
Schooling, youth adaptation and translocal citizenship across the post apartheid city

Aslam Fataar

Abstract

This article draws on my research in a township on the outskirts of Cape Town. It focuses on young people's identification adaptations in their interaction with schooling in this city. While the deeper markings of race, class and gender associated with the city's apartheid past are ever present, I will suggest that young people's adaptations are negotiated fundamentally in light of the changing cultural topography of race (Rizvi, 2004) in which life in South African cities are currently experienced. I employ the lens of 'translocalism' to signpost the new articulation field in terms of which school students reflexively adapt their youthful identities. I use the case of one high school student to illustrate how many young people navigate spatially reconfiguring urban school terrain.

During my ethnographic work in a township 45 kilometres from inner city Cape Town, I frequently observed large numbers of high school children who daily leave their homes in a myriad of different school uniforms to attend schools outside this area. The early mornings at the bus and taxi terminals in Rustvale (pseudonym) are abuzz with the chatter of young bodies making their way to their remote schools. It was clear that they chose not to attend any of the five high schools in this sprawling township of about 100 000 people.

I figured that their daily mobility must have been inspired by a particular reading of the worth of the township schools. Here the notion of education as a 'positional good' (see Jonathan, 1997) is given particularly poignant meaning. These coloured and black African kids choose to access remoter schools because they regard them as crucial for cultivating the necessary aspirant dispositions that will allow entry into formal middle class employment and lifestyles. In a study of learner migration at 120 selected urban schools in five provinces, Sekete, Shilubane and Badiri (2001, p.27) found that 49% of the students are "from other residential areas than those in which schools are located". This represents a sizeable migratory school attendance phenomenon. It is mainly black and coloured children who travel daily to remoter former coloured, Indian and white schools, with little similar cross racial movement into former black schools (Sekete *et al.*, 2001). Enormous sacrifices are made

in order to access the ‘proper’ schools on the other side of the city. School choice is understood and negotiated as a key resource in positioning aspiring kids for later life. The exercise of such choice depends on the ability to pay school fees, which requires a large financial outlay for these mostly struggling families.

Fee paying at public schools in South Africa was formalised under the post apartheid government as a means of augmenting the annual government funded operational grants allocated to the schools (see DOE, 1996). Schools, for example, could use their fees to employ extra teachers and acquire optimal learning resources such as books and sport equipment. The greater a school’s middle class parental base, the greater its ability to charge fees, enabling it to retain and expand its qualitative status. With quality ensured, schools such as these, mostly in former white locations whose apartheid bequeathed resource bases are crucial to their on going viability, could easily translate their functional character into sought after status. Kids similarly accessed those former non-white schools that succeeded in retaining their image of good quality in the post 1994 period. But these schools are few and far between. The apartheid government’s under funding of black schools has had a lasting legacy on their functional status.

With a solid financial basis and discursive projection in the popular media and school promotional campaigns, the former white schools were accessed by children from non white townships. Following Rizvi (2001), the cultural topography of race and youth identification in these schools changed fundamentally. Akin to his example of children of Indian sub-continental origin who began to attend schools in white working class towns in the UK during the 1970s and thereby change their school’s ethnic make up, the demography of children in former white schools in South Africa also changed markedly. These schools were often unprepared to adapt to these new demographic dynamics. Paradoxically, most of the formal integration between children of all races in South Africa’s schools after apartheid took place in these schools. Their teachers remained largely white. The daily trek of kids out of places like Rustvale had a direct, if hitherto under explained, impact on the receiving schools. The extant literature on school inclusion shows that those schools that received children of other races by and large failed substantively to adapt to the cultural and racial backgrounds of the incoming kids (see Johnson, 2007; Sayed and Soudien, 2004).

A discourse of cultural assimilation meets the arriving kids with the expectation that they adopt the ‘culturally white’ ethos of the school (Dolby,

2001; Johnson, 2007). Race had transmuted into culture, based on the schools' self proclaimed view that their age old traditional 'habits of being' are sufficient for the cultural socialization of the newer black kids (see Dolby, 2001). An example is the insistence at many schools that only rugby be allowed as a sport code, to the exclusion of soccer, which is very popular among non white boys. Basketball, an increasingly popular sport among black youth, is frowned upon. Similarly, school concerts are dominated by 'high' cultural items such as ballet and Shakespearean plays, excluding popular youth art forms such as kwaito, hip hop and modern dance. The media periodically reports on crude displays of racism in the schools such as the beating of black students by fellow white students. A self congratulatory discourse of 'we don't see race, only children', provides compelling justification for the schools to acculturate the kids into the hegemonic culturally white habits of being.

It is clear that cultural assimilation into the pre-existing school culture provides these schools their conceptual referents in the face of a complex mix of raced and cultured young bodies on their campuses. I will suggest below that the young people, in response, are acutely aware of the formal and informal messages of these schools, leading them to adopt strategic deportments as they navigate this unfamiliar cultural terrain. This article is an attempt to provide conceptual insight into some of the identification bases upon which young people in these schools substantiate their navigations. I will argue that it is the contingencies of social space in changing urban contexts that combine with the considered cultivation of deportment that can explain their youthful adaptations.

