# #PennySparrow and South African race conflicts online: Evaluating Twitter as a democratic public sphere
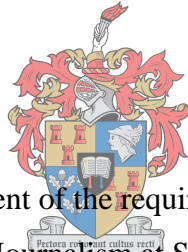
by Bronwen Heather Dyke-Beyer

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Supervisor: Dr. Gabriël Botma

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**Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

**Date: March 2018**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to determine whether or not Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy. It makes use of reactions to the Penny Sparrow incident on Twitter as a case study of conflict around racial identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In order to analyse Tweets about the case the researcher acknowledges and explores the tensions which exist between remnants of apartheid ideology and the hegemony around non- and anti-racialism which is promoted by the democratically elected post-apartheid government. Racism and democracy are fundamentally incompatible in a racially inclusive South Africa and racial conflicts on Twitter reflect the complex interplay between different races in South Africa

The theoretical foundation for the study includes the work of Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Chantal Mouffe, Manuel Castells, Yochai Benkler and Lincoln Dahlberg. By seeking the points at which they intersect, the researcher uses the work of all six theorists to identify five major points which define a networked public sphere; namely access, equality, freedom of expression, relevance to topic and quality of discussion, and adherence to behavioural norms.

The case study uses critical discourse analysis to analyse Tweets using the hashtag #PennySparrow. Of particular interest are the complex power relations at play within online racial conflicts and these are interrogated discursively with a focus on revealing themes and forms of argumentation.

Issues such as the need for a multiplicity of voices, the presence of counter-hegemonic discourse, the reaching of consensus and the potential consequences of racial conflict online were considered. By using the above-mentioned criteria, the viability of Twitter as a networked public sphere is evaluated. Using these findings the researcher concludes that Twitter in South Africa can in some ways, although not definitively, be considered a public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy.

**OPSOMMING**

Hierdie navorsingsprojek beoog om vas te stel of Twitter beskou kan word as 'n netwerk-publieke sfeer wat die potensiaal van deelnemende demokrasie kan verhoog. Dit maak gebruik van reaksies op Twitter op die Penny Sparrow-insident as 'n gevallestudie van konflik rondom rasse-identiteit in post-apartheid Suid-Afrika. Om Twiets oor die voorval te kan ontleed, neem die navorser kennis van en ondersoek die spanning tussen oorblyfsels van apartheid-ideologie en die hegemonie rondom nie- en anti-rassigheid wat deur die demokraties-verkose post-apartheid-regering bevorder word. Rassisme en demokrasie is fundamenteel onversoenbaar in 'n inklusiewe veelrassige Suid-Afrika en rasse-konflik op Twitter reflekteer die komplekse interaksie tussen verskillende rasse in Suid-Afrika.

Die teoretiese basis van die studie sluit in die werk van Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Chantal Mouffe, Manuel Castells, Yochai Benkler en Lincoln Dahlberg. Deur te soek na punte waar hulle by mekaar aansluit, kon die navorsers die werk van al ses teoretici gebruik om vyf hoof-kenmerke van 'n netwerk-publieke sfeer te identifiseer, naamlik toegang, gelykheid, vryheid van spraak, relevansie tot die onderwerp en die gehalte van die bespreking, en gehoorsaamheid aan norme van behoorlike optrede.

Die gevallestudie maak gebruik van kritiese diskoersanalise om Twiets met die hutsmerk PennySparrow te ontleed. Van spesifieke belang is die komplekse magsverhoudings wat ter sprake is by rasse-konflik aanlyn en dit word diskursief ontleed deur te fokus op veelseggende temas en vorms van argumentasie.

Kwessies soos die behoefte aan veelstemmigheid, die aanwesigheid van teen-hegemoniese diskoerse, die bereiking van konsensus en die moontlike gevolge van rasse-konflik word oorweeg. In die proses word die potensiaal van Twitter as 'n netwerk- publieke sfeer aan die hand van bogenoemde kriteria oorweeg. Die bevindings dui aan dat Twitter in Suid-Afrika nog nie aan al die vereistes van 'n netwerk- publieke sfeer voldoen nie.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Background of study

This study is the result of the researcher's interest in the role played by social media in South African society and the impact of the medium in either furthering or undermining democracy. South Africa's hard-won democracy is only 23 years old and race relations remain a dominant theme in all facets of society. As fledgling journalists we are taught that democracy is strengthened by freedom of expression and free speech and that these freedoms must be protected.

In following the traditional press coverage and conversations within and extending beyond my own social network, I began to wonder about whether the frequent coverage of incidents of racism in the media and their myriad consequences were promoting or hindering the development of a young democracy. This led to other questions, such as are there any conditions in which free speech should be regulated and should government be able to regulate what individuals are able to say beyond the limitations which already exist in the Constitution of 1996?

Traditional media in South Africa are subject to more stringent internal and external regulations than social media and this has proved problematic in terms of ensuring that user-generated content is in line with the law. A newspaper, for example, will make use of editorial guidelines in order to ensure that the content that is published does not violate the law or accepted journalistic ethics. When an individual publishes content on social media, there is no such regulatory process. Unregulated content posted by South Africans on social media therefore provides unfiltered insight into public perception.

Social media also facilitate public mass discussion which provides scholars with a rich source of data. From a theoretical position the researcher was interested in the subversive possibilities offered by social media. Having taken an interest in public sphere theory and its potential applicability to what Castells calls the network society, the researcher began formulate a research problem, which incorporated these interests and focused on a specific social media platform; Twitter (2009:4).

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Deliberative democracy requires the type of consensus which is associated with functional public spheres. Discussions and debates about important democratic issues can be found on Twitter, but can Twitter constitute a public sphere? Given that much Twitter content is not subject to immediate regulation, users are able to engage freely with subjects such as racism.  What, then, are the consequences for democracy when the topics under discussion are controversial, emotive or the cause of conflict?

In South Africa, discussion and debate about race remain prevalent despite the introduction of democracy and a constitution which provides protections against the types of discrimination which characterised apartheid. Online discussions do not, however, necessarily reflect a nation in which differences are celebrated and respected.

Perceived racist comments made  by a number of South African individuals, such as Penny Sparrow, Judge Mabel Jansen, Vicky Momberg, Ntokozo Qwabe, Matthew Theunissen and Pieter Hattingh became contentious topics of public debate during 2016 (Lujabe, 2017). These incidents have had consequences ranging from concerns about the precarious state of the so-called rainbow nation to potential legal reforms relating to free speech.

For the researcher these racial conflicts and consequent national discussions provide a suitable case to utilise for an exploration of whether Twitter contributes to democracy by facilitating deliberation in a space which meets the criteria associated with a public sphere.

## 1.1.1 Selected incidents in brief

Social media are still relatively new to many people and its uses are varied. These platforms, by their very nature, facilitate discussion and the sharing of information. These include political discussions.  In South Africa, citizens have various perceptions of democracy and apartheid and these perceptions still play a dominant role in shaping the discourse in which they participate. The departure point for this study is that social media have forced people to broaden the scope of their interactions. Individuals may in their everyday lives choose to socialise with people of only certain races, sexual orientations, or religions but social media potentially facilitates wider interaction.

This new way of interacting has revealed how entrenched racism and other forms of prejudice are in South African society. Whereas one could talk about the "Other" openly at private social gatherings, social media creates an illusion of being a self-contained world for users and their contacts. Often the intended audience for social media posts is very different to where and how the content eventually proliferates.

One could speculate that most of the individuals responsible for racist posts possibly did not think that anyone who did not share their prejudice would ever see these posts or assumed that it was acceptable to say things that range from distasteful prejudice to hate speech.

### i.    Penny Sparrow: The post that started it all

Just days after the start of 2016, a post by KwaZulu-Natal estate Agent Penny Sparrow caused an outcry on social media. In the post, Sparrow was lamenting the state of beaches after New Year's Day and compared black people to monkeys.

**Penny Sparrow**
These monkeys that are allowed to be released on New years Eve And new years day on to public beaches towns etc obviously have no education what so ever so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others. I'm sorry to say I was amongst the revellers and all I saw were black on black skins what a shame. I do know some wonderful thoughtful black people. This lot of monkeys just don't want to even try. But think they can voice opinions about statute and get their way dear oh dear . from now I. Shall address the blacks of south Africa as monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same pick  drop and litter.😊
Sat at 1:30 PM  ·  Like  ·  👍 15

Sparrow was shocked when confronted by the anger of thousands of South Africans stating afterwards that:

> Every year it is the same story; it's their [black people] day and we don't go in
> the beach, we don't interfere, we let it be. We all know it and there is nothing
> wrong. We stay out of the way and stay at home. I am sorry that it has taken
> such a viral turn, but it was just a statement of how it was. I made the mistake of

comparing them [black people] with monkeys. Monkeys are cute and they're naughty, but they [black people] don't see it that way, but I do because I love animals. I wasn't being nasty or rude or horrible, but it's just that they [black people] make a mess. It is just how they are. (Wicks, 2016a)

As a result of her post, the African National Congress (ANC) filed criminal charges against her for hate speech (Wicks, 2017). The Equality Court ruled that a R150 000 fine be paid and Sparrow also paid R5 000 after being found guilty of *crimen injuria* (Wicks, 2017). The post gained such broad media coverage and notoriety that Sparrow's name became known across South Africa and synonymous with racism. The post also sparked widespread debate over what hate speech is and highlighted the racial chasm which still exists in South African society.

### ii.     What happened next?

Whilst this study will focus on Penny Sparrow, it is informative to provide other examples which illustrate the prevalence of this type of behaviour online.

In 2016 real estate agent Vicki Momberg was recorded verbally abusing a Johannesburg police officer after an alleged smash and grab. According to evidence in her *crimen injuria* case she used the k word more than 40 times (Jordaan, 2017; Mabuza, 2017; ANA, 2016). She is also quoted as having said: "One k****r is bad enough. This happens all the time, all the time. The k*****s here in Johannnesburg are terrible, I'm so sick of it" (*Citizen* reporter, 2016a). The video which was taken by a fellow police officer went viral on social media, giving Momberg her proverbial 15 minutes in the media spotlight.

Also in 2016 Oxford University Rhodes Scholar Ntokozo Qwabe made the headlines when he left a comment on a restaurant bill stating that he would tip the waitress when (she) gives back the land (Payton, 2016). The white waitress in question then received thousands of Rands in donations from South Africans who were incensed by the comments.

Later in 2016 activist journalist Gillian Schutte made public a number of messages sent to her on Facebook by high court judge Mabel Jansen. Schutte claimed that she had released the Mabel Jansen messages in defence of Qwabe and to question the public's response to black on white racism (Jordaan, 2016).  In her messages Jansen says "In their culture a woman is there to pleasure them. Period. It is seen as an absolute right and a woman's consent is not required" and "I still have to meet a black girl who was not raped at about 12. I am dead serious", amongst other disturbing things reducing all black men to sexual predators (*BD Live*, 2016). Jansen argued that the conversation was private but the damage to her public image was already done.

In the same year Matthew Theunissen took to Facebook to vent about that state of various sporting codes in South Africa following then minister of sport Fikile Mbalula's moratorium on sporting events stemming from a lack of transformation.
Theunissen posted "So no more sporting events for South Africa.. (sic) I've never been more proud to say that our government are a bunch of K*****S..(sic) yes I said it so go f**k yourselves you black f*****g c***s" (Feltham, 2016). Theunissen later penned an apology and was given community service as a result of a settlement brokered by the South African Human Rights Commission (South African Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Pieter Hattingh, now former chief executive officer of Hattech, was criticised when his post responding to farm murders was circulated on social media. The post described black people as "voken k*****s" (sic) and barbarians (Wicks, 2016b). He denied being racist (*Citizen* reporter, 2016b).

### iii.    Legal ramifications

By the time Hattingh made his comments, exposing racists on social media had become firmly entrenched practice in South Africa. This prompted the South African government to announce in March 2017 that:

> Government condemns the resurgence of racist posts on Twitter and Facebook which deliberately undermine the gains made towards social cohesion, nation building and strengthening democracy. Government is of the view that this

malicious and offensive content erodes the values of our Constitution and
incites social tensions in communities. (South African Government, 2017a)

Following in the wake of these racist scandals on social media, a number of issues
related to hate speech, social media and freedom of expression featured prominently in
civic society, the media and government communications. It was apparent that many
people were recognising the problem of hate speech and racial conflict online but were
not sure how to begin to tackle such a complex issue.

Over the 2015/2016 period the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)
reported that 505 out of 749 equality-related complaints were based on racial
discrimination and the use of racial epithets (South African Human Rights Commission,
2017). These may be only the tip of the proverbial iceberg as most incidents arguably go
unreported.

The draft National Action Plan to combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia
and Related Intolerance (2016 – 2021), was published for public comment in February
2016 and as of August 2017 is in the final stages of drafting.

The Plan identifies the role that social media can play in spreading hate; asserting that
"the unprecedented, rapid development of new communication and information
technologies, such as the Internet and social media, has enabled wider dissemination of
racist and xenophobic content that has the potential to incite racial hatred and violence"
(Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2016a: 40).

The Draft Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill of 2016
proposes the criminalisation of any distribution of hate speech. The greatest concern
that freedom of speech proponents share surrounds how exactly hate speech is defined
and what kind of censorship power this would provide government. The Bill defines
hate speech as anything which advocates hate or is threatening, abusive or insulting
towards any other person or group of people (Department of Justice and Constitutional
Development, 2016b: 7).  This is an amorphous description, which leaves it open to a
number of interpretations.

 The consequences of legal restrictions on what can and can't be posted online are
broad. If certain types of content are deemed to be unlawful, Twitter (and other social

media) could hypothetically be held responsible for hosting hate speech and Twitter users could be held liable for sharing hate speech.

The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) came out strongly against censorship, asserting that "freedom of expression is indispensable to the functioning of a democracy and should not be restricted" (Freedom of Expression Institute, 2016: 1). The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation recognised the dual-nature of social media stating that "while the Foundation is concerned over social media being used by racists to spew hatred, it is encouraged that ordinary people have used online platforms to challenge these views and promote non-racialism" (Balton, 2017).

These attempts to criminalise racism cannot address the strongly-held beliefs that individuals hold with regard to race. They can only provide sanctions when one is caught in the act. This arguably limits the potential for open dialogue because many individuals will not risk fines or imprisonment to explain their specific positions and beliefs.

Incidents of racial conflict online call into question the unity and tolerance associated with the rainbow nation metaphor. Conversations about race can be painful and deeply troubling for many South Africans who are grappling with their own identities in a changing world. According to Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, "accusations of racism, denials and counter-accusations are often precipitated by efforts to eradicate the legacy of racism and inequality that stubbornly persists" (2011: 22).

The consequences of these online race conflicts appear in part to be a perpetuation of troubled race relations offset somewhat by governmental and civic counter-responses. The severity of these conflicts has, as discussed above, resulted in legislative attempts to stop racism from being voiced. They have however also given rise to growing anti-racism movements which seek to unite South Africans in speaking out against racism.

## 1.2 Contribution to the field of study

Studies relating to social media use in a specifically Southern African context do not yet create a substantial body of work. There is a fair amount of international academic output which seeks to evaluate whether social media fulfils the characteristics of a public sphere (Dahlberg, 2007; Fuchs, 2014; Kreide, 2016; Rasmussen, 2014). The

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incidents mentioned in this study are recent enough to not yet have gained widespread academic attention.

This type of study is important because social media and other online communications platforms are playing an increasingly prominent role in terms of governance and public opinion formation. It is therefore essential that scholars evaluate what type of role social media is going to play as more and more people go online and start sharing their views.

## 1.3 Key concepts

### 1.3.1 Public sphere

Public sphere theory originated with Frankfurt School luminary Jürgen Habermas. The Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory was established in 1923 by a group of German philosophers who sought to interrogate capitalism and its underlying ideologies (Strinati, 2004: 47). Theoretically it had its roots in Marxism although it sought to understand the role of culture in imposing modern capitalism rather than focusing solely on economics (Strinati, 2004: 49).

The Frankfurt School was most commonly associated with Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, but Habermas' contributions are considered foundational by many (Strinati, 2004; Raulet, 2008).

The public sphere concept was first brought forward in Habermas' book *Structural transformation of the public sphere: An investigation of a category of bourgeois society* in 1962, in which Habermas asserts that the public sphere is the discursive site where individuals come together as a public (1991: 27). The bourgeois public sphere was first constituted in coffee houses where the 18th century German bourgeoisie were able to deliberate and debate about issues concerning commodity exchange and social labour (Habermas, 1991: 27).

Habermas posited that the bourgeois public sphere represented a turning point in terms of the power relations between the state and the people (Habermas, 1991: 27). Most pertinent to this thesis is his assertion that "the public sphere in the political realm

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evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society" (1991: 30-31).

