN, 1988) concerning the students' experiences on campus. Mainly based on the explicit and implicit background knowledge of the primary data collector (who, as a former student and resident on campus, experienced some of these processes himself), the project centered around explicit issues on the main campus such as the "role of management," "gender," "residence traditions and initiations" and "intergroup conflicts." The data was collected by means of focus group discussions (BARBOUR, 2007; KRUEGER & CASEY, 2009 [1988]; MORGAN, 1988). The main aim was to facilitate detailed representations about the issues of interest (BOHNSACK, 2004, p.220). The interaction amongst the students provided for rich and nuanced accounts of experiences and brought to the fore in more explicit terms differing views in relation to contested issues (WARR, 2005). The original research project was based on the assumption that the relevant thematic dimensions could be reconstructed using focus groups as a "self-contained method" (MORGAN, 1988, p.24), i.e. no other interviews were conducted. The main focus was the "residence diversity policy"; the students chosen were all living in residences on the main campus. As mentioned in the previous section, students residing on campus are at this point a minority, and the former distinct status difference between students living on and off campus seems to have diminished. But the residences remain important groups pertaining to life on campus and to the shaping of what is perceived to be "typical" for the UFS student culture. [13]

The sampling for the focus groups was based on a partial self-selection by the house committees of the respective residences (which are staffed only by students).[13] Five focus group discussions were held (each with 7-9 participants): three discussions with only female participants (one composed of only "white"

11 When these places cannot be filled with students of the corresponding category until a certain cut-off date at the beginning of the year, they are filled with students of the same category as the majority—to make the housing system financially viable.

12 Source: University of the Free State (2011). Policy and Additional Regulations Concerning the Placement of Students in Junior Residences, Main Campus, http://residences.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00000/103_eng.pdf [accessed: April 22, 2013].

13 The researchers asked the residences for a certain type of student pertaining to gender and "color" categories. The selection of the students was done by the respective house committees. Out of these students, the researchers composed focus groups with students from different residences.

students, one of only "black" students, and one of students of both categories) and two discussions with male students (one with only "black" students and one with only "white" students). Due to restricted time and resources, no "mixed" discussion with male students was held. In each of the groups, there were also students that—pertaining to their population category—constituted a minority in their residence. The discussions in "whites" only groups were held predominantly in Afrikaans (with interspersed English contributions), while the "mixed" and "black" discussions were held in English. Carried out in the first half of 2011 and only composed of third year students, all of these students experienced the implementation of the diversity policy starting after the Reitz incident. [14]

As mentioned in the introduction, the second reading of the data involved a re-discovery of the campus context: pursuing a sociology of knowledge approach to discourses (cf. sections below), the analysis was aimed at reconstructing discourses that are not necessarily specific to the life on campus. The reading indicated, however, that experiences of the students that were narrated using "racial" or "color" categories seem to be "co-structured" by other relevances, stemming—amongst others—from the local interaction context. However, the accounts of the students left categories and themes pertaining to this context relatively "thin," as their accounts presuppose knowledge of other local systems of relevances. What was narrated in the focus group discussions highlights the "diversity aspect" of the experience, but only "suggested" and left other relevant aspects of the very same experience largely implicit. Thus, in order not to presuppose exclusively "racial" or "ethnic" relevances where there are also other relevances at work, the context needs to be taken into account. To gain a better understanding of this context, ethnographic interviews were conducted with members of the university administration who professionally deal with student life in residences and who are involved in the implementation of the diversity policy (see Section 2.2). These interviews provide a tentative understanding of the local systems of relevance that play an important role in the daily life on campus. [15]

Neither the focus group data nor the ethnographic interviews can be read as "direct" representation of actual everyday practices on campus, as the researcher is not present as a participant observer. As the students' narrated their experiences and views in the focus groups, they accounted in varying degrees for the views and anticipated reaction of the other students. The focus groups thus constitute temporary "tiny publics" (FINE & HARRINGTON, 2004) that are indeed an ethnographic context of their own (cf. WILKINSON, 2011, pp.173ff.), an interaction that is not part of the everyday contexts of the students (unless they are regular focus group participants). The focus groups are marked by the presence of a researcher who "injects" (broadly framed) issues, who is instrumental in framing, establishing, maintaining and dissolving the interaction situation and whose presence—as a non-member of the students' everyday life and as someone with specific gender, age, "ethnic," academic and other attributes—may suggest specific forms of narrations and interactions and may lead to students conveying their views in terms of "political correctness" and not necessarily in terms of their own beliefs and convictions. But as far as the focus group as temporal and situated accomplishment is based on habitualized

practices—and as far as these practices are (most likely) *not only* related to focus group participation—the data does allow for inferences about how discourses are embedded in the experience of everyday campus life. However, both notions appeared to be unlikely: the notion of complete difference, the focus group being only self-referential and not suitable to infer to anything outside its situated production context, and the notion of a "direct" view on social reality, the focus group being viewed as reproducing the social realms of interest in a transparent way. [16]

3. A Social-Constructivist Perspective on "Race" and "Racial Groups"

In the context of analyzing transformation pertaining to "ethnicity," "race," "cultures" and (national) "identity," one cannot presuppose "given groups," i.e. view "bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis" (BRUBAKER, 2002, p.164)—a notion that BRUBAKER has called "groupism." In this context, the term "group" suggests that "ethnic groups, nations and races [are] substantial units, to which interests and actions are attributed" (ibid.). Instead of contributing to the reification of such entities by uncritically using the notion of "large groups," we adopt a social-constructivist perspective that analyses ethnicity, race and nationalism with respect to categorization and membership, social organization and politics (BRUBAKER, 2009, pp.26f.). However, as we will outline below, groups proved to be important in a different sense—as relatively small, spatially situated interaction scenes with routine participants and more or less specific cultures (FINE, 2010).[14] [17]

In the South African context burdened with a history of racialized segregation and exclusion with dire consequences for the vast majority of the population, it is important to remember that a social-constructivist perspective does not deny the reality of racism and its consequences, but aims at studying this reality differently by showing in what ways social reality is reproduced and maintained or transformed. A common misreading of the social-constructivist perspective in the tradition of a sociology of knowledge approach is that it allegedly denies the stable and structured character of social reality.[15] On the contrary, social reality is

14 We do not regard these small groups as "substantially given" or constituted by an "essential belonging." Groups are continually reproduced in social processes. This is not the place, however, to explain *why* groups are reproduced as such (cf. e.g. FINE [2010] for the corresponding set of [mainly social psychological] assumptions concerning what "benefits" or "functions" groups have for individuals). For our purpose, it suffices to notice that they do exist over time and form to some extent an obdurate social reality encountered by outsiders and new members.