Translocalism and affective geographies

This article primarily focuses on the negotiations young people make in their interaction with schools that are culturally incongruous with their domestic places. Their daily mobility across the city is a key element in accessing their schools. Mobile bodies combine with a number of affective processes to substantiate the adjustments they make in order to fit into and mediate the hegemonic cultures of the schools they enter. I have coined the phrase 'affective geographies' as an attempt to capture the ways these youth cultivate or build cultural repertoires that enable them to navigate the social spatial shifts involved in living in between racial and culturally dissonant spaces. Cultural repertoires draw on Miron, Dardar and Inda's (2005, p.291) notion of

cultural citizenship to indicate the ways people “become cultural citizens through a reflexive set of formative and locally constructed processes”. I suggest that their identifications are made up by a number of hybrid adaptive processes based on ‘putting together’ (Simone, 2002) cultural material that draws on elements of race, religion, ethnicity, class aspiration and strategic embodiment. Active and mediated readings of these materials constitute their versatile and flexible identifications. This conceptual approach is an attempt to accord constitutive power and agency to young people as they move across space to maximise their life chances in spite of, or perhaps because of, the ephemeral circumstances of their places of living. I would argue that their social spatial attribution, i.e. what they become as a result of their interaction with place and space, is crucial to understanding their shifting selves.

Recent work has placed educational subjectivity in the post apartheid period on the scholarly agenda. Soudien and Sayed (2004) provide an incisive critique of the way post apartheid education policy reform failed to leverage a productive response from the country’s diverse schools. According to them the extant institutionally divergent responses detract from the country’s ability to establish an equitable system, leading them to label the state’s policy discourse as neo-racial. Sayed, Soudien and Carrim (2003) are particularly harsh on the state’s choice of decentralisation as the basis of its reform platform. Decentralisation failed to galvanise schools into developing inclusive cultures. Following on this, Johnson (2007) argues that the dominant and pre-existing cultural orientations of schools were allowed to remain in tact. A key criticism of the post apartheid state is therefore that it failed to provide policy levers to facilitate genuine inclusion or accommodation of the multiple articulations of identity that co-exist in the country’s diverse range of schools.

Monographs by Dolby (2001) and Soudien (2007) are important contributions for understanding youth and schooling in South Africa. They provide a platform for the conceptual focus of this paper. Dolby’s is a compelling account of the dynamics of identity construction in one school. She argues that it is globally inspired consumption and the cultivation of taste that are primary in the youth’s racial and cross racial associations in school. Being an ethnographic study located inside the boundaries of the school, she does not take analytical account of the impact young people’s extra-school lives and living environments have on their constructions. The study thus does not account for their constructions in light of their geographic or lived contexts outside school. Young people, I would argue, bring the attributes of their environments with them to school, and these play a major role in their everyday navigations in schools.

Soudien's (2007) book, *Schooling, Culture and the Making of Youth Identity in Contemporary South Africa*, is a seminal contribution in the sociology of South African education. Soudien's analysis embraces complexity. It is based on a combination of psychological and sociological lenses that attempt to understand the ways youth identities are articulated in the bifurcated worlds of South African schooling. He suggests that there are arenas of privilege and poverty that affect young people's socialization in the country's schools. Their life worlds – whether they are the expansive environments of privilege or the narrower world of the townships – fundamentally condition what kind of people they can become. Soudien's work thus moves closer to taking account of geographic configurations, which, I would argue, is implicit in his work. He lays the basis for further engagement with the impact of spatial dimensions on the young students' lives.

The analytical gap that I locate this story of mobile youth in lies in understanding how geography and 'social space' are articulated in young people's interaction with their schools. Space is crucial in understanding how they cultivate their sense of self. In support of this position Keith and Pile (1993, p.6) argues convincingly that:

We may now use the term 'spatiality' to capture the ways in which the social and spatial are inextricably realized one in the other; to conjure up the circumstances in which society and space are simultaneously realized by thinking, feeling, doing individuals and also to conjure up the many conditions in which such realizations are experienced by thinking, feeling, doing subjects.

This dynamic agency orientated perspective opposes the view that space is fixed, dead and undialectical. A fixed view, according to Soja, reduces spatiality to a "mental construct alone. . . Social space folds into mental space . . . away from materialized social realities" (in Keith and Pile, 1993, p.4). Resisting this view, Soja argues for a connection between "representations of space and actual (physical) space" (125, my parenthesis). An analysis of identification construction therefore has to take into account the material and spatial contexts of people's social practices. Spatiality thus involves the relational or human dimensions of space, i.e. lived space, or as Lefebvre (1971/1991) suggests, the relational appreciation of space as actively produced in and through everyday human practices. Space should thus be understood as the active interaction between the physical environment and people's uses of, and practices in it, such as the mobile spatialities of young people who travel daily to access remote schools.