Although the technologically-driven network society is worlds away from the 18th century bourgeois public sphere, public sphere theory is still relevant today. If one uses McQuail's simplified definition of the public sphere as "the 'conceptual space' that exists in a society outside the immediate circle of private life and the walls of enclosed institutions and organisations pursuing their own (albeit sometimes public) goals", one can certainly see how this could describe how we use social media and the Internet in 2017 (2010: 569).

Howard defines the contemporary public sphere as a "space – increasingly digitally mediated spaces – in which people discuss cultural values, compose solutions to shared problems, and implement collective projects" (2011: 40).  Castells emphasises the conflict which lies at the centre of this digitally mediated space:

> Throughout history communication and information have been fundamental sources of power and counter-power, of domination and social change. This is because the fundamental battle being fought in society is the battle over the minds of the people. (2007:238)

For the purposes of this study we will reflect on public sphere theory from a purely Habermasian context only briefly, focusing rather on conceptions of the public sphere as they apply to the network society. The struggle for representation in such a highly contested space will later form part of the exploration into how Twitter can be viewed as a public sphere and what role it plays in entrenching or eroding democracy in a South African context.

## 1.3.2 Network society

The network society is a term coined by Manuel Castells and Jan van Dijk and it describes the evolution of the information based economy (where traditional mass media were ubiquitous) into one which is networked based (Castells 2002, Van Dijk 2012). An information society can be contrasted with previous agrarian or industrial societies in that it is based on the sharing of data – information – rather than capital or labour (Howard, 2011:19).

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The network society is best understood as an updated version of the information society as it exists in a contemporary setting and is comprised of social and media networks (Van Dijk, 2012a: 24). It functions at individual, group and societal levels which gave rise to the idea of the network society being both local and global (*glocal*) in nature and scope (Van Dijk, 2012a: 43).

This *glocalisation* allows networks to connect across space and time - negating the previous constraints by which the pre-modern era was defined. Castells explains that: "The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time" (2007: 246). These horizontal networks provide the setting for the evaluation which will take place throughout this study.

### 1.3.3 Networked public sphere

In his seminal work of 2006, *The wealth of networks*, Yochai Benkler reimagines the public sphere in a network-based society. The networked public sphere is one in which it is theoretically possible for any person to participate in knowledge production on an equal playing field. It has the potential to revolutionise who can communicate on a global scale, by in many instances bypassing the limitations which existed on traditional pre-Internet media platforms.

In this utopian public sphere, Benkler asserts that:

> The easy possibility of communicating effectively into the public sphere allows individuals to reorient themselves from passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation. The way we listen to what we hear changes because of this; as does, perhaps most fundamentally, the way we observe and process daily events in our lives. (2006: 213)

Benkler does however acknowledge that there are various mitigating issues which potentially render this theory moot. We will examine how this affects the democratising potential of Twitter in South Africa in greater detail in Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6.

For our purposes we will work primarily from the assertion that the networked public sphere allows a large number of individuals to become active participants in public

discourse and politics rather than passive recipients of mediated messages (Benkler, 2006: 219 – 220).

### 1.3.4 Social media and Twitter

Social media is an umbrella terms which describes various forms of networked digital media. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube are simultaneously a form of interpersonal communication and a tool for communicating with wider or mass audiences (Leaning, 2009: 45). Castells calls it mass self-communication (2009: 4).

In this research the term social media is used when making generalisations which are applicable to Twitter and other forms of social media. Although the case study makes use of Twitter specifically, there are theoretical and practical commonalities between the previously mentioned types of social media which warrant the use of both terms.

One of the more interesting aspects of social media use is the perception by some that posting on social media is just like talking to a group of friends behind closed doors. This is clearly not the case as evidenced by the incidents mentioned previously. Marwick and Boyd contend that although we know that social media reach is theoretically limitless, users nonetheless behave as if it were confined (2010:115). In this setting, user-generated content (in the form of posts, images and videos) allows users to become active participants in the news-generation process (Marwick & Boyd, 2010: 130; Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton, 2012: 22).

Twitter is a social media platform on which information is shared through posts which are currently limited to 140 characters. Twitter uses the hashtag as a way to link posts topically. In this sense strangers or online connections are able to join in larger discussions using a hashtag, which a number of users will already be making use of.

Topics can therefore be grouped and searched by hashtag and keyword, as I will demonstrate in my analysis of #PennySparrow, so that a person from for example India could be reading content from a South African and potentially sharing it or accepting it as fact (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013:140).

This study will explore the tension between optimistic conceptions of social media and Twitter specifically as utopian virtual public spheres which encourage open and

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collaborative networking and the negative view which sees seemingly endless racial conflicts that leave no possibility of consensus (Loader & Mercea, 2011: 757).

### 1.3.5 Hegemony and counter-hegemony

Hegemony describes the cultural and ideological process of creating and maintaining a belief in a certain set of facts touted by a ruling class which is then accepted and internalised by a subordinate class (Strinati, 2004:153). During colonial rule hegemony was created by coercing people into believing the natural order of things was set by the coloniser. It complements physical coercion by creating false beliefs, which then make subordinate groups pliant and easily controllable.

It is hegemony which has allowed the Western male patriarchy to secure its perpetuation in the minds of the global populace for centuries. Strinati posits that "it is achieved by the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (2004:153). It is a dynamic process which works through ideology and hegemonic ideology is produced and distributed through social institutions such as the media – both traditional and new (Fourie, 2007:280).

Dahlberg asserts that any "consensus over the boundaries of discourse, and any consensus resulting from deliberations within these boundaries, is always intertwined with asymmetrical power relations and a struggle for domination (2007: 835). Castells echoes this sentiment, stating that "throughout history communication and information have been fundamental sources of power and counter-power, of domination and social change. This is because the fundamental battle being fought in society is the battle over the minds of the people" (2007:238).

This is vital when we consider how race conflicts are created on social media and where the power in that discourse is situated. Counter-hegemony is the means by which entrenched beliefs are challenged.

In this study we will explore the tensions which exist between remnants of apartheid ideology as the historical hegemonic narrative and the contemporary hegemony which is perpetuated by the post-apartheid government of national unity. The researcher will

interrogate how racial conflicts on Twitter reflect the complex interplay between different races in South Africa.

 Dahlberg describes counter-discourse as providing a safe space for marginalised voices to challenge dominant discourses (2007: 837). It is "constituted by the circulation, deliberation and articulation of issues, identities, positions, etc., which have been excluded from, and thus stand in opposition to, dominant discourses" (Dahlberg 2007: 837).  In contemporary South Africa it can be very difficult to distinguish marginalised voices from dominant voices, when dissecting race conflict without pre-supposing which race will occupy which position. This complex interplay between historical and contemporary dominance will be further explored in Chapter 2.

**1.3.6 Power**

McQuail defines power as "a term open to many interpretations, but the basic idea is a reference to the capacity to gain the compliance of another, even against their will (as with police or military power)" (2010: 566). Power pervades every facet of social relations (Barker & Jane, 2016: 12). Barker and Jane assert that power is:

> Not simply the glue that holds the social together, or the coercive force which subordinates one set of people to another, though it certainly may involve these things. It is also understood in terms of the processes that generate and enable any form of social action, relationship or order. In this sense, power while certainly constraining, is also enabling. (2016:12)

This study is located within the parameters of cultural studies, which centralises the ways in which power and culture intersect (Barker & Jane, 2016: 7). Hegemony is enacted through various forms of power and power is therefore essential in any examination of hegemonic practices (Barker & Jane, 2016: 79). Thompson outlines four forms of power: economic power, political power, coercive power and symbolic power (1995: 12-18). Symbolic power is of particular interest because it is exercised through the production and transmission of symbolic forms (Thompson, 1995: 17).

According to Houtsonen and Antikainen, "the efficacy of symbolic power depends on social agents' submission on the basis of a predisposition to recognize it as a legitimate representation of reality" (2008:3).  Symbolic power is transmitted through ideology via the process of interpellation. Interpellation can be simplified as a process in which someone tells someone something, and the person who is receiving the information not only accepts that it is true but perceives it as being part of the natural order of things.

Althusser contends that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, ensures their subjection to the Subject and ultimately ensures that subjects continue to labour and consume just as intended by the capitalist hegemonic Subjects (Althusser, 2004: 701). According to Barker and Jane, "Subjects are the effects of discourse because subjectivity is constituted by the positions which discourse obliges us to take up (2016: 73).

Colonialism, for example, was enforced through economic, political and coercive power but symbolic power was used to entrench the belief that the system was natural and right. The case study in Chapter 5 will unpack the use of symbolic power further.

### 1.3.7 Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is a key concept linked to the efficacy of the public sphere. It can be described as a place where citizens debate issues in a robust manner, where different opinions are heard and where ultimately a consensus on what constitutes public opinion is reached (Kreide, 2016: 477).

Kreide lists the essential traits of a platform for deliberative democracy as "free access, no thematic restrictions, equality among participants and no limits on the number of participants" (2016: 481).  We will assess Twitter in terms of these criteria further on in this study.

Strandberg and Berg identify four markers which characterise deliberative democracy including rationality, reciprocity, relevance to the debate's topic and the level of politeness and respect exhibited by participants (2013:136). We will also employ these as criteria by which to critique social media in the Penny Sparrow context. In Chapter 3,

counter-views such as Mouffe's agonistic public sphere will be introduced as a counter-argument to the notion that a public sphere should be a reasoned, dispassionate space.

### 1.3.8 Racism, othering and non-racialism

For the purposes of this thesis it is important to define racism. Van Dijk provides a concise holistic definition:

> Contemporary racism is a complex societal system in which peoples of European origin dominate peoples of other origins, especially in Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. This relation of dominance may take many forms of economic, social, cultural and/or political hegemony, legitimated in terms of, usually negatively valued, different characteristics ascribed to the dominated people(s) (1991:24).

According to Delgado and Stefancic race is a social construction rather than a biological reality (2001: 17). Racial and ethnic identies are never static, but rather continuously revised and negotiated (Rattansi, 2007:79). According to Barker and Jane, "races do not exist outside of representation but are formed in and by it in a process of social and political struggle" (2016: 28).

For Suttner, "race is a social construct which has had and continues to have significant effects on people's lives. It has been a primary way of framing social inequalities between people categorised under 'race'-based terms" (2012: 23). In Chapter 2, we will expand on how race as a construct plays a pivotal role in South Africa today, and how the effects of these categorisations are visible in online racial conflicts.

Hall defines subjectivity as "social and personal being that exists in negotiation with broad cultural definitions and our own ideals" (2004: 134). It is the combination of how an individual's idea of self is constituted not only through their own eyes, but society's too (Hall, 2004:134). He suggests that "we may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and a subjectivity that is comprised of all of those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of our selves" (Hall, 2004:134).

According to Rattansi, identities usually imply and rely on the recognition of difference (2007:115).  Therefore, "drawing boundaries around characteristics of 'sameness', and

thus belonging, necessarily involves practices of exclusion and the creation of identities and non-belonging for others" (Rattansi, 2007:115).

Non-racialism, according to Haffajee, is a social, political and economic construct (2015: 90). Haffajee explains that her "understanding of non-racialism is that it is the long, hard road race through race consciousness to non-racial consciousness where (we) begin to understand each other as fellow human beings" (2015: 90). It is considered the antidote to racism and othering and is enshrined within the South African Constitution. According to Suttner, non-racialism is "linked to notions of unity, freedom and nationalism, the nation-to-be or the nation-that-may-be, in the case of South Africa" (2012: 23).

When viewing race conflicts online it is important to remain aware of how an insult can trigger the awareness of centuries of subjugation as well as personal lived experiences. The corollary is also true, insults and racial jibes can also remind those who used to be considered superior that this is no longer the case. Each interaction is potentially an ideological struggle over how race is perceived and constructed, an idea which will be explored throughout this study. The desire to construct and define one's own identity exists across races as South Africans grapple with who they are in a post-apartheid democracy.

## 1.4 Focus

This study explores the theory of deliberative democracy as it applies to more recent conceptions of what constitutes a public sphere. The study is located in critical theory and primarily takes a cultural studies approach, as evidenced in the concepts outlined in the overview of key concepts.

The study will use the Penny Sparrow incident as a case study. It will look broadly at the incident and the factors that came together to create it and specifically at the use of #PennySparrow on Twitter. Twitter was selected because of the brevity of its messaging and the ability to search an entire topic through the use of a hashtag. In this case #PennySparrow was selected as it was specific enough to constitute a relevant case study. As of 15 May 2017, an initial search for #Penny Sparrow yielded more than 1000 pages worth of results, which provides a workable but significant amount of data to analyse.

The analysis will seek to understand the various power dynamics at play in online race conflict. The findings will allow the researcher to consider the broader question of whether Twitter constitutes a public sphere characterised by deliberative democracy.

The study will specifically examine how racial conflict is discursively enacted on Twitter in the South African context. This includes the use of memes, the rise of Black Twitter and other aspects of defiant social media use. The democracy-building potential of these subversive uses of social media will create a counterpoint to the more negative aspects of race conflicts online.

## 1.5 Research questions

Flowing from the preceding discussion we can formulate the research questions which will underpin this study. The overall question is whether or not Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy? This will be explored by evaluating South African race conflicts online, and specifically the case of Penny Sparrow on Twitter.

The specific research questions are:

- Does Twitter encourage a multiplicity of voices?
- Do contemporary South African racial conflicts on Twitter echo historical racial conflicts?
- Is it possible for subversive counter-hegemonic discourse to take place in a dominant hegemonic context on Twitter??
- Is any form of consensus reached on Twitter when racial conflicts occur?
- Does Twitter meet the criteria for a functional networked public sphere?

## 1.6 Methodology

This qualitative case study employs critical discourse analysis as its principal method. Qualitative research can be broadly defined as being philosophically interpretivist in as far as it explores how the social world is produced and constituted (Mason, 2002: 3). This understanding can be derived from focusing on social meanings, interpretations, discourses, practices, process and constructions (Mason, 2002: 3).

Mouton contends that qualitative research is used when analysing properties, values, needs or characteristics which underpin messages (Mouton, 2006: 88). The objectives are "to explore areas where limited or no prior information exists and/or to describe behaviours, themes, trends, attitudes, needs or relations" (Mouton, 2006:88).

Qualitative research seeks to produce holistic and fully contextualised analysis from data which is nuanced and thorough (Mason, 2002: 3). Starman asserts that qualitative research makes use of an interpretative paradigm, which "emphasizes subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual" (2013:30).

According to Wimmer and Dominick, "case studies are conducted when a researcher needs to understand or explain a phenomenon" (2011: 141). Yin expands on this definition, contending that a case study is an empirical inquiry which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not immediately evident (1984: 13).

Case studies are particularly useful for obtaining large amounts of information with a substantial amount of detail (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:140). The motivation for using a case study is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

This thesis operates from a critical paradigm and makes use of critical discourse analysis. The critical approach focuses on power relations within society, which complements the theoretical framework.

Discourse analysis is contextual rather than merely textual and it seeks to explain how language is used socially and how we interpret what is said by others (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011: 417). By focusing on the social practice aspect of discourse, critical discourse analysis acknowledges the central role that historical context plays and that social practices provide the means through which existing social relations are reproduced or contested (Janks, 1997:329).

## 1.7 Structure of research

This thesis will consist of six chapters.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter was used to elaborate on how the research problem was selected and how the thesis will add to the field of study. The literature review focused on seven concepts or terms which will feature prominently throughout the research. These concepts are briefly delineated in order to contextualise the thesis and to ensure that researcher's frame of reference is understood before proceeding. The overall theoretical framework and proposed methodology are also concisely covered.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 explores selected research from within the general field, which assists in locating this research within the broader body of existing literature. Collectively these provide invaluable theoretical and methodological insights. The literature review covers the themes of race trouble, racism and social media, deliberative democracy and social media, political discussions on social media, the rise of the hashtag, Black Twitter, the effect of racism on online news site comment sections and the digital divide.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

Chapter 3 focuses on theories which relate to the public sphere, deliberative democracy and the network society. It includes Jürgen Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, Nancy Fraser's subaltern counterpublics, Chantal Mouffe's agonistic approach, Manuel Castell's network society, Yochai Benkler's networked information society and Lincoln Dahlberg's fragmented public sphere. The researcher has thereafter created a networked public sphere framework based on the aforementioned theories which will be utilised in Chapter 5's case study.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

Chapter 4 elaborates on qualitative research, case studies and critical discourse analysis in order to describe why the research method and design were selected and how they will be applied in Chapter 5. It will also address how the specific case study was chosen and potential limitations associated with the chosen methodology.