15 Phenomenological social constructivism in the tradition of BERGER and LUCKMANN (2000 [1966]) manages to theoretically integrate both "aspects," the fleeting character of social reality and the obduracy of socially constructed objectivations. Other social-constructivist or constructionist approaches deal with these aspects differently, c.f. EBERLE (2005) who distinguishes five constructivisms: phenomenological social constructivism (BERGER & LUCKMANN), radical constructivism (MATURANA & VARELA), empirical constructivism (KNORR-CETINA), systems theory constructivism (LUHMANN), and relational constructivism (DACHLER and DACHLER & HOSKING). A similar misunderstanding pertains to the associated notion of methodological individualism that we adhere to. We do not regard persons as individuals in the sense of being fully autonomous and in complete control of their actions, but as socialized members of and actors in social contexts. Methodological individualism refers to

regarded as real, also in its consequences for the individual, but its solid and "stubborn" character is a consequence of social organization. The reality of race and racism is not created by an "essential" nature of persons or "organic" groups, but by (institutionalized) social practices that implicitly or explicitly have the effect of making "groups" and "identities" appear as something essential or given. [18]

4. Discourses

4.1 A sociology of knowledge approach to discourse

We approach the concept of "discourse" from a sociology of knowledge perspective. A discourse is a "complex of statement events and the therein embedded practices, which are linked through a structural connection [...] and which process specific knowledge orders of reality" (KELLER, 2008, p.235; our translation). The structural connection "encompasses the rules and resources that are common to the events" (ibid.) and "refers to the constitution of contents [and to the modalities of expression]" (ibid.; our translation). Discourses produce "statements in which claims and assertions about phenomena are perpetuated and accompanied by more or less strong claims about their validity" (p.236; our translation). These statements construct social reality in discourse-specific terms and "comment" on those realms that are constituted in other terms. They put forward and perpetuate systems of relevances that (should) guide mundane action and interpretation on the individual, meso and macro level. They assert what should thematically, interpretationally and motivationally be relevant in the corresponding realms of the life-world (SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN, 1974). Discourses are material to the extent that they effectively inform and instruct mundane practices, ranging from the actions of relatively few discourse participants to entire institutional realms that are created and enacted in discourse-related ways. The infrastructure (the apparatus) through which discourses are reproduced may, however, exist more or less independently of the (various) discourses it reproduces. [19]

Discourses "crystallize and constitute themes in a specific form as societal problems of interpretation and action" (KELLER, 2008, p.236; our translation). They constitute a societal context for local action in two ways. On the one hand, they turn discourse-specific issues into local problems by appresenting them and constituting action spaces that deal with these issues or problems. On the other hand, discourses may address and solve local problems in discourse-specific ways. Thus, any data collected in and from local contexts may yield information about societal relevances that go beyond the local context as well as provide

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the notion that social reality is eventually (re)produced, maintained and transformed by individuals—social structure does not exist beyond its reproduction by human beings. The social construction of reality is intertwined with the constitution of meaning in the subjective consciousness of its actors, and if we are to understand the social organization of our realm of interest, our explanations must eventually be "referable" to the subjective experience of the involved actors. These subjective experiences partially consist, however, of habitualized actions and interpretations that are not part of the explicit attention by the actors themselves during the course of their action and interpretation.

insights into how the solutions to local problems are solved in discourse-specific ways. [20]

4.2 Discourse (re-) production in context

If discourses are not distinguished by the main "institutional-organizational setting(s)" (p.264; our translation) in which they are (re-) produced—e.g. an academic discipline—, i.e. if we accept that they are reproduced in several institutional-organizational settings, we identify and distinguish them by their "thematic reference" (ibid.; our translation). This thematic reference manifests itself in the content structure of the discourse. As empirical data is in most cases found within a specific setting, the process of identifying and reconstructing discourses by their thematic reference involves differentiating these discourses from the very institutional-organizational setting that reproduces them. The reason for this is that this specific setting is governed by its own sets of perspectives and relevances. From an analytical perspective on discourses, we view this reproductive setting as an ethnographic context. The empirical data of our case study indicated that the students' intersubjective experiences cannot be reduced to racialized categorizations and identifications, but are structured by other, relatively autonomous institutional-organizational settings, the most prominent among those being the student residences. [21]

We regard these student residences as groups. As briefly mentioned above, we conceive groups as constituted by the repeated and spatially situated interaction of actors in relationship with others, where their interaction is shaped by a more or less specific culture that is based on a shared history. Groups establish and maintain boundaries by distinguishing between members and non-members. The members are involved in a network of interpersonal relations within the group, but extend the local character of the group through multiple memberships in other groups (FINE, 2010). Groups are situated in an arena, i.e. a physical or virtual space where the group and its culture are enacted, and where the group culture constitutes a local context. The context refers to "those sets of meaning that are tied to a recognizable interaction scene and its routine participants" (p.356). New members are socialized into this culture, and, depending on how strong or weak their affiliations become, in various degrees attach themselves to, and become emotionally engaged with the group culture. They identify themselves in different ways with the group and in this process their self-understanding is shaped in a group-related way. Groups remain relatively stable through adjusting "lines of action" (p.367) or routine interaction ritual chains (COLLINS, 2004). The culture, reflecting a host of past shared experiences, which are remembered in stories and anecdotes, sets standards for propriety and action, forms a basis of collective representation, and entails an "interactional grammar" (FINE, 2010, p.366). Its structure results from practices building on previously established practices. [22]

In other words: conceiving "race" and "racial groups" from a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, we distinguish between an ethnographic local context and a discourse related to race in the broadest sense. In our case, the

local context—the institutional-organizational setting of the student residences—with relatively "autonomous" systems of relevances and action problems became a "stage" for the discourse-specific enactment of population categories. Before the start of the desegregation process at the UFS at the beginning of the 1990s, the major part of the work of "boundary" maintenance in terms of population categories was not done by the students, but by the administration that did not admit "black" students to the university. Thus, for the individual student living on the campus, the relationship to other students, to academic staff and to administrative personnel did not involve "racialized" interaction (although manual labor on the campus such as gardening, cleaning and building and repairing facilities was conducted by "black" workers). Relational and categorical modes of identification that concerned academics and student life pertained thus not *primarily* to racialized population categories, but to other relevances, individuals identifying themselves and others as residence members, students, professors, administrative staff, etc., competing amongst each other for resources and positions.[16] With the desegregation process, the local autonomous residence cultures became a stage for the enactment of "racial" categories *in the mundane life of the students*. This happened as "black" students entered life on campus, and those "white" students "interested" in segregation had to engage in boundary work themselves. To this day, for many students their life on campus is the first occasion for sharing relatively intimate space over an extended period of time with individuals from other population categories. This is the case because they were still brought up in largely segregated ways (i.e. members of their family networks, relevant peer groups and educational institutions stem mostly from one population category). But, as pointed out, the space they share is set up as a stage that is not primarily designed for boundary work along these population categories. However, during the contemporary South African history of segregation and efforts of desegregation, at least some boundary work has been incorporated into the local relevance system. [23]

5. Reconstructing Discourses and Their Local Context

As our aim is to reconstruct not only a discourse that is (broadly) related to race, but also its relevant ethnographic context, we employ a method of data analysis that is suitable for both purposes—and that is the method of ethnographic semantics. In the following sections, we briefly introduce this analytical strategy that was developed by SPRADLEY (1979, 1980) as an integrated methodology for the ethnographic research process. We also demonstrate how some of the concepts that KELLER suggests in order to reconstruct the content structure of discourses—"phenomena structure," "narrative structure," "patterns of