The notion of transnationalism developed by Smith (2001) is apposite in understanding the mobile identity constructions of the youth discussed in this article. Extending on the spatialization lens, transnationalism refers to the innovative social practices of migrants who move to other countries to work and establish new lives. They combine a range of cultural practices, drawing on active social networks with and connections to their countries of origin, and resources in their settled environments to construct viable lives. Drawing on this view, Miron *et al.* (2005, pp.289–306), in their analysis of high school kids who navigate the politics of language in a Californian county, develop the notion ‘translocalism’ in reference to spatial practices that, while located in specific urban territories, transcend them because of crisscrossing movement between spaces. Particular spaces are “traversed by a multitude of processes . . . forms a node in a multitude of trans-circuits” (2005, p.295). Translocality then refers to spatial practices that weave together “various ‘circulating’ populations with various kinds of ‘locals’” (2005, p.295). In the case of this article, translocal movement and adaptation describe those young kids who wake up ‘culturally black’ in an impoverished city space and move daily through the city landscape to enter the culturally dissonant spaces of their new schools.

The final move of this section is then to tie the translocal spatiality of these youth to their subjective constructions of space and self. In other words, the analytical task is to provide a lens to understand how youth construct their identities as they crisscross urban space. Navigating dissonant spaces is emblematic of their youthful constructions. Robinson (2000, p.429) makes a productive connection when she posits an interactive construction of space and self. Young people, she says, “interconnect space and self in the organization of daily and life paths” and they “invest themselves in the landscape” (2000, p.432). She suggests that it is possible to understand from a space/identity perspective how young people sustain, develop and modify their self investment and belonging in a landscape often constructed to exclude them, as in the case of the schools these youth end up in, in Cape Town. Cahill (2000) extends on this with her discussion of the urban strategies of young people in fashioning their identities. She suggests that how teenagers define their environmental transactions is bound up with the way they construct their identities. They have a highly developed understanding of environmental protocol, read the environment in specific ways, and transact strategic and embodied practices and relationships.

Cahill uses the notion ‘street literacy’ to explain how young people acquire and apply experiential knowledge that informs their self construction and

social practices. They apply this ‘literacy in use’ to negotiate and master their neighbourhoods. Learning and practicing the necessary social skills for such mastery is a key aspect of young people’s everyday lives. Street literacy describes “on the one hand the cognitive processes of internalizing public space negotiations, and at the same time serve to dimensionalize development by locating it within environmental context” (2000, p.254). It is fundamentally the relationship between cognitive and affective adaptation on the one hand and the negotiation of dissonant spaces by these young people on the other that this article explores. I will argue that the identification referents of these young people, their affective geographies, are impacted by this spatial mobility, leading them to negotiate and establish, following Miron *et al.* (2005), translocal cultural citizenship in the post apartheid city.

Schooling and spatial mobility across the changing city

Racially based apartheid geographies proscribed the extent of possible lives in South Africa. One example of this is the professional lives of coloured teachers of Muslim religious persuasion. I did a study of their educational and religious socialisation as first generation educated during the middle decades of the twentieth century. I described the affective adaptations they had to make when interacting on the basis of modernising impulses with their own tradition-based communities (see Fataar, 2007). I concluded that their socialization as professionals was strictly mapped onto the racial geography of Cape Town. Their lives as teachers and community activists were tightly bound to the city’s coloured spaces, where they established middle class place-based identities. From my interviews with them I concluded that they could not, and did not imagine their professional and personal existence outside of the mono-racial urban spaces of their birth. Lived space, or spatiality, was for them coeval with a bounded racialised existence.

Translocal student mobility did occur during the apartheid period but was transacted in race-based extensions across the city’s landscape. This is exemplified by the following school attendance story. Harold Herman¹ is a

¹ Harold and Matthew (the latter whom I refer to below) gave me permission to mention these aspects of their biographies. I refer to their stories as a means of illustrating how people’s lives were circumscribed by racially-based geographies during the apartheid era. This is not to suggest that their life experiences and memories were either evinced or marked exclusively by race. Coinciding with geographic enclosure, race began to play a very powerful socializational role during the apartheid period. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for this comment.

Professor in my Faculty from the coloured group, approaching retirement. He grew up on a peri-urban mission station about 75 kilometres from Cape Town. He was one of a select and precocious few who travelled daily by train to a high school in the city. The interaction between his religiously based social location and his daily travel to the city to attend a famous politicised high school with a scholarly reputation provided him key markers for his youthful socialization. Schools such as these played an important role in the modernisation of the coloured community. Racially marked translocal mobility across the city was central to Harold's formative years, wherein he had to negotiate shifts in his identity from a limiting coloured rural mission environment to urban middle class mobility. This took place within coloured geographic extensions. Mobility for Harold was determined by his travel across the city to attend a high school reserved for a particular race.

Matthew's case is an equally compelling example of the co-incidence of race making (production of whiteness), schooling and place. He is a white teacher also approaching retirement. He grew up in Springbok, a rural town in South Africa's Northern Cape Province. By the 1950s the town was predominantly white Afrikaner, and he was at the receiving end of white – favoured political development. With mobility not an option, Matthew had to attend the only high school in the town, where as a minority English speaking child he experienced daily recrimination. He nonetheless received a good quality schooling that was reserved for whites. But Matthew suffered at the hands of the Afrikaner boys and the Afrikaner nationalist culture that pervaded the school. Having to carry his Englishness on his skin provided him part of the context for his early identity formation.