**Chapter 5: The case study**

In Chapter 5  the theoretical framework and research methodology are applied in order to analyse the selected #PennySparrow Tweets. The researcher identifies themes present within the case study and uses critical discourse analysis to reveal the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies and highly nuanced nature of South African racial conflict.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Chapter 6 includes reflections on the research process and a review of the preceding chapters. The research questions are then addressed and a conclusion regarding the public sphere status of Twitter is reached. The research concludes with suggestions for future research.

**1.8 Summary**

This Chapter provides an entry point into the research which is presented in this thesis. It includes the motivation for the study as well as contextual information which locates the research within specific theoretical and methodological frameworks. Key concepts which feature throughout the thesis are introduced and briefly defined. The primary research question is introduced and the additional research questions are then outlined. The research seeks to determine whether or not Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

**2.1. Introduction**

Social media, including Twitter, are a relatively new phenomenon dating back to the first years of the twenty-first century. As such the existing literature is not as comprehensive as that surrounding traditional media types.

The researcher was not able to find any studies which were an exact fit for this study and therefore opted to review studies relating to aspects of the research topic, which when combined could create a broader view of some of the work that has been done.

This literature review therefore covers the themes of race trouble, racism and social media, deliberative democracy and social media, political discussions on social media, the rise of the hashtag, Black Twitter, the effect of racism on online news site comment sections and the digital divide. These will have overlaps with each other but each offers important insights into the field of study.

**2.2 Emerging themes**

**2.2.1 Race trouble**

In Chapter 1's introduction to key concepts, the researcher briefly introduced racism, othering and non-racialism. It was established that race is a social rather than biological construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001: 17).  Race is therefore:

> Not objective, inherent, or fixed, (they) correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient…and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behaviour. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 7-8)

Barker and Jane suggest that racial identities are "contingent and unstable cultural creations… they are not universal or existent 'things'" (2016:296).

To assert that race is socially constructed with no biological basis is extremely disruptive to historical hegemonic narratives, which used racism to justify slavery, colonialism and apartheid. In South Africa, historical social relations have

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predominantly been based on the legitimacy of racism. Some individuals have been interpellated by this ideology for generations. It is very difficult to simply cast such beliefs aside post-1994. Racial conflict in South Africa therefore remains widespread despite the legal abolition of the racially oppressive system of governance known as apartheid.

In *Race Trouble*, Durrheim, Mtose and Brown ruminate on race, identity and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. They define race trouble as a "social psychological condition that emerges when the history of racism infiltrates the present to unsettle social order, arouse conflict of perspectives and create situations that are individually and collectively troubling" (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 27).

Post-apartheid interactions continue to be troubling because "they take place in a context where the memory of racism is still fresh and where the legacy of apartheid is visible in concrete form in the form of persistent racial inequality and segregation" (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 22).

They assert that people feel troubled by race in the sense that they feel attacked, threatened and undermined, which in turn leads to responses characterised by irritation, anger and hostility (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 27).

They provide a number of examples of white racist sentiment from the 1970s, which are salient (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 7). These sentiments include that black people should not complain about being called k\*\*firs, that black people speak absolute nonsense, that black people are ugly, that Africans[1] are barbarians and that Africans are too lazy and ignorant to provide for themselves (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 7).

Durrheim, Mtose and Brown claim that white people are sometimes haunted by their past and therefore deny any complicity through statements such as "let bygones be bygones", "stop playing the race card" and "forget about the past and focus on the future" (2011: 47). The problematic nature of this way of thinking is very clear when one reviews the #PennySparrow Tweets, because it incites further racial conflict.

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[1] In this context black and African are used interchangeably.

When told to let go of the past, black people may find themselves conflicted as to how to articulate certain opinions or perspectives. Durrheim, Mtose and Brown explain this as:

> In the post-apartheid context, black people confront many such situations that are interpretable in terms of racism. On the one hand, there is an imperative on black people not to be overly sensitive or paranoid and yet, on the other, there is an imperative to be hypervigilant to avoid being a victim of racism. This leads to an exhausting, conflicted way of engaging with the world that has no equivalent in the lives of white people. (2011: 43)

This disconnect is arguably behind much race conflict in South Africa.  A hypothetical example of how this creates or worsens racial conflict could take the form of a black person expressing that they feel that white people are still benefitting from apartheid. In response a white person may react negatively stating that the past does not matter because the government is black and affirmative action makes it impossible for white people to access the job market as they did during apartheid.

This could lead to a situation in which, "accusations of racism are responded to with denials and counter-accusations, often accompanied with emotional outbursts" (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 58). Race trouble is not characterised by binaries or clear-cut protagonists, instead it reflects the liminal space in which South Africa finds itself where old and new forms of hegemony intersect in complicated and confusing ways.

The transition from apartheid minority white government to democratic majority black government has not automatically created a united society, defined by non-racialism. Racism remains pervasive, as evidenced in Chapter 1's reflection on recent race conflicts.

### 2.2.2 What if there were no whites in South Africa?

In *What if there were no whites in South Africa*?, Ferial Haffajee explores perceptions of race relations in post-apartheid South Africa. Haffajee asserts that "when black fury meets white denial, you have the combustible and fundamentally changed race relations we live in today" (2015: 116). This will become evident in Chapter 5's case study.

The book elucidates on a number of the contradictions and complexities which make race relations in contemporary South Africa so fraught. For this research her reflections on whiteness, white privilege, non-racialism, the influence of the American civil rights movement on South Africa and the digital battleground are particularly salient.

Haffajee bemoans the perceived focus on white privilege stating that it seems to be the only constant and sustained aspect of national dialogue (2015: 5).  White privilege, according to Haffajee, "refers to a set of behaviours that underlie conduct that inflames South Africa's sometimes awful race relations – it is often unconscious, the mark of a former ruling class" (2015: 10).

This has created a situation in which non-racialism, which Haffajee supports, is eclipsed by whiteness; the study of a system of privilege which foregrounds the white experience (Haffajee, 2015: 13-14). She asserts that the born-free generation view pragmatism and a focus on diversity as outmoded (Haffajee, 2015: 49).

The book also questions why "a relatively small minority with post-colonial privilege" are still considered dominant and asserts that this particular narrative is "profoundly disempowering for blacks" (Haffajee, 2015: 21).

For Haffajee this narrative feels imported from the United States and reflects an oppressed minority under the control of a powerful majority, which is not reflective of the South African context (Haffajee, 2015: 5-6). In fact the American civil rights movement is noted as a strong influence on the anti-apartheid struggle which is still evident throughout current racial discourse (Haffajee, 2015: 20).

The role of social media in South African racial conflict is reflected in Haffajee's recounting of a social media boycott of major South African retailer Woolworths:

> I found an effort to boycott Woolworths a few years ago breathtakingly naïve. Woolworths came under social media fire because a set of advertisements had declared its commitment to employment equity. That set the bulldogs of the anti-equity lobby on the retailer. Twitter and Facebook were ablaze with impassioned white privilege masquerading as an army of defenders of non-racialism. Talk about losing the plot. Non-racialism as a constitutional principle and an organising political practice has never meant not seeing race. It is a philosophy that acknowledges the role of race in constructing the country, economy and

social relations, and that actively sets out to dismantle these relationships to eventually see and commune with each other beyond our racial identities. (2015: 16)

Haffajee believes that the counter-narrative of whiteness is being transmitted primarily through social media, which have empowered young black South Africans by giving them a voice and "voice *is* power" (2015: 62). However, instead of strengthening the rainbow nation, social media have become a battleground for a "race war":

> What we have coalesced into and around is, at best, a benign multi-racialism and, at worst, a coagulating race war fought in the digital ether where black and white seek lives that are separate and striving towards equality. (Haffajee, 2015: 87)

This view of social media and race relations stands in stark contrast to optimistic views of the network society which view the Internet as a great leveller in which cyberspace eliminates the labels which characterise us in the real world.

### 2.2.3 Racism and social media

Social media allow individuals and groups to express and share opinions. Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and every type of intolerance imaginable are as ubiquitous as they are offline. It presents a conundrum, which has motivated this research. How does society find a balance between the inarguable necessity of free speech and the eradication of hate speech and racial conflict?

According to Rauch and Schanz, the Internet is the perfect space for a wide range of attitudes and opinions on controversial topics and it is not difficult to find messages that are prejudiced (2013: 611). Some of these messages are subtly prejudiced whereas others are clearly and overtly racist (Rauch & Schanz, 2013: 611). When social media was first developed many thought that race would not be an issue in cyberspace or that cyberspace would be colour-blind (Daniels, 2008: 129).

As stated above, life online not only mirrors life offline, but also in some aspects amplifies behaviours and thoughts that may otherwise have remained somewhat private. Daniels asserts that:

> The presence of white supremacy online reinforces this epistemology of white supremacy offline by allowing whites to retreat from civic engagement and into a whites-only chimera. Thus, the early emergence and persistent presence of white supremacy online calls for multiple literacies: a literacy of digital media and new literacies not merely of 'tolerance' but literacies of social justice that offer a depth of understanding about race, racism, and multiple intersecting forms of oppression. (2008: 130)

Although some may see race conflicts online as less damaging than the kind of white supremacy peddled by neo-Nazis and members of the Ku Klux Klan, the discursive violence wrought through hateful comments should not be viewed as less damaging or more socially acceptable. Titley suggests that focusing only on hate speech or extremist groups aids in the perpetuation of racism (2015:3).  Racism has theoretical bases but:

> It is also a political process – with ideological and affective investments – and it is also a communicative process, shaped and enabled by media forms and dynamics. It also treats social media as discrete, rather than working in and through a media system. (Titley, 2015: 3)

For this reason, it is important to identify the structural, political and ideological enablers of racism. We will see this in our analysis of the #PennySparrow Tweets but one example of how Twitter can be used in this manner can be found in the Twitter account @YesYoureRacist (Domonoske, 2017:3).

According to Domonoske, this Twitter account was founded in 2012 and is used to call out casual racism (2017:3). It has been used to post screenshots of deleted racist Tweets, offensive posts by politicians and posts where people claimed not to be racist before posting something that was obviously racist (Domonoske, 2017:3).

Another common occurrence online is the defense of racist comments by suggesting that they are common sense or by using popular stereotypes as justification (Hughey & Daniels, 2013: 338). This defense occurs in three ways, according to Hughey and Daniels:

> (1) abstract arguments that invoke the individual's right to engage in 'free speech,' (2) accusations of victimhood that appeal to 'political correctness,' and

(3) seemingly matter-of-fact statements that are based on implicit racial stereotypes and myths. Such rhetorical strategies evade moderation because they shift focus from the specifics of the racialized content to questions over abstract principles of civil and democratic discourse or to supposedly scientific or 'obvious' racial differences thought natural or innate. (2013: 338)

In a country such as South Africa, racism pervades society at so many levels that racialised expressions are commonplace. Before acts and expressions of racism were made public on social media, comments such as those made by Penny Sparrow were probably considered harmless by many, some of whom may not even see themselves as racist. In this context many individuals turn to arguments such as these when their behaviour is questioned. The critical discourse analysis in Chapter 5 will touch on this phenomenon and the afore-mentioned defenses, as they are rife in the case study.

### 2.2.4 Deliberative democracy and social media

Deliberative democracy can be defined as a type of democratic participation model in which individuals participate in rigorous debate in a public sphere, which includes vastly different points of view but ultimately culminates in a reflective shared public opinion on important civic issues (Kreide, 2016: 477).

Strandberg and Berg identify four areas that are essential for effective deliberation, namely; the rationality of debates, the relevance to the topic of debates, the reciprocity of the debates and the degree of politeness and respect in the debates (2013: 136). These four areas will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

According to Weber, "[r]eader comments are especially interesting from the normative perspective of deliberative digital democracy, which revolves around the question of whether Internet-based interactive technologies support 'the extension of a deliberative democratic public sphere of rational communication and public opinion formation'" (2014: 942). Social media offer the shared text necessary for deliberative democracy to flourish and even though their use may primarily be social, they also provide easy access to political discussions and a wide variety of views (Diehl, Weeks & de Zúñiga, 2016: 1876).

Kreide identifies five key areas of criticism associated with digital deliberative democracy (2016: 476-477).  Deliberative democracy is too consensus-orientated, it is too demanding normatively, it assumes a false idea of a collective subject which does not exist, it is too old-fashioned for the digital turn and it is not receptive to gatherings and protests in real-world public spaces (Kreide, 2016: 476-477).

Ultimately, however, Kreide reaches the conclusion that "new media are also created through the participation of the many" and that "they (still) exhibit all the characteristics of an enlightened public; free access, no thematic restrictions, equality among participants and no limit on the number of participants" (Kreide, 2016: 481).

Online debates are often characterised by aggressiveness, insults and attempts to humiliate opponents. They also display a high degree of formal regularity, are exemplary of free speech, allow for opposing arguments and ultimately allow for free participation in a political forum where divergent views are openly expressed (Papacharissi, 2004: 270).

In a study which examined the presence of civility and politeness in discussions online as well as measuring the democratic potential of these discussions, Papacharissi found that the use of stereotypes to offend or undermine opposing arguments was the most common form of incivility in online discussions (Papacharissi, 2004: 275).

Although it was asserted that incivility and impoliteness do not characterise online discussions, they do represent a threat to the democratic potential of these discussions (2004: 279). Papacharissi also asserts that civility is an essential component of a virtual public sphere but its presence alone does not guarantee that these types of discussions will further democratic aims (2004: 280).

Online political discussions in South Africa often become the sites of race conflicts as a result of political history of the country and the central role that conceptions of race and racism play in the lives of South Africans from all races. Deliberative democracy is a noble concept but its practicality is certainly put to the test in online race conflicts where racist invective overshadows any potential for rational debates between equals. This chasm between theory and practise will be explored further in Chapter 5's case study.

## 2.2.5 Political discussions on Twitter

Fuchs views Twitter as predominantly entertainment oriented, stating that politics are a minority topic (2014: 199). He goes as far to assert that Twitter is an information medium and not a communication tool (Fuchs, 2014: 199). Whilst Twitter is a celebrity haven, it is perhaps short-sighted to create an equivalence in which the entertainment aspect somehow cancels out the platform's political potential.

Beukes (2017) explores a topic perhaps closest to the research for this study, by examining how Twitter was used as a mobilising tool during 2015 and 2016's #FeesMustFall protest action. These research findings certainly seem at odds with Fuch's earlier assertion that Twitter is predominately entertainment orientated.

Beukes constructs a narrative of the events and how they broadly played out during the protests but she acknowledges that her research only provides a snapshot and that much more must be done to explore the emancipatory potential of Twitter, particularly in the South African context (Beukes, 2017: 208).

Beukes raises two important points about Twitter; its use as a disrupter of dominant narratives and its polarising potential (2017: 204, 206). These two points will be discussed in the critical discourse analysis in Chapter 5.

Ultimately it is Beukes' assertion that "Twitter has played a critical part by providing a platform for young black South Africans to express their views, align arguments, influence public opinion and debate issues facing a post-apartheid South Africa (2017:198). Although her focus is on youth she also touches on greater societal issues, stating that she had noted that social media had facilitated the opening of the proverbial floodgates around issues such as white privilege, racism and inequality (Beukes, 2017: 196-197).

Beukes also briefly acknowledges the public sphere potential of social media such as Twitter, stating that

> …when viewed as an unmediated platform allowing anyone with access to the Internet to participate in a discussion, *Twitter* can be seen a democratizing tool, in the context of Jürgen Habermas' public sphere, as an arena, independent of government [and market]...dedicated to rational debate and which is both

accessible to entry and inspection by the citizenry. (2017: 200)

The study by Beukes provides important insight into the role that social media can potentially play in revealing social ills and issues affecting marginalised individuals and communities but it fails to acknowledge that for each of those students who participate in the Fallist movement, there are many more who do not have access to tertiary education or digital technology of the kind necessary to be part of such a movement. This means that those promoting #FeesMustFall are operating from a place of privilege just by virtue of the fact that they have access to these institutions and new communications technologies.

### 2.2.6 The power of the hashtag

The hashtag on Twitter is a very powerful tool. It is used in front of terms such as #FeesMustFall as a type of digital marker which enters Twitter users into discussions but it also allows people to search by hashtag which will provide some idea of what the popular sentiment on a particular topic is.