16 We do not claim that mundane identifications could not refer to racialized population categories: one's academic work and success, for instance, could explicitly be interpreted as the work of a "white" academic, and one's life—including all its relational identifications—could hypothetically be related to a symbolic universe (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 2000 [1966]) of "white supremacy." We do assume, however, that the local action contexts and its mundane problems that individuals were confronted with were group-related contexts in which other systems of relevance were prevalent. Such contexts do, of course, *also* become stages for the reproduction of various contested discourses such as racialized traditions of thinking.

interpretations," and "classifications" (2008, pp.240ff.)—fit into the analytical strategy of ethnographic semantics. [24]

5.1 Domains and themes

SPRADLEY uses the concepts "domain," "taxonomy," "meaning components" and "cultural themes" to structure the analytical process. A domain is a "category of cultural meaning that includes other smaller categories" (1980, p.88), consisting of a cover term, included terms and semantic relationships that link the overarching cover term with the terms belonging to it (similar to the "concepts" in grounded theory methodology; cf. CORBIN & STRAUSS, 2008 [1990], pp.159ff.). The corresponding analytic strategy aims at reconstructing all the relevant domains within a given realm of interest. This and the following analytic steps do not presume any kind of "generative structure" that orders the data—the aim is merely to reconstruct the domains as they appear in the everyday *use* by actors. In more elaborate domains, the included terms may be related in specific ways with regards to each other. A taxonomic analysis aims at making clear "the relationships among all the included terms in a domain" (SPRADLEY, 1980, p.113). A componential analysis is a "systematic search for the attributes (components of meanings) associated with categories" (p.131), i.e. for attributes that are considered to be significant with regard to certain domains or taxonomies. SPRADLEY describes this process as discovering contrasts between the empirical use of different domains and taxonomies. These domains and taxonomies may take on different meaning in different contexts. If these components of meaning occur in several domains or taxonomies, SPRADLEY speaks of themes. A theme will be "any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning" (p.141). While domains and taxonomies refer to existing phenomena in any given social situation, themes refer to the ways in which they are related and how they are relevant (similar to SCHÜTZ and LUCKMANN's [1974, p.194] concept of thematic and interpretational relevance). [25]

Among those concepts suggested by KELLER (2008, pp.240ff.) to reconstruct the content structure of discourses, we find "classifications" and "patterns of interpretation" the most useful ones for our analysis. While all of these concepts have been relevant in different theoretical traditions and have therefore taken on specific meanings correspondingly, their basic ideas can be reformulated in the terminology as outlined above—and the empirical reconstruction can be achieved using a domain, taxonomic, componential and thematic analysis. *Classifications* are regarded as a "more or less elaborate, formalized and institutionally stabilized form of social processes of typification" (p.244; our translation). Fundamentally, such processes of typification guide the enactment of everyday routines. They provide terms to positively identify and define the relevant elements of reality. They also implicitly define a whole range of other elements in a negative way, either on restricted or unrestricted contrast sets. A classification may therefore define different types of "ethnic groups," academic positions, medical treatments, etc. If classifications are regarded as types with nested subtypes, defined via restricted contrast sets, they are structurally similar to domains and taxonomies, a

domain linking cover terms and included terms via a semantic relation (cf. above). *Patterns of interpretation* organize the perception of phenomena. They are "basic schemata that generate meaning [... and] suggest what phenomena are all about" (p.243; our translation). According to KELLER, discourses either constitute new, specific patterns of interpretation or combine existing patterns in specific ways. They "instruct" actors implicitly or explicitly in terms of which ways phenomena are relevant and how they are to be dealt with. As outlined in the previous section, a componential analysis (in terms of SPRADLEY) focuses on the reconstruction of meaning components that are significant in relation to certain domains or taxonomies. If one or several such components of meaning are recurring across several domains, SPRADLEY speaks of cultural themes. Conceived in this way, themes are structurally similar to patterns of interpretation. [26]

We followed the basic research process as conceived by SPRADLEY (1979, 1980) and employed a domain, taxonomic, componential and thematic analysis to reconstruct the content structure of the discourse. All the focus group transcripts were read with regard to recurring salient domains and sub-relationships between the included terms. Once the salient domains were reconstructed, a comparative analysis of the contextual use of the included terms of the domains established the relevant meaning components, i.e. those aspects that are implicitly or explicitly decisive for the ways in which the domains are relevant in the given contexts. As we show in Section 6.1, there is only one meaning component that that is recurrent and salient enough to be regarded as a cultural theme. This theme constitutes the main component of content structure of the discourse, in conjunction with a taxonomy of individuals that is related to institutionalized population categories. [27]

5.2 Interpretive strategies

Apart from collecting new data or consulting a diverse range of other knowledge sources, the interpretive process of discovering the relevant types and domains with the corresponding cover terms and included terms, is based on noetic shifts while reading the given data (EBERLE, 2011, p.39). SPRADLEY (1979, pp.78ff.) suggests several principles for such shifts: both the domain and taxonomic analysis are based on the *similarity principle* that looks for shared features of meaning among empirical terms as well as on the *contrast principle* that mainly looks for restricted contrast sets of terms which are both similar and different. This process is fundamentally one of constantly comparing empirical terms with each other and of constantly comparing theoretical terms with empirical terms as described by CORBIN and SRAUSS (2008 [1990], pp.73ff.). In addition to these strategies, sequential analysis as developed in hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (KELLER, 2007 [2004], pp.104ff.; REICHERTZ, 2004) is used for the reconstruction of the relevant components of meaning. Any unit of a text containing a domain of interest—the unit being of any size in principle, presuming that the entire text is not necessarily structured by the same theme—that is chosen for analysis is broken down into smaller meaning units. Starting with the first unit, the researcher initially develops a set of possible interpretations that is as large as possible (but pragmatically limited) regarding what organizes the

meaning of the unit. The next meaning unit is then taken into account, and the researcher assesses which of the initial interpretations are adequate in light of this new unit and which have to be discarded. The chosen piece of text is in this way sequentially interpreted, whereby the relevant components of meaning are revealed. Comparing the results of such componential analyses across several domains may assist in the discovery of overarching themes. [28]

5.3 Ethnographic context

The principles outlined above are fundamentally based on the researcher's knowledge. They are designed to guide the interpretation process and to expand and reflect on the knowledge being dealt with in the analysis, even though such an explication must necessarily remain fragmentary. As it may have become evident, the *reconstruction* of the discourses is primarily oriented towards the empirical data. However, the focus of such a reconstruction is usually framed by the corresponding theoretical bodies of knowledge of the researcher. As a consequence, analytic categories are inevitably present in any reading of the data in addition to the researcher's everyday knowledge. Analytic categories are most likely used when domains consist not mainly of explicit terms, dimensions that remain implicit (thus, SPRADLEY distinguishes between "folk" and "analytic" domains, cf. 1980, pp.90f.). The interpretive strategies allow not only for a reflective process of inferring and abstraction, they also allow for reflections on the adequacy of analytic categories. [29]