Racialised geographies were central to Matthew and Harold's interaction with their schooling, structuring the lineaments of their youthful navigations and the adults they became. Following Willis (2005), they could be said to have been foot soldiers of racially based modernization that had geographic entailments which impacted on their formative stages of their lives. A key marker of their navigations in racially contingent space is the affective adaptations they had to make to deal with and fit into the disjunctural worlds of the school – for Harold in the alluring, if intimidating, urban context of inner Cape Town, and Matthew in the ethnicised world of Afrikaner whiteness – that was fundamentally out of sync with their childhood home environments. Their affective shifts have had to be established in racially enclosed school spaces, which were part of the emerging rigid racial demarcations that characterised South African society at the onset of apartheid in the 1950s.

Geographic arrangements have changed fundamentally in post-apartheid South Africa, impacting the mobility and adaptations of young people. Identification categories of race, class, religion, and ethnicity have been re-arranged, laying the ground for newer and different youth identities. The argument of this article turns on the way these changing geographies impact youth identifications in their interaction with their schools. Official desegregation has led to a number of interesting rearrangements in urban spaces. Cape Town has, for example, taken on the features of a typical post colonial city with many diverse and materially uneven spaces. Wilkinson (2000, p.195) describes the city as “located in a spectacular setting at the south west tip of Africa. . . and accommodates a culturally and linguistically diverse population”. While spatial planning during the apartheid years was based on hierarchical racial segregation, a mix of fluid race and class arrangements currently characterize the city, reorganising its spatial dynamics and flows. A striking feature is the wide ranging and heterodox material contexts in which its inhabitants live, from opulent first world living along the Atlantic seaboard, to middle class suburban living, and the myriad of townships and informal settlements dotted on its landscape. The most impoverished sectors of the city’s inhabitants are black and coloured. Growing class mobility among these groups has led to the deracialisation of the middle class, many of whom have moved to former white suburbs. The city is also experiencing rapid growth as a result of trans-regional migration from other part of the country (see Kok, O’Donovan, Bouare and Van Zyl, 2003) and refugee and expatriate settlement from the broader African continent and elsewhere (Sookraj, Gopal and Maharaj, 2005).

The changing racial topography of the city has impacted fundamentally on schooling patterns. School choice is the outcome of careful calculations by parents and children about the positional worth of a school, i.e. whether a school will provide children the educational capital required for success in later life. The ability to pay fees and transport costs is an important element in such decisions. Children travel long distances translocally of up to 100 kilometres a day to and from school (Sekete *et al.*, 2001). A number of displaced attendance patterns, of children choosing schools other than those nearest to their homes, have manifested over the last fifteen years. Unlike in northern countries where children are required to go to the neighbourhood school, policy has enabled them to choose those schools which they have come to view as better able to provide them a chance for quality schooling. An empirical study on learner migration confirms this by showing that the search for “better education emerged as a major consideration for learners to leave schools in their neighbourhood for others far away” (Sekete *et al.*, 2001, p.ix).

Exercise of choice though applies as much to those children who choose schools outside the township and those who choose to remain inside. A sizeable number of children who live in townships attend schools in other parts of their township or in adjacent townships. They view the school closest to them as of inadequate quality. My research in Rustvale revealed the way perceptions about the worth of schools in this township are produced and circulated, leading to elevated status for some schools compared to others (Fataar, 2007). Contrary to popular perception, many young people who attend township schools exercise agency in their school choices. Notwithstanding the functional differentiation among the schools in townships, my research in Rustvale has shown that they have been struggling to establish functional learning environments. The schools seem to be impacted by the absence of cultural capital and difficult domestic circumstances. I have suggested elsewhere that the schools refract “the social pressures of the township, becoming part of its sociality, while on the other hand, they actively serve to ameliorate the worst consequences of poverty and hardship” (see Fataar, 2007).

Young people who choose to migrate out of the townships to attend former white schools are influenced by their reading of the township schools’ ability to facilitate their middle class aspirations. Their mobility is based on acquiring carefully cultivated dispositions, as a means of accessing those schools which they come to understand as providing them the best opportunity to facilitate their aspirations. I will argue below, based on the case of one student, that their youthful dispositions are articulated fundamentally in interaction with the changing spatial attribution of the post apartheid city.

One case of translocal spatial mobility

I make no claims about the generalisability of this paper. I advance a conceptual argument that suggests a bigger trend. Layla’s (pseudonym) story is meant to provide qualitative substantiation for my argument, pointing towards one way of understanding the subjectivities of young people when they engage in translocal mediations of their school environs. She is one among a number of youth in Rustvale whom I have spoken to during my research, who make similar adaptations and can therefore be said to be representative of them. In other words, her case is not an isolated one but part of a larger urban trend. I therefore offer an analysis of her story as a way of stimulating further debate and research into this and similar sociologies of young people in the city’s schools.

I acknowledge the narrative constructions, Layla's and mine, that influenced the presentation of Layla's story. Following Schreurich (1999, p.241), such constructions are based on "the complexity, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of each one-to-one human interaction". Interviews are complex processes where the interviewer and the interviewee struggle over meaning. Layla was never a passive subject. She actively asserted control over the interview. Her responses were spontaneous and effusive, while also careful and considered. Meaning was generated out of the tussle between Layla's constructions and my own as the researcher who has a particular interpretive agenda. What appears in written form, the final interpretation of the interview interaction, arises from the researcher's interpretive baggage, or as Scheurich suggests, the "written representation, is largely, though not completely, only a mirror image of the researcher and his or her baggage" (p.249).