Fuchs makes an interesting statement about social media, which this discussion on the power of the hashtag refutes. He states that:

> Social media do not cause revolutions or protests. They are embedded into contradictions and the power structures of contemporary society. This also means that in society, in which these media are prevalent, they are not completely unimportant in situations of uproar and revolution. Social media have contradictory characteristics in contradictory societies: they do not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather pose contradictory potentials that stand in contradiction with influences by the state, ideology, capitalism and other media. (2014: 207)

According to Shapp, Twitter acts as a forum for spreading awareness and information about social justice movements and initiatives as well as for dialogue regarding social justice issues (2014: 39). Hashtags play an important role in this regard. Konelly asserts that "hashtags contribute to ongoing discussion of what constitutes 'community' in electronically- mediated communication" (2015: 1-2). Although Twitter has various communication channels such as retweeting, favouriting and replying using @, the

hashtag is the most powerful (Konelly, 2015: 2).

Konelly identifies what she calls the "Cause Hashtag", which is created purposefully in order to raise awareness, advance a cause or rally support for a social cause (2015: 2). In this regard she asserts that hashtags act not only as a meta-message within a tweet, but also as tools of affiliation, political discourse-making, and collective identity-informing" (Konelly, 2015: 2).

**2.2.7 Black Twitter**

i.     **Origins of Black Twitter**

Black Twitter originated as a way for African Americans to voice their discontent at the persistent racial profiling, which exists throughout American society. A breaking point was reached when when an unarmed black teenager was shot to death for looking suspicious in 2013 (DeHahn, 2014).  This type of profiling and violence against people of colour spawned hashtags such as #Blacklivesmatter, #Icantbreathe, #TrayvonMartin, #Ferguson and #AliveWhileBlack (DeHahn, 2014). This embodies a social movement that has captured the global imagination and become synonymous with counter-hegemony.

Chaudhry's study tracked mentions of  #Ferguson in the four days after yet another young black man, named Mike Brown, was shot in the American town of Ferguson (2016: 296, 298). This was done in order to measure whether the sentiments on Twitter matched broader American sentiments regarding race (Chaudhry, 2016: 296).

Tweets were analysed and structural racism was noted in a number of forms, including individual and interpersonal racism (Chaudhry, 2016: 300, 302). Ultimately Chaudhry concluded that although the underlying problem was not solved through mobilisation on Twitter it remains essential that these topics are popularised so that they can "create momentum for social change" (2016: 303).

Black Twitter is a popular subject in critical race studies as it incorporates a number of organic discursive strategies, which serve counter-hegemonic purposes in the American context. Florini mentions the presence of signifyin', which can be described as an interactional framework (2014: 224). Signifyin' is a term coined by prominent African

American studies luminary Henry Louis Gates to describe a concept that predates De Saussure's concept of signification by almost two centuries (Gates, 2004: 987).

In its simplest form, signifyin' is the world viewed through African American eyes and defined in their own terms based on their own histories. Gates describes it as a "theory of interpretation, arrived at from the black cultural matrix, (is) a theory of formal revisionism, it is tropological, it is often characterized by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences" (2004: 987). Florini asserts that:

> Signifyin' generally involves elements of humor and displays of wit, and at times may seem frivolous to the uninitiated. But, even at its most lighthearted, signifyin' is a powerful resource for signaling racial identity, allowing Black Twitter users to perform their racial identities 140 characters at a time. (2014: 224)

Signifyin' therefore allows Black Twitter users "to align themselves with Black oral traditions, to index Black cultural practices, to enact Black subjectivities, and to communicate shared knowledge and experiences" (Florini, 2014: 224). This is a powerful tool because "black hashtag signifying reveal(s) alternate Twitter discourses to the mainstream and encourages a formulation of Black Twitter as a 'social public'; a community constructed through their use of social media by outsiders and insiders alike" (Brock, 2012: 530).

Florini also touches on the digital divide, which will be discussed further in this chapter. She asserts that digital media studies either erases race and identity politics or seeks to portray people of colour as victims and technological outsiders, effectively obscuring the many people of colour who are participating online (Florini, 2014: 224). Black Twitter thus decentres "hegemonic models of human value that often depend on the dehumanisation of Black bodies, but also by disidentifying with the hyper capitalist composing practices of digital spaces" (Prasad, 2016: 50).

Graham and Smith, acknowledging the subversive role of Black Twitter, sought to test whether or not it would qualify as a counter-public in the American context (2016: 433-449). In order to answer their research question they compared three different hashtags; #BlackTwitter, #TCOT (Top Conservatives on Twitter) and #BCOT (Black

Conservatives on Twitter) (Graham & Smith, 2016: 436-437). Using dendrograms they were able to identify terms and topics that were specifically counter-hegemonic in nature and through comparison reach a conclusion (2016: 444).

They found that Black Twitter could be characterised as a parallel discursive arena and counter-public and that the content was not only characterised by different perspectives on issues but that different issues were also discussed (Graham & Smith, 2016: 446).

### ii.    South Africa's Black Twitter

South Africa has its own socio-historical character and so it stands to reason that the enactment of Black Twitter here would have its own dynamics although it shares some commonalities with its American counterpart. In Chapter 5, the researcher will analyse whether South African Black Twitter has reached its full signifyin' potential.

South African Black Twitter's debut was the result of a racial conflict between Black South African musician Simphiwe Dana and white politician Helen Zille (Masemola, 2015:1). Zille's Tweet stating, "You're a highly respected black professional. Don't try to be a professional black. It demeans you", caused outrage and indignation (Pilane, 2014:1). This served as a call to action and South African Black Twitter made its voice heard.

Black Twitter in South Africa produces commentary which is insightful, cutting and reflective of South Africa's cultural diversity and multiplicity of identities (Pilane, 2014:1). According to prolific South African Black Twitter member, Nomalanga Mkhize there are similarities between national Black Twitters across the diaspora because they echo each other's critiques of white mainstream hegemony, despite immense differences between the lived experiences of black South Africans and Black Americans (Serino, 2013; Sosibo, 2015).

### 2.2.8 Racism in online comments sections

This section  deals specifically with online comments on news sites. Online comment sections were initially implemented as a way to increase interactivity, create an online community, engage with readers, and to generate more advertising revenue via clicks, but they have also given rise to a number of social issues (Nielsen, 2012: 86).

Racism in online comments sections and the subsequent global trend of closing these sections offers important insights into what happens when communication platforms become so over run by various forms of hate speech that site owners feel left with no option but to shut them down to avoid potential brand damage or legal consequences.

According to News24's former Editor in Chief, Andrew Trench, comments on the online news website were switched off because many users sought to push South Africa's protection of free speech beyond what could be considered reasonable (2015:1). Further stating that "[c]omments tediously drift towards hate speech at worst and, at best, are often laced with prejudice. Interesting and considered contributions are drowned out by a cacophony of insults from a minority of users" (Trench, 2015:1).

IOL Managing Editor Adrian Ephraim concurred with Trench when the IOL news platform closed its comments section just over two months later in December 2015. He stated that

> Protection and essence of our hard won democracy requires constant vigilance and debate – not mudslinging and certainly not more hate speech. The right to dignity cannot willy-nilly be traded for unmonitored online dialogue. Free speech rights are not inviolable. (Ephraim, 2015: 1)

Moosa takes issue with the suggestion that people should simply learn to deal with racist invective as it is an inherent facet of the Internet (2014: 2). The single biggest concern is the lack of accountability associated with making harmful comments online (Moosa, 2014: 4). Moosa suggests that it is necessary to combat entitlement by "prioritising safety, solidarity and quality…over so-called 'free speech', that benefits only the loudest and usually most vile" (2014: 6).

In an article for *BDlive*, Pienaar asks whether it is wise to allow trolls and vitriol to compromise free speech (2015:1). He traces the twar (a war of words on Twitter) to the days of online chatrooms when the phenomenon was known as flaming, which he says, "opened a Pandora's Box; and brought into the open the vile, unfiltered, reflexive emotions we suppress in common hours" (Pienaar, 2015: 1).  He asserts that this kind of behaviour is:

> Simply a small part of the avalanche of electronic detritus that we have to learn

to cope with as the Internet revolution progresses. Dubious and unethical practices have proliferated and yet, the only sustained attempt to moderate the Internet, in China, is notable for its failures as Chinese Internet users have quickly learnt how to dodge censors and spread news and opinions in flash comments reaching hundreds of millions. (Pienaar, 2015: 2)

For Pienaar it is a case of throwing the baby out with the proverbial bathwater. The loss of free speech is perceived as far more harmful than having to wade through hurtful or offensive comments. It may also simply be a case of hiding racism rather than addressing it, and passing the problem on to other online comment sites or social media (Hughey & Daniels, 2013: 344).

### 2.2.9 The digital divide

For Strandberg and Berg, the Internet's greatest democratic potential lies in its diversity as a medium and also in its level of interactivity (2013: 134). It cannot achieve this potential, however, if universal access is not guaranteed. The digital divide refers to "unequal patterns of material access to, usage capabilities of, benefits from computer-based information- and communication technologies that are caused by certain stratification processes that produce classes of winners and losers of the information society, and participation in institutions governing ICTs and society" (Fuchs & Horak, 2008: 101).

According to Van Dijk, the digital divide can be understood as inequalities, which cover four facets of access, namely; motivation, physical access, digital skills and different usage (2012: 57). Van Dijk further provides insight into how the digital divide perpetuates inequality:

- Categorical inequalities in society produce unequal distribution of resources.
- An unequal distribution of resources causes unequal access to digital technologies.
- Unequal access to digital technologies also depends on the characteristics of these technologies.
- Unequal access to digital technologies brings about unequal participation in society.

- Unequal participation in society reinforces categorical inequalities and unequal distributions of resources (2012: 60).

This shows clearly how important a role technology plays in contemporary society. It also shows that the very same inequality, which exists in the concrete world, affects the online world. In a country such as South Africa where the income gap is significant, the digital divide is pervasive. Statistics from World Wide Worx show that 14 million South Africans use Facebook while Twitter sits at 7.7 million users out of a total population of almost 56 million (Worldwideworx, 2017:1).

The South African National General Household Survey found that 59.3% of South African households have at least one member who had access to the Internet, be it from home, work, school or Internet cafes (Statistics South Africa, 2016: 51). This may sound positive but contrasted with the lowest household Internet access by province , Limpopo 1.6% and Northwest at 3.5%,  it is clear that universal access is not applicable in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2016: 51).

It is not only affordability which affects access but also infrastructure. In the many rural areas of South Africa (and even in some urban areas) people are still living without electricity, in such cases access to Internet may constitute a luxury that simply is not an option. In their 2008 study of the digital divide in South Africa (as one of a selection of African countries) Fuchs and Horak found that because there are "decisive underlying social, ideological (racism), and economic factors that result in structural inequalities, the digital divide is not closed by fostering privatization and liberalization" (2008: 110). This is still the case almost a decade later.

The digital divide will therefore play an important role in determining whether or not social media could be considered a networked public sphere as contemporary iterations of the public sphere view universal access as an essential component of any public sphere. This does not mean that social media should be automatically excluded but that one should remain cognisant of who is able to access the Internet, who isn't and how that translates in a democratic setting.

## 2.3. Summary

This chapter has explored some of the most pertinent issues relating to this study by critically reviewing existing literature within the field. It has touched on race trouble, racism and social media, deliberative democracy and social media, political discussions on social media, the rise of the hashtag, Black Twitter, the effect of racism on online news site comment sections and the digital divide. The literature review has provided the researcher with a contextual base from which to locate this study and an idea of the existing academic output related to this study.  Each aspect reveals a field of study, which is rife with contradictions and multiple levels of privilege and marginalisation.

**Chapter Three: Theoretical framework**

**3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore various facets of public sphere theory. It will initially define public sphere theory as propounded by Jürgen Habermas. Thereafter it will engage with the work of a number of theorists who have critically examined public sphere theory and offered alternatives or updates which add valuable dimensions to the strictly Habermasian concept.

While the Habermasian conception of the public sphere offers a natural starting point for this discussion, the researcher is inclined to align more closely with theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Chantal Mouffe, as will be shown throughout this chapter. Susen summarises this concisely stating that "although Habermas's approach succeeds in offering useful insights into the structural transformation of the public sphere in the early modern period, it does not provide an adequate theoretical framework for understanding the structural transformation of public spheres in late modern societies" (2011: 38).

Each theorist will offer key additions and adaptions to the bourgeois public sphere, which ensure that the theoretical framework used throughout this research is contextually appropriate for an evaluation of Twitter, rather than the $18^{th}$ century German coffee houses Habermas talked about. For this reason we will also explore how public sphere theory fits into or aligns with the network society theory by exploring selected works by Manuel Castells, Yochai Benkler and Lincoln Dahlberg.

This framework will provide a sound theoretical basis for addressing  the central research question of this thesis: Can social media be considered a networked public sphere which enhances deliberative democracy? It will also address access, multiple voices, and the potential for subversive counter-hegemonic discourse within the networked public sphere.

In order to distill the numerous theoretical inputs the final section will be used to put forward a context specific networked public sphere definition and framework which will inform the critical discourse analysis in Chapter 5.

**3.2 Jürgen Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere and deliberative democracy**

**3.2.1 Bourgeois public sphere: origins and shortcomings**

Habermas defines a public sphere as above all a space in which private people come together to form a public (1991:27). He further suggests that a public sphere should exhibit a number of characteristics; it should be a site for the formation of public opinion, all citizens should have access, participants should be free to express themselves without restrictions and debate should cover the rules which govern relations (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox, 1964:49; Habermas, 1991:27). The bourgeois public sphere was particularly significant as it constituted the first time in which reason was used by many as a medium of political confrontation (Habermas, 1991:27).

The bourgeois public sphere has specific concrete historical context and meaning and it is for this reason that one cannot simply look to Habermas to define a public sphere in a 21st century context. It was the historically specific social and cultural lives of the bourgeoisie which forms the basis of Habermas' public sphere and it is worthwhile to briefly explore its genesis. The bourgeois public sphere was a turning point as it "enabled a novel political subjectivity to emerge – an articulation of a consensus representing the opinion of a sovereign public with a legitimate claim for recognition by established power" (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013: 89).

Much of the basic foundational theory remains pertinent and that which is outdated or contradictory has given rise to contemporary public sphere theory. For example, Habermas praises the way in which coffee houses and salons between 1680 and 1730 represented centres of criticism in which aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals created a "certain parity of the educated" (1991:32). It may have been radical that bourgeois intellectuals were able to verbally spar with the aristocracy but this parity excludes women and the entirety of the working classes. It may represent a broadening of access but it nonetheless continues to exclude those who did not own property.

Marx was particularly critical of the bourgeois public sphere as he viewed the opinions and viewpoints reached therein as false consciousness which hid from itself its privileging of bourgeois interests (Habermas, 1991:124). Habermas acknowledges that Marx's central concern with the bourgeois public sphere was the idea that the basic criterion of entry was property ownership which makes universal access impossible

(Habermas, 1991:124).  This contradicts Habermas' claim that in bourgeois public spheres "opinion became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependency" (1991:33).

Habermas puts forth the utopian ideal of a space in which individuals participate as equals in an open and inclusive environment whereas property and education were necessary preconditions of participation (Finlayson, 2005:12). Indeed, barriers to entry will play a vital thematic role in the case study to follow and our evaluation of Twitter as a networked public sphere. This phenomenon is simply described by Finlayson as "no one was excluded in principle from participation in the public sphere, though many were in practice" (2005:12). Although time has passed and society has progressed in terms of human rights and technologies, these exclusions remain pervasive.

### 3.2.2 Deliberative democracy

In the introductory chapter we briefly outlined the concept of deliberative democracy. The basic criteria identified were rationality, reciprocity, relevance to the debate's topic and the observation of basic social etiquette (Strandberg & Berg, 2013: 136). In its ideal form, deliberative democracy is constituted by the reaching of legitimate decisions that are acceptable to all those involved or at the very least the taking of decisions which could not be reasonably rejected (Bohman, 1998: 402). It is characterised by free public reasoning of equal citizens who do so in the interests of the common good without presupposition of an already decided-upon consensus (Bohman, 1998: 402).

The public sphere is the ideal location for deliberative democracy to take place. Indeed, Finlayson suggests that the public sphere consists of "voluntary associations of private citizens united in a common aim, to make use of their own reason in unconstrained discussion between equals" (Finlayson, 2005:10). This encourages participants to identify and communicate their own needs and to collectively perceive that which constitutes the common good (Finlayson, 2005:10). When applied to deliberative democracy, the public sphere serves as space to advance or debate any issues which participants consider pertinent (Gimmler, 2001: 24). It has been suggested that this would serve as an intermediate sphere as it exists in opposition to a public that is controlled by the state or mass media (Gimmler, 2001: 24).

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Habermas asserts that for deliberative democracy to function it requires "a public sphere of informal political communication whose institutional basis is provided by the voluntary associations of civil society and which depends on inputs of expert information and on open access to the print and electronic media" (Cronin & De Greiff, 1998: xvi-xvii). In the context of social media, this is impractical as users are not necessarily experts on the topics which are under discussion. Here Habermas seems to hark back to his previous claims that the bourgeois public sphere created a parity of the educated, yet again excluding entire segments of society. This contradicts the notion of equality as it is by its very nature exclusionary.