Such analytic categories come into play when distinguishing discourses from the the context, the institutional-organizational setting. The initial reading of the data indicated that relevances of other realms are intertwined with the use of discourses: action and interpretation are not only instructed by discourses, but also by relevances from local contextual domains. In our case, the local contextual domain consists of the student residences that form arenas in which discourses are reproduced. There are different strategies to distinguish discourses from such reproductive settings. One of them is to read the data with analytical concepts relating to the relevant theoretical unit of the context, in our case the group. This includes reading the data for indications of group boundaries, of practices that relate to the specific group culture, of spatial interaction scenes, of specific interactional grammars, of local hierarchies among groups, etc. (cf. FINE, 2010). Such a reading was suggested when students talked about their experience of choosing residences. As "race" has been an important issue on the campus for the last two decades, experiences are likely to be discussed according to "racial" terms. But their accounts did not only refer to "color" or "race" in this regard. The accounts also brought to the fore hierarchical relationships among student residences as related to the availability of equipment and the respective academic and sport reputations of the residences. Because the discussion in the focus groups was directed towards the experience of ("racial") integration, these domains remained somewhat unexplored in the text. To explore and explicate these domains further, we conducted ethnographic interviews (cf. the section on data collection). As these interviews are not situated within an ethnographic approach including participant observations (apart from

everyday observations related to one's own working environment within the university), they pose the problem of how such accounts can inform us about the relevances of the everyday action context. [30]

As such, these are accounts *about* the reality of interest, accounts without common experiences of the researcher and the relevant research participant. It is thus difficult to judge when and to what extent they reflect actual action and interpretation relevances and to what extent the interview situation and other relevant issues instruct the account. Ideally, thus, a discourse analysis should be complemented by an extensive ethnography of the local context. As this was not possible mainly due to time constraints, our attempt to account for the context remains a "puny" program, used primarily to establish which of these domains were not simply accidental occurrences in the discussion, but socially relevant issues in campus life. The effort to methodologically "control" the distinction of discourses from local contexts by complementing the focus group information with ethnographic interviews finally remains a fragmentary attempt. Its success is based on the extent to which one operates with "realist" assumptions of commonly shared types such as actors, action, activities and spaces (as suggested by SPRADLEY) and their heuristic exploration in interviews. [31]

6. Experiencing Life on Campus

The following sections present some of the empirical findings. As outlined in Sections 2.2 and 3, the data that this analysis is based on was collected in order to obtain an understanding of how different "racial groups"[17] experienced the "race"-related integration of the student residences. Due to this initial concern, the data only allowed for a reconstruction of a discourse broadly related to race.[18] Firstly, we present the core of the discourse by describing its present mode of articulation (Section 6.1). Secondly, we outline a well explicated domain in the process around the students' arrival at the university, namely that of relating to others and establishing personal relationships (Section 6.2). Afterwards, we present salient domains of the important local institutional-organizational setting, namely the student residences, and show how the discourse of cultural differences is connected to this local setting (Sections 6.3 and 6.4). [32]

6.1 Discourse of cultural differences

The predominant term to refer to "race"-related differences is often not "race," but "*culture*." The terms "*race*" and "*ethnicity*" are not always conceived as concepts distinctly different from "*culture*" and are often used interchangeably. They are

17 See Section 3 for a critical discussion of "groups."

18 Another distinguishable discourse is "leadership": In various instances, students frame their own action and the action of the university administration in terms of leadership. This corresponds to activities currently taking place on the campus such as the university's first "Global Leadership Summit," a two-week long event to which international students were invited .The aim of this summit was for participants to "move from learner to leader" (Source: UFS website for the Global Leadership Summit, http://conferences.ufs.ac.za/default.aspx?DCode=717 [accessed: April 22, 2013]). The summit suggested that students not only need to succeed academically, but they should strive to acquire leadership capabilities, a notion we cannot analyze here in detail due to the initial focus of the research.

used in connection with a well-known taxonomy that consists of categories formerly institutionalized by apartheid legislation: "*black*" and "*white*" people or "*blacks*" and "*whites*."[19] Within the "*black*" domain, distinctions between "*Sesotho*," "*Zulu*," "*Xhosa*," "*Tswana*," "*Pedi*" and "*Venda*" are made, population categories that are also used to refer to officially recognized languages. Within the "*white*" domain, there are "*English*" and "*Afrikaans*" speaking "*whites*." The two main categories, namely "*black*" and "*white*," are mainly framed as "*different*," and the important differences conceived of as "*cultural*." The students speak of "*different cultures*," "*another culture*," "*cultural differences*," "*different experiences*," "*different people*" and "*different language*." In one instance they also speak of different "*ethnic groups*." Some students experienced the focus group discussions themselves as being "*in front of another culture*." There is hardly any detailed explication, exemplification or discussion of the notion of differences or of the "*cultural*" or "*ethnic*" aspects of that difference. The participants frame their experiences by using statements indicating that there *are* differences, but they seldom elaborate. In this regard, the discourse resembles other differentialist discourses that operate with vague and superficial statements that do not need further explication or justification and that can be applied in a flexible manner to almost any sense-making operation that involves individuals that are categorized accordingly (cf. ELLIKER, 2013 for an analysis of how migrant-related discourses operate with such a flexible "non-fitting" assumption). This "banal" characteristic of the discourse might, however, be a necessity if systems of knowledge are to be successfully reproduced in everyday life (cf. e.g. BILLIG [1995, p.6] on the notion of "banal reproduction"). [33]

6.2 Relating to others

The arrival process at the university is a well-covered domain in the data. Several stages of the students' arrival process are mentioned throughout the discussions: choosing and getting assigned a residence (whether their preferences were respected), coming to a new place (the university and Bloemfontein), living with the other residence members and deciding whether to stay in a given residence. Establishing relationships with other students can be seen as partial "solution" to the problems posed after the arrival: the unknown character of the university and of life at the university, the corresponding lack of clear-cut expectations, feelings of loneliness and isolation and the related wish of "*getting out of own's room*" and making friends. In their narrative accounts of their experiences, students mention four different types of relationships. The first type (the numbering only refers to the occurrence in this text, not to any order in the data) is referred to without "*color*" (or race) categorizations. It invokes the notion of "*independence*," where the residence is viewed as a place where one can "*just grow on one's own*" and where there is no need to "be dependent on friends." The second type of relationship refers to various kinds of friendships. This partly intersects with "colored" (racial) categorizations, but in most of the participants' narratives,

19 In Section 6, text within double quotation marks that is set in italics is taken from the focus group discussions. Longer citations are attributed to one of the focus group transcripts: white females (FG1), white males (FG2), black females (FG3), black males (FG4), mixed females (FG5). See Section 2.3 for a description of the data collection process.