The analysis is based on four in depth semi structured one – hour interviews with Layla, based on her childhood, family life, environmental transactions, schooling experiences, and reflections on her own youth constructions. I spoke informally to some of her neighbourhood friends, her mother and brother. I also visited the two schools she attended in the city where I spoke informally to the principals, some of her teachers, fellow students, and governing body members. I was familiar with the Muslim – based primary school she attended through research I did there during 2003 and 2004. These unstructured peripheral interviews provided me key background information to make greater sense of her story as well as a verifying basis for the views she expressed. The three interrelated themes that emerged from the interviews (discussed below) reveal the connection between her youthful identity constructions, articulated by the contingent social spatial dynamics that constitute her life-world.

Cultivating 'out of place' spatial mobility

One year old Layla and her family settled in Rustvale in 1990. Rustvale's development started in 1989 as a model residential area that served the legitimacy logics of the apartheid state. Intended as a coloured residential area, Rustvale was supposed to alleviate the city's housing shortage for this racial group. Housing was used by the apartheid state to garner support among subordinate groups and to help reproduce Cape Town's racial geography. Rustvale currently has about 100 000 residents who live in formal and informal housing, the latter mainly wooden backyard dwellings. There are currently six sub areas in Rustvale and fourteen schools, five of them high

schools. As a relatively new township, Rustvale's racially inscribed origins have been meshing with newer desegregated town planning processes in the post apartheid period. Blacks and coloureds live together in the newer parts of the township, based on a mix of racialised and deracialised associations. The older parts of the township, where Layla lives, remain predominantly coloured.

Rustvale has a reputation as a desolate place far away from public amenities, work, commercial activity and leisure. The residents who initially settled there spoke of having to move to the township out of desperation. Instead of the model town it was intended to be, people felt shunted there and neglected by what they described as a remote and disinterested government. Many lived in backyards in other parts of the Cape Flats and were under pressure to move there. Layla's mom who grew up in a lower middle class area was initially uneasy about living in Rustvale, claiming she "moved into a hole from which I have to get out". Uneasiness about the place characterised the mom's insistence that her "children will not get too comfortable here . . . I must raise them for something better than this place" (Layla's mother). Layla and her siblings were never allowed to explore the township: "we played on the stoep (verandah) or in the house" (Layla). They didn't have many friends in the neighbourhood and they were encouraged to enjoy leisure activities elsewhere in safer places outside Rustvale. Her parents' access to a car meant they frequently left the township over weekends to visit family or leisure places. They were one of a number of families whose relatively comfortable financial circumstances provided them some mobility to leave their home regularly. Layla's parents were supervisors at different retail stores in the city.

The conditions of the township and the nature of people's livelihoods contributed to families like Layla's detached attitude to the township. Living conditions in Rustvale is generally very harsh. Houses are small and cramped, unemployment stands at 55% and single parent families at 45% (Statistics South Africa, 2005). Backyard sub-letting is an important income generating strategy. Backyard dwellers move more frequently in and out of this township compared to those families who live in the front houses. High levels of crime make the area unsafe. The nature of dwelling in this environment can be described as unstable and fluid. People moving in and out of the township, and from one part of the township to another, can cause rapid changes in its demographic make. I have described at length how transient dwelling arrangements are compounded by over-populated living quarters (see Fataar, 2007).

While Layla and her family live in a more stable section of Rustvale they are exposed to people's informal and desperate lifestyles, criminal flows, and violent youth gang activity. Life here is ephemeral and desperate. Residents, though, have constructed viable and productive livelihoods. Layla's family is not involved in the civic, welfare and community policing activities or the myriad social and religious activities organised by the residents that render the township exciting and socially viable. Instead, the family confines its domestic life to the home, interacting only with its closest neighbours and friends.

The family's relative detachment from township life translated into measured deliberativeness in the context of their children's schooling. The family understood that Rustvale's schools, especially the high schools, would not be in a position to provide their children the necessary capital to lay the basis for their aspirant middle class mobility. Perceptions about the schools' worth were therefore important to their school choices. The functional status of the schools is reproduced in light of its social spatial attributes. In the case of Rustvale the schools are an acute example of how environmental pressures can define their status. The schools are characterised by one dimensional identities mired in the social welfare difficulties conferred on them and their students by the township's living conditions (see Fataar, 2007).

Layla and her parents had an acute understanding of the limited utility of these schools in their quest for class mobility. Layla commented acerbically on a question about why she didn't choose one of the high schools in Rustvale thus: "over my dead body, it doesn't look like the children work there. . . suddenly if I were to go to school there I'd have to live with getting Ds and that was going to be ok". She clearly associated the area's schools with low achievement, akin to the way she felt about the ambitions of its people. This is reflected in the discursive distancing she expresses in the following quotation:

The longer I went to the school (in the city) the less there was any relationship with Rustvale. I go home and live in the house. Everything else around me had no bearing on me. . . . My school separates me further, where you're living becomes abstract, it's a convenient living space . . . could be anywhere in the world . . . its like I have neighbours, I know who the people are, but really, it has very little impact on me.