For Gimmler there is simply "no plausible alternative model to rational and uncoerced discourse as the normative basis for democracy" (2001:23). The discourse envisaged here requires "equality among participants, the complete disclosure of procedures, the temporary suspension of domination and structural power, and the creation of a situation in which themes for discussion can be freely chosen" (Gimmler, 2001:23).

This is congruent with Habermas's contention that the institutional design of modern democracy calls for the private autonomy of its citizens (where each is able to determine their own life paths), democratic citizenship which guarantees freedom and equality and an independent public sphere which acts as an intermediary structure between state and society (Habermas, 2006: 412).

Habermas identifies what he calls "actors" without whom the political public sphere simply could not function and deliberative democracy could not occur (Habermas, 2006: 416). For the purposes of clarity, the political public sphere can be defined as a space "produced by communication about public matters as in journalism, opinion and argumentation, in face-to-face communication as well as in mediated communication" (Rasmussen, 2014: 1315-1316). It is the type of public sphere which this study refers to primarily.

Habermas singles out media professionals and politicians as the co-authors and addressees of the public opinions shared in the political public sphere (Habermas, 2006: 416). The rise of the social media has however eroded the role of media professionals as the originators of information to be shared with the masses but this is not the primary point of contention that the researcher has with this claim. It is the next point in which

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he asserts that "mediated political communication is carried on by (the) elite" (Habermas, 2006: 416).

 This exclusionary intellectual superciliousness is also at work when he elaborates on the other actors within the political public sphere. These are lobbyists representing special interest groups, advocates who either represent general interest groups or substitute for a lack of representation of marginalized groups that are unable to voice their interests effectively, scientific or professional experts who are invited to give advice, moral entrepreneurs who highlight underrepresented issues and intellectuals who engage spontaneously in public sphere discourse (Habermas, 2006: 416). These actors collectively construct public opinion - which is the opinion which triumphs over all others (Habermas, 2006: 417).

### 3.3 Nancy Fraser and subaltern counterpublics

Fraser recognises that public sphere theory is a vital part of critical theory but takes issue with aspects of the Habermasian public sphere and how they apply to what she calls "actually existing democracy" in late capitalist societies (1990:57). She asserts that the bourgeois public sphere signifies a turning point in historical power relations in that it marked the end of repressive monarchical domination characterised by brute force and introduced hegemonic domination which relies on ideological conditioning to secure consent (Fraser, 1990: 62).

Four of Habermas' central assumptions are critically scrutinised and interrogated. These are the assumption that socio-economic status is irrelevant, that a singular public sphere is preferable to a number of competing publics, the sharp distinction between what is characterised as common good and that which is considered private and the requirement of a continued separation between civil society and the state (Fraser, 1990: 62-63).

To illustrate the problematic nature of the blanketed exclusion of private matters, Fraser uses the example of domestic violence. Domestic violence has always been considered a private matter that only affects a small percentage of society and is better dealt with in the privacy of the home (Fraser, 1990: 70-71). It has taken enormous amount of unrelenting advocacy to reach a place where, for example, the South African government observes 16 days of activism against child and women abuse.

Although Fraser's focus is very much on a feminist public sphere she ultimately advocates for alternative publics – namely subaltern counterpublics – which emphasise inclusiveness and explicitly and strategically create non-dominant forms of knowledge, thereby legitimising and sustaining the subaltern (Jackson & Welles, 2015: 933-934).

These counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1990:67). They are inclusive in that they cater for all marginalised groups including, but not limited to, workers, people of colour and members of the  LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual) community (Fraser, 1990: 67).

In contrast to these counterpublics, lies the dominant public sphere in which white moneyed men further their own interests and perpetuate dominant patriarchal hegemonic ideology (Squires, 2002: 450). Fraser suggests that this dichotomy has always existed and that even during the epoch of the bourgeois public sphere there existed in direct competition "nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics" (Fraser, 1990: 61). These counterpublics unsettled the bourgeois public sphere and reinforced their desire to remain exclusive (Fraser, 1990: 61).

This distinction between dominant and subaltern, public and counterpublic must be recognised in order to create inclusive discursive spaces which further democracy and gives voice to the voiceless. Counterpublic theory, according to Asen, lays bare power relations and thereby creates the possibility that these may be altered (2000:425). The concept of the counterpublic aligns with the idea of a modern public sphere which is humanist in nature and "guided by a learnt conviction that in principle equal, but in fact relatively powerless, individuals can give concrete shape to the hope for an autonomous, self-determining life as a shared project" (Johnson, 2006: 1).

In order to achieve the democratic goals associated with public sphere theory Fraser recognises four requirements. There must be acknowledgment of the harmful effect of social inequality on deliberation, the segmentation and empowerment and corresponding disempowerment of participants as a result of inequality must be recognised, the antiquated idea of private issues should be cast aside and that weakness

of character within public spheres serves to undermine the strength of public opinion (Fraser, 1990: 77). These requirements are in sharp contrast to Habermas's ideal political public sphere and its elite actors.

Rutherford echoes this suggesting that for a public sphere to succeed access must be as close to universal access as is possible, participants' autonomy must be guaranteed and coercion must be absent, there must be no hierarchy, the rule of law must be followed and participation must be logic-driven (Rutherford, 2000:18). These appear reasonable but as we shall see in the next section (Mouffe's agonism) the constraints of rational reasoning and logic are problematic.

## 3.4 Chantal Mouffe's agonism

While Fraser questions the value of a single homogenised public sphere, Mouffe suggests that democratic consensus can never truly be realised rationally and that conflict forms a vital part of any public discourse. She identifies three vital flaws in deliberative democracy theory; the primacy of the individual over collectivities, an emphasis on reason at the expense of emotion and the conflation of political adversaries with moral enemies (Mouffe, 2005: 6; Ruitenberg, 2009: 273-274).

Mouffe addresses these shortcomings through her theory of agonistic pluralism which seeks to mobilise passions expressed in the public sphere in order to advance democracy rather than focusing on the impractical and impossible ideal of rational discussion (Mouffe, 2000:15). In order for democracy to flourish there must be animated sparring of democratic political positions (Mouffe, 2000: 16).

Agonism is contrasted with antagonism in as far as "antagonism is one that takes place between enemies, while a relation of agonism takes place between adversaries" (Mouffe, 1998: 16). In this context opponents are viewed not as enemies to be defeated but adversaries whose existence is recognised as legitimate (Mouffe, 1993:4).

 The understanding is that ideas can be contested while respecting the right of an adversary to defend these views (Mouffe, 1993: 40). Collective and individual identities are always contingent on the recognition of the other and the adversarial relationship born from this recognition (Jones, 2014: 15).  The category of enemy is then repurposed

to describe individuals or groups who do not acknowledge the basic democratic tenets and are therefore excluded (Mouffe, 1993: 4).

In emancipatory agonistic politics and democratic pluralism the desired outcome is the transformation of antagonistic relations to agonistic relations (Jones, 2014: 22). The public sphere is thus not a space for rational consensus but one where legitimate conflicts can be freely expressed (Mouffe, 1998: 16). In this agonistic political space, it is accepted that hegemony is always at play and that every order and practice is the result of specific power relations (Jones, 2014: 20).

Mouffe also contests the idea of a natural order based on rationality or common sense insisting instead that these ideas are "the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; …never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity exterior to the practices that bring it into being" (2007: 2-3). This suggests "that all political orders are simply contingent expressions of the meeting point between objectivity and power" (Jones, 2014: 20). This acknowledgement of inherent power structures in all discourse and the inherent hegemonic nature of what we view as natural or common sense is necessary for a public sphere and deliberative democracy to function optimally.

Agonistic politics recognise an objective, obvious consensus is never possible. Instead consensus is merely the acceptance of something at the exclusion of alternatives which could at any time be replaced (Mouffe, 2007: 3). This challenges the utopian ideal of democracy in a way that seems at times counter-intuitive but this is because it requires us to move from a moral to political framework for engagement (Jones, 2014: 25). Universality and reason cannot ensure moral consensus unless it is achieved through exclusion (Jones, 2014: 25).

There is a caveat to participation in the agonistic political endeavour and that is that consensus can only be considered legitimate if it adheres to the rights and responsibilities associated with liberal democracy – namely liberty and equality (Mouffe, 2000: 15). Any and all counterpublics are free to contribute but must be guided by and accept democratic ideals. In practical terms, a public arguing for the reintroduction of slavery would not be granted any legitimacy of have any chance of changing laws because their undemocratic foundation would disqualify them.

In contrast to this a counterpublic seeking to change perceptions of domestic abuse (as in Fraser's earlier example) would be able to use their deeply held belief in the need for change to advocate for a transformation in societal perceptions and even laws themselves. Similarly, a counterpublic comprised of LGBTQIA allies could legitimately seek to ensure that transgendered individuals have access to universal healthcare or that they are able to join the military as openly transgendered individuals. In contrast, Habermasian public sphere theory could be used to suggest that LGBTQIA issues are better dealt with in private.

## 3.5 Manuel Castells and the network society

Thus far this theoretical discussion has explored the public sphere, subaltern counterpublics and agonistic pluralism. In order to address this study's research question in its entirety we must now introduce the networked society in more detail before introducing the networked public sphere, which forms part of the network society.

In the introductory chapter we established that a network society is made up of social and media networks (Van Dijk, 2012a: 43). The public sphere now exists across various communication networks and in the digital age this includes the mass media as well as Internet and wireless communication networks (Castells, 2008:79).

These digital networks facilitate what Castells has termed mass self-communication, which link large numbers of people through the sending and receiving of multimedia messages which bypass mass media and often direct government control (Castells, 2008: 90)

This independence does not however guarantee that social movements are able to influence public opinion as this is dependent on how successful these movements are in shaping the debates taking place in the public sphere (Castells, 2008:87). The network society is not immune to the exclusionary power of hegemonic practices and beliefs which existed in public spheres before the introduction of the Internet.

Castells defines power as "the structural capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actor(s)" (Castells, 2007: 239).  Power relations take different forms in the network society depending on who has the power and how it is used. Networking

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power is the power held by individuals and groups who are part of the global network society over those individuals and groups who are not (Castells, 2011: 773). Network power stems from the power imposed in the coordination of interaction on specific networks in the form of rules relating to who is included (Castells, 2011:773). Networked power is the power wielded by some individuals within networks over fellow network members (Castells, 2011: 773). Lastly, network-making power is the "power to program specific networks according to the interests and values of the programmers, and the power to switch different networks following the strategic alliances between the dominant actors of various networks" (Castells, 2011: 773).

In response to these power relations there exists the same counterpower as exists in subaltern counterpublics and the agonistic public sphere. This counterpower seeks to advance the interests of and values of those in marginalised positions (Castells, 2011: 773). Castells holds an optimistic view of this type of counterpower suggesting that "from the depth of despair, everywhere, a dream and a project have surged: to reinvent democracy, to find ways for humans to manage collectively their lives according to principles that are largely shared in their minds and usually disregarded in their everyday experience" (Castells, 2012: 316). This utopian view of the Internet does not integrate the fact that only select individuals have access to the technology that will purportedly fulfil this dream.

This is not a negative view of the emancipatory potential of the networked public sphere, it is simply an acknowledgement of the shortcomings of any claim that the Internet represents a universally-accessible site for the struggle for signification. It is an unfortunate reality that the disparity in wealth between the rich and poor and the characteristics of digital technologies create significant barriers to access (Van Dijk, 2012b: 60). Fuchs asserts that "the Internet does not exist in a vacuum – it is embedded in the antagonisms of capitalist society" (2009: 74). This is a contradiction inherent to the network society which will inform how well the case study performs as a networked public sphere.

Castells acknowledges these shortcomings and recognises public spheres have historically never constituted neutral spaces but that they remain the spaces in which "representations and opinions of society are formed, de-formed, and re-formed to

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provide the ideational materials that construct the basis upon which politics and policies operate" (Castells, 2008:80). It cannot be denied that the Internet and other digital technologies broaden the public sphere by sheer virtue of the limitless size of cyberspace and its global nature.

Gimmler asserts that despite the criticism aimed at the networked public sphere, the Internet retains the potential to enhance deliberative democracy. In this view Internet technology provides equality of access to information, unrestricted means of access as well as facilitating opportunities for interaction (Gimmler, 2001: 31-32). In the next section we will further explore this optimistic view.

## 3.6  Yochai Benkler's networked information economy

In Chapter 1, we briefly defined the networked public sphere as a place in which a large number individuals become active participants in discourse rather than passively receiving mediated messages as occurs with traditional mass media (Benkler, 2006: 219-220). This public sphere is a social communication process which is:

> A place where people can come to express and listen to proposals for agenda items—things that ought to concern us as members of a polity and that have the potential to become objects of collective action; a place where we can make and gather statements of fact about the state of our world and about alternative courses of action; where we can listen to opinions about the relative quality and merits of those facts and alternative courses of action; and a place where we can bring our own concerns to the fore and have them evaluated by others. (Benkler, 2006:181)

Similar to Habermas's public sphere it is characterised by universal intake, filtering for potential political relevance, filtering for accreditation, synthesis of public opinion and independence from government control (Benkler, 2006: 182-85). For universal intake to occur a public sphere must allow for anyone to raise an issue or concern which they believe requires consideration and collective action (Benkler, 2006: 182). Filtering for political relevance ensures that whilst universal intake is guaranteed, that matters which

are not in fact relevant are separated from those which are (Benkler, 2006: 183). Filtering for accreditation ensures that whatever is under discussion has the credibility necessary to warrant its inclusion (Benkler, 2006: 183). Synthesis of public opinion is achieved when similar individual opinions are aggregated in order to identify them as shared (Benkler, 2006: 184). Finally, independence form government control ensures that the participants in the public sphere are able to deliberate and reach consensus independently and without governmental influence (Benkler, 2006: 185).

Benkler is a proponent of technological advancement as a tool for societal change, which he identifies as the networked information economy (Benkler, 2006:3). This networked information economy displaced the industrial information economy which spanned the period of the mid nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century (Benkler, 2006:3). It empowers individuals through "radically distributed nonmarket mechanisms" – the most prominent of which is arguably the Internet (Benkler, 2006:3). He suggests that with the Internet as a technology and the networked public sphere as an organizational and social model of information and cultural production, counterpublics will flourish (Benkler, 2006:177).

The Internet has served as a catalyst for a complex paradigm shift with regards to conceptions of a modern day public sphere:

> The Internet allows individuals to abandon the idea of the public sphere as primarily constructed of finished statements uttered by a small set of actors (socially understood to be 'the media' whether state owned or commercial) and separated from society, and to move toward a set of social practices that see individuals as participating in a debate. (Benkler, 2006: 180)

 Digital citizens could potentially transform society through collective action, suggesting that connection to the Internet can potentially facilitate unprecedented global changes (Marichal, 2012:30).
In this view the Internet certainly seems to be a panacea for all of the problems with the public sphere which have previously been highlighted. It is inclusive (as long as you are in a geographical location which supports Internet and access and have the money to

pay for it) and creates a never-ending loop of communication between participants. Debate on the Internet is often uncensored and on many platforms accessible by anybody. For example, as long as you have an active Facebook profile you can engage with any number of individuals with minimal moderation. In Chapter 1, we outlined some of the ways in which these open-access platforms for debate have influenced the South African legislative process.

Benkler also acknowledges critiques of the Internet's democratising function. These include the potential for information overload, concern regarding domination through wealth, fragmentation of attention and discourse, polarisation, centralisation of the Internet, restricted access and use in authoritarian countries and the ubiquitous digital divide (Benkler, 2006: 233-236).

The vastness of the Internet makes it impossible to access every part of it. In that regard there will be countless opinions and voices that may only ever be seen by the creator or a handful of fellow Internet users. Search engine optimisation ensures that anyone who searches for something is exposed to content that has been specifically designed to occupy a dominant position. This phenomenon is also an example of dominance through wealth.

Benkler's Babel Objection also posits that " when everyone can speak, no one can be heard, and we devolve either to a cacophony or to the re-emergence of money as the distinguishing factor between statements that are heard and those that wallow in obscurity" (Benkler, 2006: 10). We are however free to seek any information that we wish – although this may be limited by filtering or blocking access executed by third parties (such as China's state-censored Internet and filters created by parents or corporates) (Benkler, 2006: 139).