establishing and maintaining friendships appear as ordinary "action problems" beyond "*color*" (race) categorizations. Friends are distinguished by degrees of closeness: There are close friends, a person with whom one can "*go mad together*," and with whom one forms a group like a "team"—small groups with routine face-to-face-interaction between members. Similar to this type of friendship are "*friends' friends*," i. e. close friends with whom one goes out, ones that e.g. call one another to "*go out [...] to the club and rests* [restaurants]." Then there are friends that are not "*friends' friends*," the relationship with whom is still framed as friendship, but not as close. This also includes "*people*" one "*knows*" from one's own residence on the campus. There is no explicit distinction in regard to closeness, but the category bound actions of greeting each other and chatting when one meets on the campus suggests a degree of familiarity similar to "*friends*." Thirdly, there are relationships of just getting along with persons, involving only little interaction. In one instance, this type of relationship is likened to the kind of loose association with neighbors as a particular research participant remembers from her life before university: "*you only see them in the morning*" on the street, "*is like hello and that's it*" (FG5, p.3). The fourth kind of relationship is mentioned in the context of what is considered to be conducive or inviting for establishing friendships. This refers to team-based activities such as playing in a sports team. Members of such teams may eventually build relationships in such a way that "*they will call me and say hey listen we are going out so come with us*" (FG5, p.3). [34]

In the research participants' reasoning about which aspects restrain or facilitate when it comes to establishing friendships, different kinds of actions linked to "*personality*" are being referred to. This includes the willingness to "*talk*" and, for instance, to contact your neighbor if you need to borrow something and "*say oh ... your duvet looks good*." Approaching others is also referred to in more general (self-) descriptions as a kind of "*ability*," of being "*good*" or "*not good at making friends*," of not being used to take "*that extra step*" or "*measure*" to approach others. Apart from such an ability, the extent of engaging with others is also related to "*being comfortable where [one] is*" and to their intention to not "*be dependent on friends*," i. e. to be more self-reliant and to not go along with the (urgent) wish to engage in (close) friendships. These processes of relationally identifying others as friends, as neighbors and/or as members of the same residence constitute an everyday backdrop of issues in the talk of the research participants that exists relatively independently of categorical identifications pertaining to "*color*" or "*race*." [35]

In a similar vein as "*personality*" is an interpretive resource in making sense of what contributes to establishing different kinds of friendships, "*biography*" is an important interpretive resource. This is the case in most of the accounts when relating to others is mixed with the discourse of cultural differences. When participants reflect on their ability and willingness to connect with others categorized differently, their personal background—*"where I come from*"—is a dominant domain in framing these reflections (as well as their own expectations of coming to the university). Having been "*surrounded by different cultures*" in their youth and/or in school is for participants along both categories an important

experience. Having been previously exposed to different "*cultures*," the experience at university "*won't be of a difference*," whereas a background where it is "*not easy to do that kind of thing*" played a negative role and lead to difficulties in engaging.[20] This does not mean that such a background prevents a positive experience of engaging with persons across categories, as many students experience to have "*learned a lot, coming here from a small rural school*" (FG1, p.1); there are, however, those that "*would not have been able*" to move into a residence where they would have been part of a minority. One's own background is also viewed as providing an attitude where relationships across "*cultural*" categories are not an important issue. This is either the case because "*I am just fine with them* [others]" or because the student comes to the university to continue with "*what one is comfortable with*" and not explicitly wanting to "*expand one's horizon*." In line with this, some of the informants describe themselves as having built their relationship networks when coming to the university with a preference for people "*from the same race*." Thus, students interpret their background of "*inter-categorical*" experience and being "*open minded*" as important for establishing friendships with persons of different categories. The life in residences is, however, an important realm that may run counter to or be conducive for establishing friendships among members of different categories. [36]

6.3 Life in residences

6.3.1 Reputations

The research participants confirmed that whether a residence is predominantly "*black*" or "*white*" is partially relevant when they choose a residence. However, not all of the participants were aware of the specific nature of residences' "*color*" reputations. In those cases where they were aware of these reputations, they were not sure about them or even "*wrong*" in their estimates (e.g. choosing a predominantly white residence because "*my sister [...] thought it was a black hostel*"). Nonetheless, all of the participants—having spent a considerable time at the university at the point of the focus group discussion—seemed in no doubt about the "*color*" predominance of the residence. In this way they indicated that the reputation or image of the residence is part of the life on campus and refers to a distinct reputation of being "*white*" or "*black*." As a "*black*" participant mentions: "*When I chose [residence name], I didn't know nothing about [this residence]. [...], ja maybe there are white guys, maybe there are ..., you know*" (FG3, p.3), only to find out that this residence was mostly populated with "*black*" students. Another residence's name, however, indicated "*okay listen, that must be very, very Afrikaans, you know*" (FG3, p.4). [37]

The "*color*" dimension is, however, not the only part of the residence reputation and not the only one relevant when choosing a residence. Other relevant dimensions are related to the academic, sport and cultural success of a residence

20 This "background" can also be relevant in a different way. Some of the accounts frame past actions of parts of the university administration as "siding" with "white parents" who would "be talked to separately to assure them that their girls will not be mixed with black girls in their rooms" (FG3, p.3).

—"*its merits or sport activities and how many graduates they have*" [FG5, p.6])—, its physical infrastructure and its reputation specifically among members of the opposite gender. One of the residences was explicitly called a "*classy*" residence, one that has "*plasmas*" (big TV screens) and is "*cool*." However, these other dimensions appear only marginally in the narratives. The additional ethnographic interviews showed that there is indeed a history of relevance of other dimensions than "*cultural differences*." The residences have distinct reputations and "*established names*," students being drawn to residences that often win sport and cultural competitions, activities that residences frequently engage in. The opposition against increased residence diversity also comes from students who perceive that "*the hostel's identity is being broken down. Where our rugby used to be good, we now have to work with a first year group in which most of the black guys would rather play soccer*" (FG2, p.1). The older and larger the residence is, the more likely it is to have more financial resources, mainly due to the size of the alumni club and the money that is raised through that channel. Financial resources also depend on the attachment alumni have to "their" residence. Additional money is raised through students' own initiatives (e.g. renting out residence facilities to outsiders) and through contributions by the parents. The budget makes a distinct difference to the residents' opportunities and to issues such as access to coaches and sport equipment. There is clear evidence of an existing hierarchy among the residences, particularly in as far as material equipment, opportunities for students, the reputation of the residence and the size of the budget (the latter also considerably depending on the wealth of the parents of the current students) are concerned. Residences with students predominantly from poorer families are as a whole less well equipped. The reputation regarding material equipment is partially connected to "color." As one focus group participant puts it, the name of a specific "*black*" residence says "*listen, I am as ghetto as you can get, but, yeah so it does, the name of the hostel does play a role in certain like, you know, perception*" (FG3, p.4). Another residence was referred to as having lost its status. This came out in a narrative that referred to the disappointment of a participant when he found out that this residence "*was kind of up there, you know, even if you talk with some female hostels or some females who were here like ten years ago, it was there*" (FG3, p.10). He compared it explicitly to other "*black*" residences. Imbalances are sustained by residences raising funds and organizing activities, as the university funds the residences with the same amount per student. There are attempts from the university administration to eliminate these imbalances. A recent intervention, directly promoted by the rector's office, entailed the upgrading of the foyers of all residences in order to create a similar "outside" appearance. In addition, external sponsors are drawn in. In three of the residences a large corporation financed the upgrading of the socializing areas. According to the university administration, the imbalance has been reduced as the goal of equal "racial" representation in the poorer residences is approached. [38]