Layla did attend one of Rustvale's primary schools until Grade 4. She knew she would later on have to commute out of the township to another school similar to her older brother. Her views about the township schools and the young people who attended them were reinforced by what she experienced in the school in Rustvale until Grade 4. She complained about her primary school's relaxed attitude to school work, homework and its "lack of interest in

being the best for their kids”. Her family, particularly her mother, whom she describes as a “practical person who does what she has to do”, knew that her choice of schools for her children was an important factor in getting them to move on in life. Layla’s mother prepared them early on for the move to a city school. Layla clearly understood this at an early age. She and her family could be said to have cultivated what can be described as a ‘thin’ connectedness and interaction with their places of living in this township where they still currently stay. Choice of schools outside the township was an expression of this thin connectedness. I offer the view below that their deliberative choice of schools combined with a particular interaction with schooling in city space, which led to Layla developing ‘thick’ loyalties to conceptual space rooted in middle class ambition. In other words, place of living is much less meaningful to her than the need for mobility tied to aspiration. This is a decisive in her formative identification construction. Her comment in the interview that she “can live anywhere, I’m not mad about my place, or any place for that matter, as long as I’m happy and comfortable”, seems to indicate that, instead of being invested in physical place she expressed a desire to be spatially mobile, committed to a fluid and adaptive lifestyle. This investment in conceptual or mental space, I will show below, was cultivated in her daily navigations across the city space and the spatiality of the schools she attended.

Navigating the city spaces and the spatiality of her schools

With her commitment to spatial mobility ensured, Layla’s steering across the city space occurred in her interaction with the two schools she attended in the city. Her family invested money in transport, school fees, extra mural activities and stationary requirements to ensure her access to these schools. Her day started at 05.15. She made a 45 kilometre two-bus journey to school, arriving slightly before 08.00. She became familiar with the passing urban landscape through the bus window, becoming acquainted with the city as a moving space. She commented on feeling invigorated to see people on the move, making their way to their places of work or education. She recollected how her bus journey experiences, walking through the inner city to her school, and daily interactions with people from different backgrounds gave her a larger perspective on life beyond the limitations imposed by the streets around her house in Rustvale. Layla grew to love the exposure that her daily translocal mobility gave her, feeling privileged to encounter the buzz of the city and the ability to imagine a broader perspective of life.

The two schools she attended provided markedly different spatial dynamics which impact fundamentally on her identification constructions. She

encountered each in a strategic and considered manner, learning the cultural rules of each, and adapting to each school's expectations with the primary aim of accessing the educational capital on offer. Family dynamics, especially her mother and the children's conversion to Islam upon her mother marrying her stepfather, played an important role in Layla's adaptations at the primary school she attended from Grade 5 to 7. Her mother saw the need to cultivate an acceptable Islamic identity for her children as part of her religious commitments to her adopted faith. A Muslim school would ostensibly provide Layla a socializational context to acquire the appropriate religious identity. Rahim Primary School (pseudonym) is situated slightly outside the downtown area of the city in a place called District Six. Muslim children come to this school from all over Cape Town.

Young Layla initially felt completely out of place at this school. She struggled with English as medium of instruction, having done her first few years of school in Afrikaans. The entire family switched to English as home language in response to the need for English fluency at the children's new school. The difficulty that accompanied this switch was a small sacrifice for Layla's mother who wanted her children to succeed in their new school. The other challenge that confronted her was, as she puts it, her "lack of Muslimness". Because she didn't know much about the religious requirements, liturgies and prayers, Layla felt that she was under surveillance. She commented that she "felt my difference on my skin, you don't feel like you look like them at all, like you don't belong". She had few friends at the school and struggled to fit into the hegemonic religious cultural environment into which she was supposed to assimilate. The school, in turn, didn't seem to understand the adaptations someone like Layla, with her hybrid religious background, was required to make upon entry into such a school. Here a straightforward religious identity provided the unquestioned cultural backdrop² against which Layla was required to mediate her school navigations.

Layla drew on hard work and scholastic achievement to mediate this culturally alienating social spatial terrain. She understood that the only way she could survive in the school and gain some recognition was to perform optimally in school work. She pursued her quest for achievement with vigour, commitment and hard work, achieving top marks for each of the grades she completed at the school. She commented that the teachers were very proud of her achievements for someone "who came from a convert background" (Layla). She confronted her lack of 'Muslimness' by throwing herself into rote learning

² See Fataar (2005) for a discussion of the discursive functioning of Muslim schools such as the one Layla attended in Cape Town.

the Muslim rituals and prayers, reasoning that her pride and acknowledgment in this environment required not only scholastic achievement but also proficiency in religious symbolism. She successfully, if reluctantly, achieved this proficiency, consistently achieving second place for Islamic Studies. She was, however, disaffected by this experience because of what she regarded as socially meaningless rote learning. Layla's memory of having been something else, from a Christian background, to which she could return if she chose to, meant that educational socializing into another religion never went unquestioned. She was compelled to participate in it as an outflow of the religious spatiality of her school. At the end of her primary education at Rahim Primary School Layla was convinced that such narrow socialization would not suit her desire for social mobility. She wanted a more engaging cultural context with richer reference material in terms of which she could acquire the cultural citizenship necessary for mobility and flexible living.