## 3.7 Lincoln Dahlberg and the fragmentation of the public sphere

For Dahlberg the Internet potentially creates a space for marginalised voices to be heard and disrupts state and corporate power (Dahlberg, 2005a: 161). Dahlberg interprets the public sphere as "constituted wherever and whenever any matter of living together with difference is debated" (Dahlberg, 2005b: 112). It is a heterogeneous array of complex

networks populated by players including individuals, associations, social movements, journalists and a variety of civic institutions (Dahlberg, 2005b: 112).

Despite its complex and variable nature he identifies six critical components of any public sphere. These are reasoned exchange of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, formal inclusion and discursive equality and autonomy from state and corporate power (Dahlberg, 2004:1).

He calls for a "(Re-)radicalising of the public sphere" in order to address perceived flaws in the public sphere conception (Dahlberg, 2007:834). These include a lack of awareness of the power relations which saturate the deliberative process, the inter-subjective basis of rationality and meaning, respect for difference and the democratic role of like-minded deliberative groupings (Dahlberg, 2007:834).

Dahlberg also questions whether a "unified, transcendent subject who stands in a highly reflective relation to their interests, values and feelings and in relation to others and the world at large" could exist in reality (Dahlberg, 2007: 833).

Rational consensus would presume the ability of participants to engage in reasoning "that moves deliberation towards rational consensus through distinguishing between better and worse arguments, good and bad reasons, true and untrue claims, persuasion and coercion" (Dahlberg, 2007: 833).

 It presupposes that individuals participating in the public sphere are doing so for the betterment of others or to solve serious societal problems. The phenomenon of trolling, which consists of individuals or groups posting maliciously or misleadingly on social networks, pervades even the most serious of online debates. Sometimes it is obvious but particularly nuanced acts of trolling often go un-detected. In this case reasoned exchange, sincerity and reflexivity are absent.

In the case of political trolling such as the disseminating of fake news and propaganda under the guise of unaffiliated individual opinion, the autonomy from state power is severely compromised. Perhaps then it is more realistic to use these components as idealised rather than set in stone. A public sphere is constituted by individuals, each of who bring their own particular flaws and failings and it is not possible to exclude all of these transgressions from public spheres.

There is also the persistent concerns as to whether online interaction is constituted predominantly by like-minded individuals gathered in innumerable echo chambers across the Internet (Dahlberg, 2007:828). It is suggested that offline interaction is open to chance and thus guarantees interaction with difference, whereas it is far easier to define which people and opinions we are exposed to when online (Dahlberg, 2007:829). The greatest danger posed by this type of polarisation is the increased potential for hostility, violence and the spread of extreme ideologies and beliefs (Dahlberg, 2007:830).

The corollary of the fragmentation debate is the assertion that "online participants readily seek out and deliberate with actors holding markedly different views, thus expanding the public sphere" (Dahlberg. 2007:828).

### 3.8 Networked public sphere: a framework

By engaging with the work of these critical theorists it is evident that there are varying interpretations and that vibrant engagement with these theories is on-going. In order to evaluate Twitter as a networked public sphere there must be a framework that can be applied throughout our critical discourse analysis. The criteria for the framework are an amalgamation of what the researcher perceives as the most salient points raised in the preceding parts of this chapter. They will be outlined here briefly and combined with the research questions in Chapter 4 in order to create the methodology necessary to analyse and evaluate the case study.

The researcher has identified five primary components for a networked public sphere based on the work of the theorists mentioned previously in this chapter. They are access, equality, freedom of expression, relevance to topic and quality of discussion, and adherence to behavioural norms.

Access includes language use, the consequences of the digital divide and the effects of information overload. Equality covers inclusiveness, an absence of hierarchy, the role played by wealth and elitism and structural power. Structural power will incorporate Castells' specifically identified forms of power; networking power, network power, networked power and network-making power. Freedom of expression will focus on the

importance of an array of opinions and the role of the law in advancing or curtailing freedom of expression. Relevance to topic and quality of discussion relates to whether there is filtering or moderation in place. Behavioural norms will include perceptions of the role of reasoning and emotive motivation in debate, the effects of polarisation, the role of sincerity and reciprocity and whether participants are engaging in antagonistic or agonistic relations.

## 3.9  Summary

In this chapter we laid the theoretical foundation for the study by briefly examining the work of Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Chantal Mouffe, Manuel Castells, Yochai Benkler and Lincoln Dahlberg in public sphere and network society theory. By seeking the points at which they intersect, the author has used the work of all six theorists to identify five major points which define a networked public sphere; namely access, equality freedom of expression, relevance to topic and quality of discussion, and adherence to behavioural norms. These are not exhaustive but are specific enough to serve as a framework for the case study in Chapter 5.

**Chapter four:  Research Design and Methodology**

**4.1 Introduction**

As stated in Chapter 1 this research is qualitative in nature, takes the form of a case study and uses critical discourse analysis as its research method. This chapter will first explore the theoretical nature of qualitative research, case studies and critical discourse analysis before showing how these are practically employed within the research presented.

This chapter will serve as the blueprint for the research process to follow and will provide a clear framework from which to proceed.

**4.2 Research purpose**

Social media are increasingly asserting themselves as not only communication platforms but as generators of news content and important societal issues. The purpose of this research is to critically evaluate Twitter in terms of set criteria for a networked public sphere. As social media become increasingly ubiquitous, scholars and academics must navigate, evaluate and analyse the myriad complex ways in which these platforms have and continue to transform social interaction.

Racism is a historical phenomenon which still besets South Africa more than 20 years after the end of apartheid and the introduction of a non-racial democracy. Racism and South Africa's non-racial democracy are antithetical and in order to ensure that racism is eradicated we must understand how it operates discursively and conversely how it is contested discursively. The presence of racial conflict on social media presents a conundrum as public spheres are necessary for democracy but public spheres are also where discursive racism is perpetuated.

In determining whether Twitter constitutes a networked public sphere the researcher hopes to provide some insight into the role that social media plays in furthering non-racial democracy.

**4.3 Research Questions**

The overarching question to be answered is whether or not Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which aids in the enhancement of deliberative democracy? In

order to answer such a complex question a number of specific questions have been formulated. These are:

- Does Twitter meet the criteria for a functional networked public sphere?
- Does Twitter encourage a multiplicity of voices?
- Do contemporary South African racial conflicts on Twitter echo historical racial conflicts?
- Is it possible for subversive counter-hegemonic discourse to take place in a dominant hegemonic context on Twitter?
- Is any form of consensus reached on Twitter when racial conflicts occur?

The research methodology which follows in this chapter will provide the tools with which to answer these questions.

## 4.4 Research design: Qualitative case study

### 4.4.1 Qualitative research approach

According to Wimmer and Dominick, there is no agreed upon definition of what exactly make up qualitative research (2011: 115). Despite this, it is important to delineate some of its aspects in order to show why it is suitable for the study. The qualitative research approach is used to explore and understand the meanings ascribed to social or human problems (Creswell, 2009: 4). The most simplistic way to differentiate between the qualitative and quantitative approaches is to note that for each the role of the researcher, the design of the research, the setting, the measurement instruments used and the theory building aspects will differ (Wimmer &  Dominick, 2011: 116).

Du Plooy (2009:35) provides a comprehensive set of suppositions regarding when and how the qualitative research approach is used. She proposes the following:

- Reality is subjective (ontology)[2]
- Insights into communication, as part of the social world, can be derived from the subjects' perspective (ontology and methodology)[3]

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[2] Ontology refers to beliefs or assumptions about the nature of reality (Du Plooy, 2009:20)
[3] Methodology refers to a research strategy (Du Plooy, 2009:21)

- The research process is essentially, but not only, based on inductive reasoning, which is used to understand patterns in observations (theory)[4]

- Reality can be described in terms of meanings that people attach to communication experiences (epistemology)[5]

- Multiple sources of knowledge exist (for example, values, experiences, cultures) and can be used to interpret and understand a subjective world (epistemology)

- Qualitative themes and categories can be developed as methods to explore and describe meanings communicated in particular contexts (methodology)

- Research questions can guide the types of observations to be made, in order to understand a communication phenomenon (methodology)

- Observations can be analysed thematically and holistically

These provide very important guidelines for further distinguishing qualitative research from quantitative, which is positivist in nature and relies on deduction and the application of objectivity and universal laws (Du Plooy, 2009: 22, 27). The researcher selected a qualitative research approach as the research questions are better suited to the inductive and analytical nature associated with a critical approach.

Inductive reasoning is used to interpret particular situations and to analyse general themes (Creswell, 2009: 4).  The focus on how meaning is created and interpreted requires researchers to grapple with complex social interactions on a number of levels. Racism and the potential for social media to act as a networked public sphere are certainly complex and multi-faceted.

Jensen and Jankowski concur that in many cases, the quantitative approach simply cannot deliver the depth of data needed for research on certain topics (2002: 1).  Stating that "there appears to be an emerging consensus that a great many central research issues cannot be adequately examined through the kinds of questions that are posed by hypothetico-deductive methods and addressed with quantifiable answers" (Jensen & Jankowski, 2002: 1).

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[4] Theory is a generalisation which helps to explain certain phenomena (Du Plooy, 2009: 21)
[5] Epistemology is the science of knowledge (Du Plooy, 2009: 21)

Mason defines qualitative research, loosely, as interpretivist in nature and "based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context… (that) aim(s) to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data" (2002: 3-4).

Interpretivism acknowledges that the researchers own values and knowledge will inevitably influence the research process and that rather than being frowned upon, this subjectivity enhances the research process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:17). It must however be tempered with a type of critical self-scrutiny, which Mason terms active reflexivity (2002: 7). Active reflexivity requires that a researcher consistently review their research process and how their own subjectivity influences the direction and decisions made (Mason, 2002: 7).

Ritchie and Lewis contend that the methods and approaches used in the natural sciences are not suited for certain types of enquiry as they do not allow for human agency or the mediated nature of the social world (2003:17). This does not mean that the research process is haphazard or less carefully undertaken, in order to be effective it must be strategic as well as flexible and contextual (Mason, 2002: 7).

Wimmer and Dominick assert that "the aim of the interpretive paradigm is to understand how people in everyday natural settings create meaning and interpret the events of their world" (2011: 115). The objective is to progress beyond description and to produce explanations or arguments. Mason suggests that qualitative research should be formulated around an intellectual puzzle of sorts which the researcher has a deep desire to understand (2002: 7-8).

### 4.4.2 The case study

A case study is a very popular choice when undertaking qualitative research; because, as Gerring asserts, the product of a well-crafted case study is insight (2007: 7). According to Baškarada, a case study is "a method for learning about a complex instance, based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance, obtained by extensive description and analysis of the instance, taken as a whole and in its context" (2013: VII). It generally involves the rigorous study of a single case (Gerring, 2007: 20). The advantage of this

type of study is that it offers the potential for greater insight into variations in human behaviour (Marczyg, De Matteo & Festinger, 2005: 148).

Flyvbjerg suggests that "good social science is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand" (2006: 242). Woodside suggests that case studies can be used for description, understanding, predicting and control but that ideally it should be used to gain meaningful understanding of the role players, interactions, beliefs and behaviours within a specific case (2010: 6).

Case studies make use of a number of data sources. These include, but are not limited to direct observations, interviews, archival records, documents, participant-observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2012:10).  This study makes use of documents in the form of Tweets, which have been downloaded manually from Twitter's archive.

## 4.5 Research method: Critical discourse analysis

Before we elaborate more on what exactly critical discourse analysis is and how it is used, let us clarify how the rather amorphous term "discourse" will be used throughout this chapter.

Fairclough and Fairclough assert that discourse is the use of language in social contexts (2012: 81). They further elaborate that it consists of signification as a component of  the social process, the language associated with specific fields (such as political discourse), the way of understanding the world from a particular social perspective (such as neo-liberal discourse of transnational capitalism) (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: 81). Language in this context refers to "the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated" (Barker & Jane, 2016: 85). It is also "the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world" (Barker & Jane, 2016: 85).

Wodak and Meyer contend that all practices are practices of production and these practices constitute the spaces in which all social life is produced (2001: 122). Each practice is made up of productive activity, means of production, social relations, social identities, cultural values, consciousness and semiosis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 122).

Semiosis refers to the finding or making of meaning through the mediation of signs or symbols, such as images or words (Given, 2008: 809, Weiss & Wodak, 2003: 131). According to Gee discourse is always situated within relationships of complicity and contestation with other discourses (1999: 21-22). This means they are constantly evolving and often contingent upon changes in other discourses (Gee, 1999: 21-22). This provides social scientists with an unending stream of data particularly in terms of the enduring, intrinsic struggle for definition. This also means that no knowledge or analysis of discourse can ever be complete or substantive because our knowledge of reality can only ever be conditional, fluid and limited (Fairclough, 2003: 14).

Despite these shortcomings, the study of discourse remains an essential endeavour and one which is of particular interest to the researcher. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher believes that critical discourse analysis is a particularly suitable method.

Critical discourse analysis, is at its core, a method of discourse analytical research which grapples with dominance, inequality and the abuse of social power and how this is endorsed, reproduced and resisted within society (Van Dijk, 2001: 352). This clearly aligns with the theoretical framework of the research, based in cultural studies.

According to Barker, much of the work conducted using the contemporary cultural studies paradigm focuses on how the world is socially constructed and the roles that identity and difference play in this construction (2004: 43). It also examines signifying practices, their contexts and the associated relations of power (Barker, 2004: 43). Critical discourse analysis is so important precisely because it encourages the researcher to identify larger societal issues. Van Dijk unpacks this convoluted interplay stating that:

> Certainly, discourse features may only be symptoms or fragmentary enactments of larger problems: inequality, class differences, sexism, racism, power, and dominance of course involve more than text and talk. Yet discourse plays a crucial role in their ideological formulation, in their communicative reproduction, in the social and political decision procedures, and in the institutional management and representation of such issues (e.g., in laws, meetings, media coverage, informal daily talk about them, their reformulation in documents). (Van Dijk, 1985:7)

The quote succinctly encapsulates the powerful role that discourse plays in the creation, reproduction and perpetuation of ideologies. As researchers wrestle with these issues, it becomes more likely that counter-strategies and disruptions to problematic hegemonic ideologies, like racist superiority, can be identified (Van Dijk, 1985:7).

Fairclough and Wodak identify eight central tenets of critical discourse analysis which also demonstrate that the theoretical framework and research method of this study are complementary. These central tenets are: social problems are addressed, power relations are discursive, discourse constitutes society and culture, discourse is ideological work, discourse is historical, the link between text and society is mediated, discourse analysis is interpretative and illustrative and discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:271-280, Van Dijk, 2001:353).

Van Dijk concurs, stating that critical discourse analysis must focus primarily on social problems and political issues, take a multidisciplinary approach, explain discourse structures in terms of social interaction and social structure and focus on the ways in which discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society (2001:353).

Combining all of these Van Dijk (1995: 17-18) suggests that any critical discourse analysis should incorporate the following:

- Problem- or issue oriented
- Critical discourse analysis is an approach position or stance which examines text and talk
- It is inter- or multidisciplinary
- It falls broadly under critical studies
- It pays attention to all levels of discourse
- Also pays attention to other semiotic dimensions
- Focuses on power, dominance and inequality
- Deals with discursively enacted structures of dominance such a class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality
- Aware of underlying ideologies

- Attempts to uncover, reveal or disclose the implicit power relations such as manipulation, legitimation and the manufacture of consent
- Takes a critical and oppositional stance against the elite
- Supports the creation of counter-power and counter-ideologies

Wodak and Meyer provide a number of guidelines for the practical application of critical discourse analysis (2001: 54-56). These are useful but are better suited to the analysis of traditional media discourses where the authors are aligned to a publication or where the data is taken from a specific media source which uses editorial control. In the case of social media it is far more complex as the data comes from hundreds or even thousands of sources and each contributor cannot always be identified. Social media users often use aliases, which makes it difficult to assess the individual poster and makes it necessary to focus on the text and the wider-societal context.

For this reason the researcher has adapted Wodak and Meyer's (2001: 54-56) guidelines in order to align them with the specific social media context.

- Provide general information regarding the media platform
- Provide justification for the sample selection and clearly delineate its boundaries
- Provide socio-cultural context for the selected sample
- Identify themes and specific discursive strategies
- Identify and analyse forms of argumentation
- Explore possible implications and insinuations resulting from the discourse
- Identify (as far as possible, while acknowledging the limitations associated with the platform) the participants in the discourse
- Determine the level of inclusiveness within the sample
- Identify and analyse ideological rhetoric and positioning
- Identify the presence of counter-power and ideologies
- Analyse the potential for the resolution of the problem based on sample only

These guidelines are not exhaustive and are simplified for the purposes of this research. In the next section of this chapter the researcher will show how these guidelines will be practically applied in order to answer the research questions.