In addition to the material base, there is also a gender dimension involved. The position of a residence within the residence hierarchy is often directly linked to relationships between female and male students, as both genders are aware of the respective residence status. Often, encounters with the opposite gender are

taking place in the context of events organized by the residences. While some of the female and male residences have long established relationships, the residences for such events would be chosen with respect to the status hierarchy. Thus, less popular female residences would not (or less frequently) be visited by students from popular male residences and vice versa. The university administration tries to counter the gender-related imbalances by encouraging popular residences to engage also with less popular residences of the opposite gender. [39]

6.3.2 Managing intimacy and judging others

Residences are places where students share relatively intimate spaces. Frequently two students share a room, and facilities such as bathrooms are shared. Taken-for-granted ways of doing things are exposed to tiny publics and thus subjected to the talk of others. Such practices include learning, the management of intimacy and representing one's intimate relationships with a partner of the opposite or same gender. Ways of doing things that do not correspond to the expectations of others or interfere with their way become issues and the subject of gossip, coordination and negotiation efforts. This section illustrates some of these domains. [40]

One of these domains is the management of intimacy, which is perceived to have developed differently in historically "*white*" and "*black*" residences. An aspect of managing intimacy relates to the internal residence life. A "*white*" participant, for instance, describes her "*black*" residence as having a "*very chilled vibe*" and exemplifies this by stating that "*we can walk around the passages with just a towel on coming from the bath room and its okay*" (FG5, p.5). This same participant indicates that if she was doing this in other ("*white*") residences, "*white girls will ask what are you doing*?" In this context, "*black*" students are seen as more "*accepting*." Other intimacy-related aspects are further connected to the outside image of the residence. "*Sexual activity*," for instance, is something that "*white*" female residences are perceived to "*downplay*." The display of condoms is seen as a sign of sexual promiscuity and tends to be avoided. Often the feeling is that condom dispensers should not be placed in the bathroom of female residences. In other cases this conservative attitude leads to frowning upon those who carry condoms with them (and if those only do so because, as a black participant mentioned, "*even I as a girl, my mother actually tried to say that I should carry a condom in case I got raped*" [FG3, p.21]). "*White*" females seem, according to "*black*" females, to "*hide behind religion*," as they put forward arguments of "*religious purity*" for not carrying a condom: "*She's too clean for a condom but she's the one who's sleeping around*" (FG3, p.22), an attitude perceived by "*black*" females as "*hypocritical*." Again, it is difficult to generalize with regard to actual everyday practices in this realm. However big or small the actual difference concerning such practices may be, the students' narrations indicate that these practices are subjected to talk and different notions of propriety in the residence publics, and that these seem to be structured by the differentialist discourse. This discourse refers to or "identifies" typical practices as

practices of members of the population categories. This is, as already has become evident, connected to reciprocal "*judgments*." [41]

Judgments are another domain that is present in the accounts of the everyday experiences in the residences. The female participants reflect critically on their own "*judgment*" when first encountering "*others*" and being confronted with their practices. The talk of "*white*" female students who have lived in "*black*" residences mainly deals with their initial anxieties about "unknown" "*cultural*" behavior and their own "*judgment*" of that behavior. In one instance, a "*white*" participant describes "*white people*" as being "*very judgmental by the way we were brought up*" (FG5, p.5). In some instances, this judgment arises in the face of practices that from their own perspective are seen as "aggressive." This judgment disappears with a growing "emic" understanding of the others' interpretation of those practices as non-aggressive and non-conflictual ways of interacting. Also in this regard, they view "*blacks*" as more "*accepting*." This coincides with the talk of "black" participants being not so much concerned with anxieties about the other "*color*" categories, but rather with their own judgment that starts because they experience the others as not being "*used*" to friendship offerings by themselves, i.e. by "*blacks*." However, they see those not used to it but who are now "*staying with us*" to "*start to accept the environment they live in*" (FG5, p.2). [42]

While some of the practices seem to be more intimately linked to the discourse of cultural differences, the discourse can also be employed in a relative flexible manner. On the one hand, for example, differences concerning learning practices are typically framed in cultural terms. Several participants state that "*white*" and "black" students study in different ways. The "*blacks*" "*like studying with music next to us*" and the "*whites like being silent*." This is "*why they [whites] move out and like we have this disturbance*" (FG3, p.3). On the other hand, differentialist thinking can be quite flexibly applied to almost any conflict arising from mundane interactions. If a "*black guy*" and a "*white guy*" are

> "*arguing about something, then this white guy will go to the other white guys and heat them up, like tell them that this guy did this and this, and the black guy will also go to the other black guys, tell them like 'boys, this white guy did this and this', then it starts to be a black and white thing in a hostel and to be honest with you guys, it always happens in [this residence]. Always*." (FG4, p.7) [43]

Thus, to some extent, students use the discourse of cultural differences as a strategy to support one's position in conflicts that originally do not have a cultural component to them. [44]

6.3.3 Common ground

Not all activities in residences are based on conflict: Residences provide a space for categorical and relational identifications that provide the potential to overcome "*cultural differences*." This is the case even if it is only, as some participants narrate, that the residence membership provides a "*legitimate reason*" to

recognize and engage with others on campus irrespective of their population category. The participants view those forms of engaging with each other that are not framed by the (racial) population categories as the most successful ways to "*integrate*." Such a domain is being a "*first year*" (student)[21], which is a categorical identification, as certain activities are bound to that category across all residences. In the everyday life of "*first years*" in the residence, however, this category becomes also a relational one as the residence culture is partially organized around whether one is a "*first year*," a "*junior*" or a "*senior*." For instance, in house meetings, the students are split into "*junior*" and "*senior*" groups, and in these groups, it does "*not really matter [...] where we come from*." To build lasting friendships, "*you need to have something in common with them like sports*" (FG5, p.2), some kind of "*common ground*," "*common personality or specialties*," to be on the same "*level*" with the other person, such as a "*personality*" "b*eing open minded*" and not "*minding to take extra steps*." In this context, the "*forced integration*" by the university is discussed ambivalently. Some interpret these measures as necessary steps, for without such interventions, there would be less "*integration*." They also see it as creating circumstances that one gets used to over time, while others find it unlikely that they will accept or like a person just by having to live in the same residence. The above mentioned fourth type of relationships, groups such as sport teams, are accounted for as potentially providing a common ground in such a way that close bonds are formed beyond being just a member of the team. Establishing such friendships must furthermore, in these accounts, not "*feel to be pushing oneself to the other*." Thus, while the institutional setting is viewed as positive in promoting better understanding, friendships should evolve in a "*normal*," "*standard*" way, without the population categories being prominently part of it. [45]