Her access and entry into her high school of choice was based on an active search for more appropriate social spatial provenance. Having acquired a good measure of experiential knowledgability and street literacy (Robinson 2000) about her personal investments in the spatial attributions of the school environment, Layla played an active role in choice of high school. She knew that her scholastic achievements in primary school made her attractive to many of the city's top high schools. Layla applied to five schools in the city, including one Muslim oriented school to which her primary school encouraged her to apply. After successful interviews at the schools she was accepted by all of them. She then decided to establish for herself what each school offered by speaking to either the principal or a teacher over the telephone, in effect interviewing them to establish how each school could facilitate her aspirations and ambitions.

Layla chose a former Christian mission-based school for girls in the centre of Cape Town's inner city because of what she described as its ordered and stable atmosphere, the amenities and extra mural activities, and the congenial principal. Important in her decision was that the school had a consistent high ranking in the countrywide end of high school matriculation examinations, which was crucial for entry to university study. This information was provided by her mom who annually made a study of the best performing matriculation schools. Layla was of course at the stage of enrolment unaware of the deeper cultural orientations of the school. What she found out in her telephone research was enough to convince her that the school had the necessary spatial attributes to facilitate her mobility. As the last section shows, Layla actively mediated this new cultural terrain on the basis of strategic readings of the

boundaries of acceptability at the school. She enacted appropriate behaviours that enabled her to plot a course and steer across the cultural terrain of this school.

Department cultivation in the space of the school

This section discusses particular aspects of Layla's identification construction, of how she went about mediating the social spatial environment of her high school, and of what she became as a result of her school interactions. I make the argument that she developed an acute understanding of the school's cultural functioning and expectations. She meditated the school's hegemonic ways of being with active dispositional cultivations, wherein her desire for aspirant mobility was decisive.

The missionary origins of Castle High School for Christian Girls (pseudonym) at the turn of the 19th century had disappeared since it became a non denominational public school for white girls during the 1950s. Around the advent of democracy in 1994 schools like these experienced an influx of non white children, which compensated for the dramatic drop in white enrolment. This drop can be attributed to decreasing birth rates among the white population, emigration, and an increase in private school attendance (see Du Toit, 2004). Former white schools such as these depended on the new non white entrants to remain viable and retain the posts of their teachers. The demand for quality schooling by non white students gave these schools a new lease of life into the democratic period. Instead of the Christian environment that Layla expected on arriving at the school, the most visible identity marker she found was what she described as the anomaly of white teaches and predominantly non white girls. Fifty-five per cent of the girls were coloured and 40 per cent black. There was a small number of white girls and girls from expatriate families. All the teachers were white.

Eager for exposure to what people from other cultural or race groups could provide for someone who yearned for broader exposure, Layla eagerly took to her white teachers. She was comfortable with the school's insistence about what she describes as the "fair treatment of all the girls". She felt privileged to be part of a school that emphasised an egalitarian ethos, an example of which is the school's discouragement of displays of affection by parents who drop off their children in the mornings out of consideration for those girls who board in the school's hostel. Layla did observe that the school was silent about matters of race and cultural difference. It never sought to address students on

the basis of these differences, choosing instead to emphasise their common aspirations and ambitions.

Based on Layla's opinions about dealing with conflict, and the principal and teachers' views about diversity management, I concluded that the school didn't possess a conceptual grammar to speak about cultural or racial diversity. Following Foucault (in Ball 1994, p.11), the school's "discourse that speaks us" precludes engaging with such diversity, stripping the girls and teachers of a language to openly name and productively address differences that exist among the students. With a compelling egalitarian discourse that excludes the recognition and naming of race and culture, the students were encouraged to individualise problems that arose in this regard. Relational difficulties that intermittently arise among the students, between students and teachers, and even between parents and the school are designated as individual shortcomings that can be improved by better self control and personal management. In this way difficulties associated with race at the school were deflected and labelled as personal shortcomings. The closest the girls came to race labelling was their humorous use of the derogatory labels that describe different groups. Invoking mirth then is the only acceptable way for the girls to refer to racial and cultural issues.

The school's underlying cultural ethos is informed by its historical background as a school for white girls. Cultural assimilation into this ethos is accomplished on the basis of an assumed egalitarianism mainly practiced by teachers who refuse to acknowledge racial differences as fundamental to the girls' lives and the school community's social relations. This assimilative form of egalitarianism which underpin the cultural ethos of English-based schools has deep roots in Cape liberalism (see Ross 1999). In the contemporary period a discourse of equal treatment easily converts into a kind of benign racelessness ('we don't see race, just children'). This prevents constructive mediation of racial and cultural difference from becoming part of the school's reference world. This attitude precludes the productive incorporation of difference into the school's functional culture.

Layla commented "that racial things among the girls were treated light-heartedly and maybe hides some funny stuff". However, in spite of Layla's daily exposure at the school to people from other racial backgrounds, or perhaps because of the messages about the denial of difference that circulate at the school, she suggested that: "I don't feel marked at all, I survived as a coloured girl, this race thing doesn't mean anything to me". Her dual denial of race on the one hand and self description in essentialist terms as coloured on

the other, is an outflow of this benign racelessness. The contradiction between denial and racial essentialism is the product of a school that refuses to incorporate racial difference productively into its discursive functioning, and thereby prevents difference among the girls from becoming a productive resource that emphasises shifting and multiple identity construction.