## 4.6 Methodological application

### 4.6.1 The sample

The sample for the case study consists of 1000 pages of Tweets using the #pennysparrow as a search term. Twitter unfortunately does not allow users to see how many Tweets have been published for any given hashtag. Prohibitively expensive services do exist, which can be used to extract archived Tweets. On estimate for all archived Tweets for the period 01 January 2016 until 24 August 2017 came to $8610. This is the equivalent of approximately R112 000. Other estimates were similarly unaffordable. This is very unfortunate for researchers wishing to obtain actual metrics.

The researcher was however able to use the basic search functionality on Twitter to download a sample of 1000 printer pages of Tweets dated from when the story first entered the news on 4 and 5 January 2016. The sample size is large but the nature of Tweets is such that many are visual in nature and many are repeats or "ReTweets". The sample size is sufficient to gain insight into the discussion with approximately four to eight Tweets per page.

Facebook has a more comprehensive search function than Twitter but Twitter was selected because it is a unified platform whereas Facebook posts can originate from individual Facebook pages or from posts made by individuals on specific pages. This means that one could effectively search for posts more likely to have certain ideological or political alignments. It would not be difficult to find racist posts on a Facebook page dedicated to white nationalism. Using the hashtag as a search parameter on Twitter allows the researcher to conduct targeted but random sampling.

While searching it is impossible to tell whether all the results will be from a single cultural group or voice specific opinions. This makes it more likely that the sample could represent the sentiments of a variety of Twitter users. For the purposes of this research this was an important factor in deciding on the sample size and which social media platform would be used to obtain the sample.

## 4.6.2 Analytic strategies

The research problem requires an evaluation of race conflicts on social media in order to determine whether social media can reasonably be considered a networked public sphere. When considered collectively the answers to the sub questions will allow the researcher to reach a conclusion as to whether Twitter meets the requirements of a networked public sphere.

The practical application guidelines outlined in section 4.5 can now be tailored even further to answer the specific research questions:

- Identify subversive potential via presence or lack of counterpublics
- Identify themes and specific discursive strategies
- Identify and analyse ideological rhetoric and positioning
- Identify and analyse forms of argumentation
- Explore possible implications resulting from the discourse
- Analyse the potential for the resolution of the problem

When combined, these guidelines will allow us to answer individual sub questions and to incorporate the criteria from Chapter 2; access, equality, freedom of expression, relevance to topic and quality of discussion and adherence to behavioural norms.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter has systematically explored the methodology that underpins this study. It has clarified why the researcher has selected a qualitative case study using critical discourse analysis to answer the chosen research questions. By outlining the characteristics and advantages of each aspect of the methodology the researcher has shown that there is an alignment between the theoretical framework and methodology .

Thereafter the researcher has fused the core elements of a networked public sphere as identified in Chapter 2 with the research questions in Chapter 1 and the guidelines for the application of critical discourse analysis in order to create a unified analytical strategy.

**Chapter Five: Case study**

**5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of selected Tweets which feature the hashtag #PennySparrow. The analysis will broadly examine the topics below, which will inform the researcher's findings in Chapter 6:

- Identify themes and specific discursive strategies

- Identify and analyse forms of argumentation

- Identify subversive potential via presence or lack of counterpublics

- Identify and analyse ideological rhetoric and positioning

- Explore possible implications resulting from the discourse

- Analyse the potential for the resolution or consensus

**5.2 Review of methodology**

The methodology employed in this qualitative case study is critical discourse analysis as discussed in Chapter 4. In practical terms the researcher studied approximately 1000 pages of Tweets using the search term #PennySparrow. The analysis will address the questions above as a means to address the research problem; whether or not social media can be considered a networked public sphere, which aids in the enhancement of deliberative democracy.

The researcher inductively sought to identify themes and patterns. The Tweets were analysed in terms of their relation to the specific Penny Sparrow incident as well as how they reflected race relations broadly.

Once themes and strategies were identified, the researcher selected Tweets to serve as examples. In order to rationalise and simplify the discussion a tell-and-show format was selected. Discussions are therefore directly followed by related examples. The latter sections of the chapter reflect on the examples in their entirety and specific examples are therefore not provided.

## 5.3 Limitations of methodology

The methodology employed within this research has a number of limitations. These limitations must be acknowledged as they are inherent to this type of research but they are not insurmountable.

The researcher was not able to look at every Tweet relating to Penny Sparrow and as such the analysis does not claim to be definitive. As with any form of interpretive research, the researcher's subjectivities will influence this analysis. The theoretical framework and methodology discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 are there to guide the researcher.

When looking at a 140 character Tweet it is impossible to gain full insight into the identity and motivations of the Tweeter. Many Tweets are made by accounts that use fake names, nicknames or are posting as an entity rather than an individual. This means that the sincerity of every Tweet cannot be guaranteed and trolling cannot be ruled out.

Space limitations also require that the researcher compresses complex issues. This does not allow for comprehensive exploration and analysis but is sufficient to provide an overview of the issues covered. Future studies would benefit from a more intensive analysis of the sample material.

Despite these limitations, critical discourse analysis nonetheless provides the best tools for a case study of this scope and nature.

## 5.4. Key concepts revisited

In Chapter 1 hegemony and counter-hegemony, racism, othering and non-racialism and power were introduced as key concepts. It is useful to revisit these briefly before proceeding.

Hegemony was described as the product of a negotiated construction of political and ideological consensus which involves both dominant and dominated sections of society (Strinati, 2004:153). Castells suggested that information has historically been a fundamental source of power and counter-power as well as domination and social change because it is also a vehicle for ideology (Castells, 2007: 238). The researcher stated that discourse is a vessel for hegemony in as much as all discourse is a site of struggle for the power to create meaning.

Barker and Jane further assert that hegemony is inherently unstable and must be understood in relational terms (2016: 77). Hegemony, in this regard, is:

> A temporary settlement and series of alliances between social groups that is won and not given. Further, it needs to be constantly re-won and re-negotiated. Thus culture becomes a terrain of conflict and struggle over meanings. Consequently, hegemony is not a static entity; it is marked by a series of changing discourses and practices intrinsically bound up with social power (Barker & Jane, 2016: 77).

Racism can be described as a belief system (or ideology) which uses binary logic to assign positive and negative characteristics to individuals and groups based on their perceived racial identity. In South Africa colonialism and apartheid were characterised by the systematic oppression of black people by white people, in other words, racism was a hegemonic discourse. Othering is a process in which perceptions of sameness and difference are employed in a complex psychological process (Rattansi, 2007:115). The other is always viewed as inferior.

In deconstructing racism, one seeks to uncover the relationship between binaries, the rhetorical strategies which work against the logic of the text's arguments and ultimately to expose the tension between what a text means to say and what it is constrained to mean (Barker & Jane, 2016: 40).

Non-racialism is a belief system which recognises that racism and othering are divisive practices and ideologies which do not conform to basic democratic principles. In South Africa, non-racialism forms the basis of our constitutional democracy but, as the case study will suggest, this does not mean that race simply ceased to be a fundamental part of how South Africans relate to each other.

Power relations are central to hegemonic struggles around racism. In Chapter 1 four forms of power were identified; economic power, political power, coercive power and symbolic power (Thompson, 1995: 12-18). The interplay between hegemony, racism and power relations will be explored as a major component of this critical discourse analysis.

**5.5 Themes**

The researcher identified a number of themes among the Tweets. Often the themes were contradictory or expressed completely polarised views. The list is in no way exhaustive but the researcher identified the following themes:

- All or most white people are racist
- Not all white people are racist
- No one cares about racism against white people
- Why aren't white people addressing racism?
- The Democratic Alliance is racist and protects or hides racists within its ranks
- The Democratic Alliance is not racist
- Racism should be criminalised/ there should be harsher punishment for racism
- Call to action / call for dialogue / call for unity
- There is no rainbow nation
- How much longer should black people tolerate racism?
- Black Twitter wants to talk to you
- (Black) people are over-reacting (again)
- Threats

**Individual themes**

**5.5.1 All or most white people are racist**

Generalising is a common feature throughout this analysis. Regardless of the flaws in logic and lack of nuance involved in generalising around complex issues such as racism, it is nonetheless a pervasive feature. Penny Sparrow is a white woman who is affiliated with the Democratic Alliance. Her racist utterances on social media went viral and a common and not entirely unexpected reaction from some Twitter-users was to generalise beyond the specific case. Some Twitter users thus concluded that all whites are racist and/or that the Democratic Alliance is a racist political party.

There is a reason for this type of reaction to racism in South Africa. The apartheid regime was perpetuated by white people and there remains a deep mistrust of political parties who are not the African National Congress (the political party associated with liberation). The Democratic Alliance, a party with largely white people as its support

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base, is therefore perceived by some as focused on white issues and as a party which may seek to bring back apartheid.

There are deep historical and ideological reasons for these beliefs and the researcher is not making a value judgement in this regard, merely identifying a recurring theme and providing some historical context. We will unpack the perceptions of the Democratic Alliance aspect specifically further on in this section but first let us look at whiteness and how it is perceived in the Tweets sampled.

In the Tweets below, participants associate #PennySparrow with the idea that white people are still or have always been racist.

**Nkosinathi Mokoena** @PercyMokoena · 4 Jan 2016
Truth be told, Black folks are shocked by #PennySparrow utterance mean while its a usual dinner talk or social gatherings of white folks.

**Lucky Years** @lucky_years · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow you're probably lost dear. Africa is for Black Africans. So be excused and go back to where other white pigs like you belong

**Nkosenye T Mathunjwa** @tnmathunjwa · 4 Jan 2016
At this rate I think someone put the Truth Serum in the water #JustinVanVuuren #ChrisHart #PennySparrow #CarronNadauldGouws

**Tafadzwa Wakatama** @TMVWakatama · 4 Jan 2016
So you liked it better when you could be openly racist? #PennySparrow #JustineVanVuuren

**Keri** @mynameiskeri_21
I liked Facebook and Twitter better when I could bitch without ending up on the 19h00 News.

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## 5.5.2 Not all white people are racist

Conversely, there were Twitter users who used the hashtag to assert that not all white people think like Penny Sparrow. This assertion was illustrated in two ways primarily. The first is a direct assertion by a white Twitter user that they are not racist. Secondly there are users who recognise that some or many white people are in fact racist but assert that they, personally, are not. The third less common adherent to this theme takes the form of a Black Twitter user stating that some white people are racist while others are not.
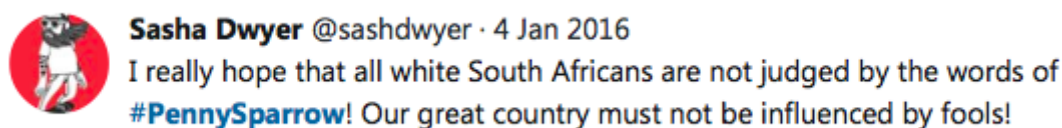
**Lee** @Angielee_vr · 4 Jan 2016
This woman makes me even more ashamed of my skin.  #PennySparrow

**Pike** @gareth6pike · 4 Jan 2016
I know #racism like #PennySparrow HURTS and it galls me every time. Boat to Australia waiting. Me: not racist. Staying. #letstryfix

**Zeb Daz Makwala** @ZebDaz · 4 Jan 2016
"@Mpopi__: There are 2 types of people in SA, your #PennySparrow then there are your Kori Hawkins "

04 Aug 2015 at 2:48am · Edited · 



Emma got to pick out a new babydoll this weekend and took the baby with us EVERYWHERE! Tonight at the store a stranger said hi to Emma and then laughingly asked me "she has a black babydoll?!" I was shocked. I stood there and just stared at the lady and then snapped back "yes she does, that is the one she chose!" I was so infuriated that in front of Emma someone was going to act as though there was something wrong with her choosing a baby that looked different than her. Children are born with unconditional love and I intend on raising my child to love people of all races and colors. Emma doesn't see color, she sees people and I hope the shitty people in this world never have an impact on that.

**albert combrink** @albertcombrink · 4 Jan 2016
Sadly there is a #PennySparrow #JustinVanVuuren in almost every white family in SA. I hate family events.

**City Press Online** ✓ @City_Press
First #PennySparrow, then #JustinVanVuuren, and #ChrisHart: SA entered the #RacismMustFall battle with vigour: ow.ly/WABbr

**Chris to da Crossd** @ChrisCrossd · 4 Jan 2016
Dear stupid white persons saying things that make da rest of us look kak,voetsek man! #PennySparrow #RacismMustFall

**Darren Olivier** @DazzaRPD · 4 Jan 2016
Ms #PennySparrow, your words and attitude do not belong in South Africa, let alone the world. Regards, South Africans everywhere

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**Kim Peters** @kimmipeters · 4 Jan 2016
Am ashamed #PennySparrow #wearethesame #fuckracism #NoToRacism #RacismMustFall

**Clarence Watts** @clarencesdb · 4 Jan 2016
Have you read what #PennySparrow said? You agree with her? It's not opinion, it's racists filth. It's just not on!

**simaxis** @simaxis
Replying to @NickolausBauer

@NickolausBauer @clarencesdb Her opinion is hers. The chaos on Durban beaches  a fact ,the filth is a fact =not racial but lack of manners

### 5.5.3 What about racism against white people?

In these Tweets we find white people who are joining the discussion to argue that black people are also capable of racism. The common trend is to show comments which speak ill of white people or to refer to threats against or past crimes in which the victims are white. This type of comment does not engage with the issue at hand, but instead seeks to diminish it in favour of what the participant views as a greater injustice. This reflects the "race trouble" described by Durrheim, Mtose and Brown (2011) in Chapter 2.

In this case the participants feel that they are the true victims and that their concerns are being ignored in favour of issues which they view as being of lesser importance. In any discussion of racism in South Africa this sentiment is commonly expressed and in many cases causes deeper polarisation around race issues. It creates a situation where participants are talking against one another instead of engaging in issues.

**JC MacFarlane** @Macfarlane123 · 4 Jan 2016

We can forget that these will trend or make the news. Or what? #PennySparrow



**EFF Official Account** @EconFreedo... 4h
EFF statement on anti-black racism in South Africa effighters.org.za/eff-statement-...

↩   ⇄ 84   ♥ 47

than to destroy you and the unicellular body you evolved from, fuck White people' and 'I hate White people', there is more to those statements than blanketed, unprovoked bitterness. There is an underlying understand that maybe you don't see that I assume is evident.

I hate White people', I'm saying I hate that I have to be compared to you in order to get any recognition. I'm saying that I hate the fact that everything that I do is judged by your standard. I hate that no matter where I go, I will be scrutinized based on your principles. I hate that I cannot exist without being subjugated to you. I hate that you don't have to think about these things on a regular basis.

I hate White people', I'm saying I hate that I get told any time I mention race or racism or racial inequality that I should 'get 'over it' and that I'm being 'too sensitive' and that racism 'doesn't exist anymore' or that I'm not 'affected' by it because I'm not a slave.

I hate White people', I'm saying I hate that when something political is deemed unsavory, it is quicklycomparedtoslaverywithoutamoment'shesitation is even vaguely appropriate in any form for any reason.

I hate White people', I'm saying I hate that when a White person commits a crime it can be excused with a defense like 'he was too rich to know any better' while a PoC who commits a crime of lesser damage will get more time. I'm saying I hate that the prison industry is built as a legalized form of slavery, and that it is fueled primarily by racial inequality and injustice.

I hate White people', I'm saying I hate that blatant displaysof

**IZWELETHU** @mohmedsbu

@EconFreedomZA fighters attack. One settler one bullet.  KILL THE BOER KILL THE FARMER. MABAGODUKE.

1:59 PM · 04 Jan 16

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**A C C E L E R A T E** @WallWatcher1983 · 4 Jan 2016

More Blacks advocating violence over "Racist" tweets. #PennySparrow



**Chris** @Mukwevho44
When black people find #PennySparrow

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**Hate left's hate EUV** @ExUnitateVires · 4 Jan 2016

But hey...let's demonize #PennySparrow instead

**IOL News** ✔ @IOL
Couple found dead at farm in Kimberley dlvr.it/DB3vp7 | Independent Online

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**Daniel Blade Amos** @blade19941 · 4 Jan 2016

#PennySparrow This guy is calling for the massacre of whites. Can we get some noise about this aswell?

Thapelo Iggy Mathe This things need to be massacred #pinkpigs ⬅────
Like · Reply · Just now

**Tracey Chananie** @TraceyChananie · 4 Jan 2016
So #PennySparrow made the news calling people monkeys - will this person make the news for threatening death?

**Mengameli Megar King Dladla**
2 hrs · 🌐

Tried to call this pink bitch Penny Sparrow but I couldn't find her. I wanted to put her in her place. I wanted her to know that he's not a South African and she'll never be, in fact there is no white African.