However, exploring and overcoming the difference can be experienced as "*exciting*" as well as part of one's personal development. On the one hand, interaction in a different language can be framed as "*totally different which is amazing*," referring to situations in which the encounter with persons categorized as others is experienced with an excitement of getting to know somebody or something (a culture, a language) unknown, a bigger difference potentially promising a greater sense of achievement or excitement when (temporarily) being able to bridge or act "*across*" it. On the other hand, as indicated above in the statement about expanding one's horizon (Section 6.2), the university in general is seen as a place not only to acquire academic knowledge, but to "*grow on one's own*" and to "*learn something new.*" This also refers to and is enhanced by relating to and befriending persons belonging to a different category: "*I learnt so much with the different cultures*" (FG5, p.2). "*Mixed*" residences are seen to allow the person to "*move*" and "*live*" "*in a different direction*," also by learning how to "*communicate better*," "*in the hostel and outside the hostel*." By interacting with people who have "*different experiences*," a sense of "*growing*" is experienced in the context of increasing acceptance. Thus, the differentialist discourse is a "*source*" (in the form of a "problem" that can be overcome) for personal development. [46]

21 The terms "first year" and "juniors" refer to those students who spend their first year at the university, "senior" to the students in their second or third year.

Another component of this development concerns one's own preparation for future working environments: Such environments are mainly seen as places where "*there are white and black people*," where "*everyone is mixed*," and thus the experience at the university is seen as preparing oneself for the demands of these future working places: "*if you get used to it now, it will help you in the future*" (FG5, p.1). Some of their fellow students, however, are described as people who prepare themselves for a life in an exclusively Afrikaans speaking environment. Similar to this, students interpret the perspective on student life also as related to biographies. Some would tell their offspring to "*got to varsity, have fun*," while

> "*I was told 'go to varsity, you have to study, you have to bring back the results', [...] I've got a job to do, because somewhere someone's paying lots of money for this and someone's making a lot of sacrifices for me to be in this place*." (FG4, p.9) [47]

As outlined in Section 6.2 on relating to others, engaging with others is interpreted as an action problem, a problem which different "*personalities*" and persons with different "*attitudes*" solve in different ways, the different "*personalities*" being regarded as something that exists irrespective of population categories. Relationships to other persons are not necessarily interpreted in culturalist or differentialist terms. There are, however "emic" domains in the participants' talk about how "*well*" integrated life is pertaining to "*color*" categories. They distinguish several modes of how students who are categorized differently live together. Firstly, there is a mode of coexistence that is regarded as "*not fully integrated*": "*we just tolerate each other*." This co-existence is seen in connection with "*personalities*" that are viewed as "*not being good at making friends*," with the notion to "*not be dependent on friends*," with not being used to make friends across these institutionalized categories, with the notion that friendships should not be established only because of the categorical difference, but because of other "*common grounds*," and it is seen in connection with life situations where there is simply no "*need*" to establish friendships across categories as one has a sufficiently big network of friends already. Overall, this mixed environment is seen as increasing reciprocal acceptance and understanding. Secondly, there are those whose background provides them with experience and a sense of "*normality*" of having friendships across categories, and those that are regarded as "*open-minded*." Both of these enter into closer relationships when engaging with each other, labeled as friendship. [48]

6.3.4 Intervention, autonomy and identity

The residence environment, among other group-related domains, is viewed as an environment that provides potentially a better understanding of others, even in the case of those who did not want to make friends across categories. Establishing such relations does need, however, "*extra measures*" and institutional interventions. There are four typical perspectives in the students' accounts concerning their autonomy and interventions from the university administration. One is based on the assumption that people do not try to "*integrate*" without being forced to—an (institutional) context is needed within

which people are able to change their views. Another one asserts that the university should go and is "*going*" into a "*new direction*," regarding the university as an institutional actor making important and necessary contributions towards "*integration*." Yet another perspective stresses that forcing somebody to live with another person won't necessarily change attitudes: "*True*" change comes from within the person, from an "*inner*" wish to engage with another person. It that sense, bonding with others is seen as an individual matter, based not mainly on categorical identifications, but on other commonalities and "*personality*." And the fourth perspective in this regard puts forward a "*non-categorical perspective*," framing the university as an institution that has been concerned too much with "*integration*" and should focus more on "*academic* [life]." [49]

The latter of these is also discussed in connection with the contested notions of what residences should ideally be. On the one hand, interventions of the university administration such as moving rag[22] related activities to a newly created rag farm and the banning of alcohol are seen as destructive towards the tradition and identity of the residence. A residence should, from this perspective, not be a mere "*accommodation*," but a "*residence*" where you "*join a culture, some kind of tradition*," which "*gives people a sense of belonging, [...] knowing that you've taken part, knowing that this is your pride, this is your hostel*" (FG4, p.14). The regretted loss of status of certain residences is seen in connection with the distinct residence cultures. Part of this culture are initiations and the treatment of first year students, which are about "*building what we want to be*":

> "*Yeah, when you're first year you can feel that this is, you know, 'what are they doing to me?' but like he [another participant of this focus group] said, [...] at times we hang out and talk about it, it's something that you can look back on and right now you laugh about it*." (FG4, p.14) [50]

On the other hand, what was established and upheld as tradition is also viewed as "*party*" culture and a vehicle for those simply coming to university to have a good time and to find a partner. It is not regarded entirely positive with regard to the academic progress that some of the students would like to make: "*As much as you are having your fun and drinking and they're shouting at intercom [door phone] and, I'm trying to sleep at 2 o'clock in the morning, I've got a class to attend to*" (FG4, p.11). A certain degree of coherence amongst the residents and knowledge of each other is, however, regarded as valuable by most participants, since it "*also breaks down that color barrier*." The extent to which students should engage in the residence activities remains a contested issue. While some prefer residences to be housing that enables students to live on campus and to study, some senior residence students who have passed through the initiation process state that management should "*take those guys who just want to study and give them private academic housing. The hostel is about more than that*" (FG2, p.9). [51]

22 A "rag" is an organized event on the university campus during which the aim is to collect money for charity. Students run this event and one of the main activities is a carnival parade through the streets of Bloemfontein. Different student residences compete in various activities.