While racial and cultural difference are swept under the carpet, leading to obfuscation and deflection of the intermittent racial anxieties which Layla admits the girls experienced, there is a more open cultural script that the school actively promotes among the girls. The girls are assimilated into a specific gendered deportment that marks the school. Layla expressed this process thus: “the one thing the school does very well is to tell us how to behave as proper ladies, . . . its not like they give us etiquette classes or anything, just things like that gets emphasised all the time”. The girls are “constantly reminded not to slouch, dress properly, walk on the left in twos in public, never get in fights, arguing” (Layla). She spoke about taking on this gendered role seamlessly and how she genuflects these bodily deportments outside school, even now when she is at university. Here the cultural messages, packaged in the language of gendered deportment, provide the students an essential and unquestioning backdrop against which they engage with the school and their own youth constructions. The school’s active investments in proper lady like behaviour provided a compelling cultural register for engaging the students. Other markers of identity such as race, class and culture are folded into issues of the students’ bodily deportment. In this way the pre-existing cultural orientation of the school is reproduced in the new social spatial terrain.

Taking on this gendered deportment was important for Layla in securing her the necessary acceptability to accomplish her goals. She suggested that those girls who rebelled against this cultural orientation were treated with suspicion and scepticism, and never allowed to properly fit into the school. They were barred from extra opportunities for development and learning by the teachers. Coming to understand the expectations of the school involved an important process based on strategic readings and staying off the school’s radar screen sufficiently long to figure out what behaviour to adopt. Layla described herself as a “wall flower for quite a long time” when she arrived at school, in reference to the time she took to figure out what qualified as appropriate cultural expectations and behaviour.

She understood that choice of friends was decisive. She had to “stay clear of the cigarette smoking or trouble making groups” and out of detention. Layla

hardly ever came into trouble. She clearly followed a narrower path which endeared her to her teachers, enabling her to access many development opportunities. Layla performed a number of leadership roles during the last three years of her high school career. She served as class representative, as an elected member of the school's Representative Council of Learners, and was chosen as a teacher assistant that required her to run a resource centre and coordinate a group of fellow students who organised social events. Layla thus developed organisational and leadership abilities through her participation in organized activities at school. She credits the school for showing her how to "juggle a full life, juggling priorities, homework, do washing, and still achieve good marks". She valued her teachers' stress on hard work, especially "their emphasis on the student's strengths and not an overemphasis on weaknesses". She flourished in subjects like History, Biology and Languages, and felt supported to work hard at Maths and Science.

What was clear in Layla's mediations of her school environment was her ability to figure out what the discourses of acceptability were at the school, and how she had to insert herself into them in order to maximise opportunities for success. Her translocal investments paid off handsomely. Not only did she achieve excellent school results, she also accessed valuable resources and opportunities that enabled her to acquire the educational and cultural capital necessary for the mobile middle class lifestyles that she coveted. Layla constructed her identity as an achiever on the basis of an acute reading of the requirements and bodily deportments that the spatiality of her school required. Her full immersion as a co-participant and constructor of the school's social environment is aptly captured by the following remark: "in many ways I became the school, owned the school". From an outsider who travelled daily from an impoverished space such as Rustvale township to attend a school in the city with vastly different spatial attributes, Layla and kids like her show remarkable flexibility and knowledgability to adapt to, and come to own culturally novel terrain.

Conclusion

The post apartheid city has thrown up many interesting and unexpected features. People have engaged the city on the basis of a mix of older and newer resources. They have not been victim to the material limitations of the city, nor as in the case of these mobile youth, have they succumbed to its brutal and bifurcated geographies. My research in Rustvale has shown that an apparently desperate and impoverished space comes alive with the hussle and

bussle of people making their livelihoods in informalised ways away from the glare of a weak infrastructural state (see Fataar, 2007). The translocal cultural citizenship displayed by young people in search of educationally based mobility is one of the more acute and fascinating examples of the refusal to be trapped by geography. These young bodies show remarkable agency in developing and nurturing the capacity to find their way across the city.

Translocal transactions are fundamental to their cultural navigations. Access to former white, Indian and coloured schools is a prized possession for families and youth who are invested in class aspiration. It is, however, the basis of their transactions in the novel cultural terrain of their schools that determines whether their investment in spatial mobility is successful. I have argued that young Layla and many like her have acquired experiential literacy that enabled them to figure out exactly what is required for accessing the educational capital of the school. They do this on the basis of strategic readings of the school's limits of acceptability, and adopt appropriate bodily investments. Layla had to negotiate the hybrid materials in her social world, of race, religion, and language, in order to successfully navigate the spatiality of her place of living and the schools she attended. I argued that she developed a thin connectedness to her living space and firmer attachments to becoming spatially mobile, wherein her attendance of the two city schools played a formative role. While the hegemonic culture of the city schools positions incoming students like Layla for assimilation, how they master the school environment indicates active agency by these mobile youth. With their mobility firmly in sight, they turn the assimilative expectations of the schools to their advantage, in effect establishing one viable form of translocal cultural citizenship in the changing topographical environment of the post apartheid city.

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