Throughout the interviews, students regarded the residence traditions as relatively obdurate—as one focus group participant put it: "*It's one of those things, you either adapt or you just move out*" (FG4, p.3). As detailed account of these traditions remained fragmented, we explored these further in ethnographic interviews. The obduracy of these traditions seems to be linked to the various practices that provide opportunities for relatively strong senses of identity in terms of relational and categorical identifications. The most important among these identifications pertains to the distinction between first year students and the others (returning students). Engaged in many activities meant to establish a reputation for the particular residences and usually compelled to wear residence uniforms and clothing on campus, they are not (yet) accepted as "*full members*" of the residences, as the 2nd and 3rd year students. In some residences, they have to address older students as "*oom*" (uncle), accompanied by gestures such as lowering their heads while speaking to them. They are subjected to various forms of humiliating treatment by senior residents and are excluded from important socializing areas, the so-called bond rooms[23]. Every first-year student is also adopted by a senior student as a "*son*" or a "*daughter*," the "*adopted*" ones themselves adopting each year new "*offspring*," thus creating expanding "*families*." After passing an initiation ritual, they are officially accepted into the bond and even recognized by a formal certificate. Until recently, some of these initiation traditions used to include considerable physical violence[24]. Parts of the residence culture are experienced as hierarchical, paternalistic, and authoritarian. The treatment during the first year as "*inferior*" is considered to be the worst. The culture is also described as containing strong ideals of proper behavior and as strict with regard to enforcing rules (violently "*punishing*" deviant behavior). Some of these actions are regarded as reminiscent of military culture.[25] The participants also describe this culture as forging close ties among the respective first-year students and the "*families*," ties that are experienced to last well beyond the students' enrollment at the university. Until recently, the residences were run exclusively by the students who decided about virtually every aspect of the life in the residences, including the selection of new residents. Contacts with the university staff members who were *ex officio* appointed to oversee activities in the residences were infrequent. [52]

As the ethnographic interviews with the university's administration staff showed, the university's recent interventions were and are directed to dismantle what the administration calls the "*unhealthy autonomy*" and "*overly strong, unique identity*" of the residences. The efforts include(d) creating a "*welcoming atmosphere*" for first-year students, shifting the decision about the selection of new residents to

23 Bond rooms are important socializing spaces in the residences from which first year students are usually excluded. After their initiation, students are officially accepted into the bond, recognized by a formal certificate.

24 The "negative media coverage threat" after the REITZ incident (see Section 2.2) was effectively used by a faction of white male first year students of a specific residence who did not want to subject themselves to an initiation ritual that involved direct physical violence, forcing the older residents to develop more "human" initiation practices.

25 Some participants linked certain residence traditions (e.g. a type of room inspection) to the generations of male students that served in the army during the South African border wars. Their military experience shaped their habitualized knowledge of how to organize group life. This military way of discipline was subsequently enacted in the residences.

the administration, implementing a strict disciplinary structure, creating new interaction realms that force students from different residences to cooperate, and encouraging the active involvement of students in the residences in "*community building*" and the establishment of "*shared values*." [53]

6.4 Regional context

In addition to the group-related context of the residences at university, another important domain regarding what is conducive or inhibiting for "inter-categorical" relationships is the regional context. Bloemfontein and the Free State Province are seen as places where "*people from different races look at you differently like you are not human*" (FG5, p.4). Some of the "*black*" students who came from other provinces stopped going out (frequenting cinemas and restaurants of Bloemfontein) for this reason. This "*vibe*" does apparently not just exist between "*Afrikaners*" and "*blacks*," but also between "*Sesotho*" and "*Zulu*" people. This is interpreted as "*sticking to one's nation*." The effect of this regional context is experienced in two ways: on the one hand, it is a cognitive style that one can "*switch off*" or on, depending on where one is staying—"*when you are in Joburg [Johannesburg] the attitude [is] automatically switch[ed] off*" (FG5, p.5). The other attitude or mental state that is "*switched to*" is one of looking at people as "*human beings*" and not caring whether a person is "*black*" or "*white*." The concept "*human being*" thus provides a notion to meet and encounter with others beyond skin color. On the other hand, the regional context influences people in a longer-lasting way: anybody "*who comes here automatically change[s]*." Some of the "*black*" male students encounter difficulties to continue engaging with their "*white*" friends they know previously from school. They ascribe these difficulties to the new local friends of their former school friends, friends who are experienced as not willing to engage with "*black*" students:

> "*We all came together here at varsity. [We] like greet each other and their friends would look at me like 'dude ...' [guy] So even the guy would invite me, [but] I haven't been to his crib because of his friends, the way they look at me you know*." (FG4, p.5) [54]

As a black male student remembers, these new circles of friends did not leave a former "*white*" friend of him uninfluenced. He describes him as an

> "*'English guy, straight English.' We were great mates, we still are, but then you see how this guy has changed during the course of his studies, understand, he, being this English guy, has turned into an Afrikaans guy and basically he turned into, what how can I say, what Bloem expects of you, not what our hostel expects of you or what the university expects of you, but what Bloem expects of you*." (FG4, p.5) [55]

Pertaining to residence life, the importance of the language Afrikaans and the insistence to hold meetings in Afrikaans is also interpreted as a matter of the effect of the regional context. The segregation effect that is present in the region permeates the university and makes it difficult to "*adapt to both cultures*." [56]

7. Conclusion

We examined how the discourse of cultural differences is locally enacted in an institutional-organizational setting that is not geared exclusively or primarily towards the reproduction of this very discourse. This setting has historically developed as a relatively autonomous conglomerate of systems of relevance directed towards other purposes. The power of discourses does not consist of unmediated, "direct" effects, but is intertwined with other logics of interpretation and action. Until recently, for instance, the historically developed ways of living in the students' residences have proven surprisingly resilient. Shifting the boundary work of the discourse of cultural differences to within the campus and the residences, the residences became the stage for the enactment of discourse-related categorical identifications within a realm of various preconfigured relational identifications. In the process it transformed formerly predominantly categorical identifications into relational ones. Apart from the concept of "race" that has been formally discredited over the last 20 years and that has potentially warranted strategies of "plausible deniability" (LIU & MILLS, 2006) in its public use, this very shift of the boundary work to intimate spaces and the corresponding reciprocal experience of practices might have contributed to a more culturalist framing of differences. The empirical use of the term culture now refers less to relatively abstract, large collectivities, but more to practices. [57]

The findings presented in this article demonstrate one of potentially several relevant enactment contexts. At least three other interrelated contexts are to be taken into account in further, more extensive discourse ethnographies (GUMPERZ, 1982). As shown in the previous section, the university as an institution is embedded in a regional context, *inter alia* through the staffing of academic and administrative personnel and the recruitment of students predominantly from cities or rural area(s) who have distinct economic, political and demographic profiles. The Free State Province is a predominantly agricultural province, dominated by large-scale farming; students come, however, also from other provinces and from other cities and towns. Furthermore, through multiple memberships of students and personnel, the university is connected to other group-related contexts. In the case of the students an important other context is their family. As the narrative accounts and the ethnographic interviews demonstrate, the parents (and to some extent also their siblings) play an important role with regard to the discourse of cultural differences. Most parents are concerned about how their child is doing in the residence where she/he stays. Amongst the concerns are still notions of "propriety" concerning relations with members of other population categories. And thirdly, in addition to the present involvement of the family, the students' past forms what we call a "biographical context." Regarding the biographical context the most important dimension concerning population categories is the composition of former peer groups in the education system prior to university. While the present organizational and group-related context calls for ethnographic methods of exploration, the biographical context is best explored with strategies developed in the narrative study of lives approach (cf. COETZEE, ELLIKER & RAU, 2013). [58]

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