They stole our land, killed our grandparents after abusing them for years. Now they are calling us Monkeys in the name of reconciliation brought to us by the ANC.

We are fucken.

Pink pigs must die
Africa belongs to black people.
There's no White African
They must go back to Europe.
I personally hate them.
#BullShit

**SPURious** @Von_WR · 4 Jan 2016
It's only racist when whites says so. #PennySparrow

**Martie van Riebeeck** @martie777
What about this DA?? No racism because it is a black man calling them monkeys?#RacismMustFall

**SA-News Sports** @SANewsCom · 4 Jan 2016
Where is the outrage? Why is the media quiet when it comes to black on white racism? #PennySparrow... fb.me/3vCDyskXL

### 5.5.4 Why aren't white people addressing racism?

This question follows naturally from the previous theme. In this case, the Twitter users below lament the perceived lack of speaking out by white people on this issue.

**aperiozar** @aperiozar · 4 Jan 2016
They won't. Because they see #PennySparrow in themselves.

No to #ZumaMustFall

> **Thando Mkhize** @ChefThando
> #RacismMustFall,Im still waiting 4 white fb & twitter friends to comment on #PennySparrow #ChrisHart nje like they do on #ZumaMustFall

**Lerato Moleko** @KoenaMo · 4 Jan 2016
So when is @afriforum taking #PennySparrow 2 the SA Human Rights Commission?

**Hloni.M** @hloni_maniers · 4 Jan 2016
Just told this white girl at work about the whole Penny saga and she is so unbothered her response was "oh ok" #PennySparrow

**Lela** @Siyabulb · 4 Jan 2016
#pennysparrow hi white people do you remember 2010 when you all were hanging out in Soweto. Or was it all a farce?

**Lela** @Siyabulb · 4 Jan 2016
#pennysparrow I'm not saying that you guys are racist or anything,  it's just that I am not sure whether you're for this country?

**5.5.5 The Democratic Alliance is racist and protects or hides racists within its ranks**

As mentioned in 2.1, Penny Sparrow was identified as a card-carrying member of the Democratic Alliance. This raised concerns for Twitter users, who wondered whether the Democratic Alliance was synonymous with racism or was knowingly harbouring racists.

**Assata Shakur** @KaraboNkabinde · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow has lost @Our_DA more votes than #KholerBarnard 4 any1 who believes myth SA whites have changed *Silenced; yes... Changed; No*

**baby boy** @YolaMafuna · 4 Jan 2016
"**#PennySparrow** DA has laid criminal charges against her, saying the racist comments have no place in SA society."We still won't vote for you

**Joe NCHA™** @JoeNcha · 4 Jan 2016
@MmusiMaimane , broer wa ka I think you were set up to fail. Electing you leader of DA was like putting lipstick on a pig **#PennySparrow**

**Modibe Modiba** @mmodiba10 · 4 Jan 2016
What **#PennySparrow** said represents what many whites within the DA feel about black South Africans.

### 5.5.6 The Democratic Alliance is not racist

The converse of this assertion was also present. From these examples we begin to see that the Tweets reflect a typical discussion in which one view is presented and participants either agree with the view expressed or reject it.

**Pike** @gareth6pike · 4 Jan 2016
DA has given intention to suspend **#PennySparrow**. Not. A. Racist. Party. #southafrica #RacismMustFall

### 5.5.7 Racism should be criminalised / there should be harsher punishment for racism

Many Twitter users using the hashtag asked whether it was time for harsher measures to be taken against racism. In Chapter 6, we will briefly show how these calls for change actually influenced government and civil society, resulting in concrete action. This also sparked much debate regarding how far freedom of speech is constitutionally protected and at what point free speech becomes hate speech.

**#RememberMarikana** @LiberalsAreNaiv · 4 Jan 2016
#SAHRC is a toothless commission, #racism should've been declared criminal offense ages ago🙏🙏 **#PennySparrow** , #ChrisHart, #JustinVanVuuren

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**Ravi Bling**        @Ravi007_SA · 4 Jan 2016
She must leave SA! #LetHerGo

#PennySparrow #PennyMustFall as well as her filthy counterparts #vanVuuren
😡😤

> **eNCA** ✔ @eNCA
> #PennySparrow Investigation will be of Crimen Injuria for infringing the
> dignity of all and for dehumanising black South Africans.

**Deb** @Deb_spurs · 4 Jan 2016
It's about time people like #PennySparrow are locked up. Freedom of speech
doesn't mean say what you like with no regard for others rights!

**FXI** @FXISouthAfrica · 4 Jan 2016
2/5s16 of the SA Const guarantees freedom of expression bt CLEARLYexcludes
that which advocates hatred on the grounds of race! #PennySparrow

**Dario Milo** @Dariomilo · 4 Jan 2016
Serious & deserved repercussions for #PennySparrow - cld also face Equality
Court claims & crimen injuria  charges

> **IOL News** ✔ @IOL
> SAHRC to probe racist remarks dlvr.it/DB4nPX | Independent Online

**Linda M** @LindaMasanabo3 · 4 Jan 2016
Okay fine. Racism should be considered as a crime. She should be arrested.
#PennySparrow

> **zobo.co.za** @zobonews · 4 Jan 2016                                    ⌄
> SAHRC to probe racist remarks The SAHRC said it will look into comments made
> by #PennySparrow, #ChrisHart and #Jus... ift.tt/1mARYgh
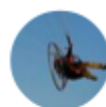
**Dave Hardingham** @davehardingham · 4 Jan 2016
Replying to @MapsMaponyane

@MapsMaponyane Hate Speech is illegal in South Africa and #PennySparrow
should be arrested.

**TeeKay wa Lekhosi** @Tshwaro_K · 4 Jan 2016

#RacismMustFall what's wrong with these racists, It's time #RACISM is referred to as criminalism  #PennySparrow abused freedom of speech

💬 1          ♻ 1

**KHOLOFELO MASELELA** @KMaselela · 4 Jan 2016

It will be very good for anti black racism to be a crime. Thank you EFF effighters.org.za/eff-statement-...

#PennySparrow #RacismMustFall #ChrisHart

### 5.5.8 Call to action / call for dialogue / call for unity

A number of Tweets using the hashtag expressed calls to action or a desire for South Africans to come together against racism. These Tweets were not antagonistic like many of the other Tweets used as examples in this analysis. Instead the posters acknowledged a societal problem and voiced a desire to eradicate the problem.

**Non-existent** @sinesiphi · 4 Jan 2016

Oh color will never change PROUD BLACK WOMAN P✊👌🙆 #PennySparrow #RacismMustFall

**Ulrich J van Vuuren** ✔ @UlrichJvV

Replying to @UlrichJvV

Racism is something you learn, not something you are born with. #PennySparrow

**BK** @BrendanKSECMNKY · 4 Jan 2016

At the very least im inspired to see white and black standing united against this twit.  #PennySparrow #RacismMustFall

**Les Ego** @lesegorgeous · 4 Jan 2016

No more silence enough is enough! #PennySparrow #JustinVanVuuren #ChrisHart #RacismMustFall #ClosetRacismMustAlsoFall #BlackDignityMatters

**Jonah Cash** @JonahCash1 · 4 Jan 2016

Just a little thing about this #PennySparrow thing. Don't fall in the same trap and be a racist or incite violence. That would be stupid!!

**Dangerous** @HollymusicSA

If we as white South Africans do not come out against the comments made by #PennySparrow then we are a part of the problem.

**Brett FISH Anderson** @BrettFishA · 4 Jan 2016

The explosion response to the #PennySparrow incident was great to see, but this has to be our daily choice when we see racism #NotOnMyWatch

**Farren Roper** @FarrenRoper · 4 Jan 2016

#Racism is for the intellectually and morally bankrupt. We should all speak out against the abhorrent #PennySparrow s of the world

**Zimerian Mokholoane** @Zimerian · 4 Jan 2016

Replying to @RealAndileZulu

@RealAndileZulu Racism is a root cause of all inequalities you see in South Africa, hence we should sort it 1st @Etiennefdt #PennySparrow

**IG: Roger.delange** @rogerd1977 · 4 Jan 2016

4 a while i been saying we need a national dialigue re:race issues in SA #ChrisHart #PennySparrow #JustinVanVuuren r only tip of the iceberg

**Victor G Fredlund** @Dr_Fredlund · 4 Jan 2016

#PennySparrow So very sad! Labelling people as not human. There is actually only one race.- humanity. Sociopolitical divides are false.

### 5.5.9 There is no rainbow nation

These Tweets reflect a sad, angry or defeated perspective on the issue of racism in South Africa. They are not as optimistic or resolution-oriented as the previous Tweets and instead assert that the rainbow nation is a myth and that the remnants of apartheid still linger ominously.  They recognise the problem but see no solution in sight.

**Claire Baloyi** @Melaningalore · 4 Jan 2016
I know two wrongs don't make a right but I an slowly beginning to hate white people #PennySparrow #GarethCliff

**loraine tulleken** @tulleken1 · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow is  a spin off of the apartheid regime. She has no concept of  the hurt she as caused

**Chelsea Da Gama** @Chelsea_Dagama · 4 Jan 2016
White people always predicting this "civil war" like we want to attack them. It's this #PennySparrow crap that makes us mad!

**Faiz Jardine** @Jarrodin · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow political freedom, economic freedom but when psychological freedom from the illusion of white supremacy?

**__sweetness** @Neo_Sedibe · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow
Funny how racism doesn't shock me anymore. Been through many encounters and feel conditioned ( positively)

**Smurph Ndlovu** @Murphonix · 4 Jan 2016
After the #PennySparrow, #ChrisHart and #CarronNadauldGouws ppl wl finally know what #SteveBiko was talking about



"Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude."

Steven Biko

### 5.5.10 How much longer should black people tolerate racism?

These Tweets also do not offer a way forward, instead they suggest fatigue and that submission to the status quo is no longer an option for marginalised South Africans. They do however raise important questions about how South Africans relate to each other in the post-Apartheid era.

> **AzanianMaverick** @AzanianMaverick · 4 Jan 2016
> That blacks in this country have never pulled a #CharlieHebdo on racists, shows just how much they tolerate this nonsense #PennySparrow

> **Loner †** @Ladylatta · 4 Jan 2016
> #JustinVanVuuren #RacismMustFall #PennySparrow ok lets look at it like this for how long are black people supposed to forgive ?

### 5.5.11 Black Twitter wants to talk to you

In this scenario, it is suggested that the Black Twitter collective is looking for racists in order to "talk to them". It is not clear if the suggestion of violence is intended literally or whether it should be viewed as a metaphorical desire to confront racism head-on rather than simply allowing it to exist unchecked. The posting of Sparrow's personal information was lauded by some and condemned by others.

> **Marwale J Phaahla** @Kgoshi_Moloto · 4 Jan 2016
> Somebody should have warned #PennySparrow about "blackTwitter" you shall be ripped apart there!!

> **Sese** @SeseTetiwe · 4 Jan 2016
> I am actually so disappointed at how we handled #PennySparrow. There was absolutely no need to distribute her address & ID number.

> **Ndzundza** @Comm_Bobo · 4 Jan 2016
> Black Twitter is baying for 'blood'. They are too angry. #PennySparrow

### 5.5.12 (Black) people are over-reacting (again)

This use of the hashtag reflects a recurring South African race relations theme; that of the so-called "race card". In these scenarios white people take exception to what they

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perceive as the continued use of race as a motivation for decisions or as an explanation for events or circumstances.

 This is most simply summarised as "why can't 'they' just move on?" or "why do 'they' always have to talk about race?" It is a significant source of tension among South Africans which emerges frequently in political discussions.

**Laurie Pieters-James** @LauriePieters · 4 Jan 2016
Don't people blow the biggest load of rubbish out of proportion. People we have real problems in the world. #PennySparrow

**Keri** @mynameiskeri_21 · 4 Jan 2016
Whilst I am dead against racism of any kind, surely the posting of a rant shouldn't be taken to the extent that it has? #PennySparrow

**SPURious** @Von_WR · 4 Jan 2016
Why are they all offended? Was #PennySparrow talking about all blacks? I guess, if the shoe fits.

**Lizzy Katie Damon** @katiedamon1 · 4 Jan 2016
Comments of the likes of @jo_annstrauss & others saying ignore #PennySparrow Is the same as those that say apartheid get over it. #Racism

### 5.5.13 Threats

Threats were not a common theme but they were present. In this case it is not possible to ascertain whether these are simply expressions of anger and hurt or whether there is actual intent. They do not suggest any resolution but resort to the idea that the problem should be eliminated or obliterated through force instead. These are problematic however as they constitute incitement, which is not protected speech according to the South African Constitution.

**#RagnarLothbrok** @king_damane89 · 4 Jan 2016
**#PennySparrow** ... What a desperate bitch ,for what ? Attention #Rhaaaa ,may she be raped !!!

**Syko_iAmLegend** @Syko_Mot · 4 Jan 2016
**#PennySparrow** @Jawitz Properties tyres and petrol were invented for such reasons. Mugabe might not be wrong after all.

**Adelaide Mthiyane** @adelaidemthiya1 · 4 Jan 2016
U filthy ugly white woman, as long as live in our beloved country, our beautiful black faces will b all over ....die bitch **#PennySparrow**

## 5.6 Discursive strategies

In this discussion we focus on two subversive strategies which are prevalent on Twitter. These are the use of memes and images and the use of humour. As stated in Chapter 3, Black Twitter is known for its incisive biting wit and fearless ability to tackle even the most unpleasant of topics.

Memes are images which are shared across the Internet and have a tendency to become viral[6]. They often use a common image or catchphrase but incorporate slight alterations. Many memes are globally recognisable but as is the case in this case study memes can also be discourse specific. Barker and Jane provide a more complex definition of a meme suggesting that "a meme is the smallest cultural item that is replicated through the human capacity for imitation" (2016: 478).

Memes in particular have become synonymous with digital interactions and they facilitate viral sharing and create exposure to issues which people may not want to engage with through masses of text or academic jargon. They simplify weighty issues without compromising the integrity of the message and are an increasingly prominent subversive discursive strategy. The use of humour without images serves a similar purpose.

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[6] He term viral is used when an image, text or video is shared by a large number of individuals on the Internet.

## 5.6.1 Memes and use of images

#PennySparrow is synonymous with one word specifically: monkeys. The bulk of memes and images found in this case study relate to this term whilst others refer to pop culture such as the television shows *The Big Bang Theory* (2007– present) and *Game of Thrones* (2011 – present) as well as Captain Jack Sparrow from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (2003 – present). The numerous examples from  American pop culture speaks to the prevalence of Western  cultural influences  in South African public discourses.

The use of images and memes reflect many of the themes listed above. They often serve as a form of re-appropriating insults or derogatory sentiments, which is a powerful subversive act in itself.

The researcher identified four major themes relating to the use of image and memes:

- Monkeys in various moods
- "We just want to talk"
- Pop culture references and adaptation of existing memes
- We are all the same

### i.    Monkeys in various moods

The comparison between black people and monkeys is not without specific connotations. Sparrow's assertion that monkeys are cute and naughty evokes a historical dehumanising and paternalistic narrative (Wicks, 2016a). The comparison of black people to monkeys is the result of stereotyping. Stereotyping employs "vivid but simple representations that reduce persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, characteristics" (Barker & Jane, 2016: 313).

The images below reflect a range of emotional responses from bemusement to outrage. Just as LGBTQIA activists re-appropriated the term "queer" as a tool for self-definition, so the use of monkey images in the #PennySparrow Tweets is a subversive discursive strategy.

The images also represent the symbolic reclamation and transformation of the pejorative. The subversion occurs when the insult is deprived of its power over its

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intended victims. Individuals recognise that Penny Sparrow's assertions are without merit and laughable and their responses reflect this.

If the discursive arena is a site for struggle over signification, the re-appropriation of the monkey image suggests that the victims refuse to relinquish their power. The use of the complementary hasthag #Racismmustfall reinforces the notion that this type of subversive reaction is part of a larger anti-racism narrative.

NOPI @MubaiwaNopi · 4 Jan 2016
you must know #PennySparrow

BITCH

I'M FABULOUS

Onthatile Seekane @onthatile_s · 4 Jan 2016
Just want to glorify the intelligence of #PennySparrow

PHARAOH Ramses @PHARAOH_JODECI · 4 Jan 2016
First selfie of the year... Shout-out to #PennySparrow

BITCH, I KNOW YOU LYIN'

ZIP

BUT CONTINUE...

weknowmemes

NOPI @MubaiwaNopi · 4 Jan 2016
you must know #PennySparrow

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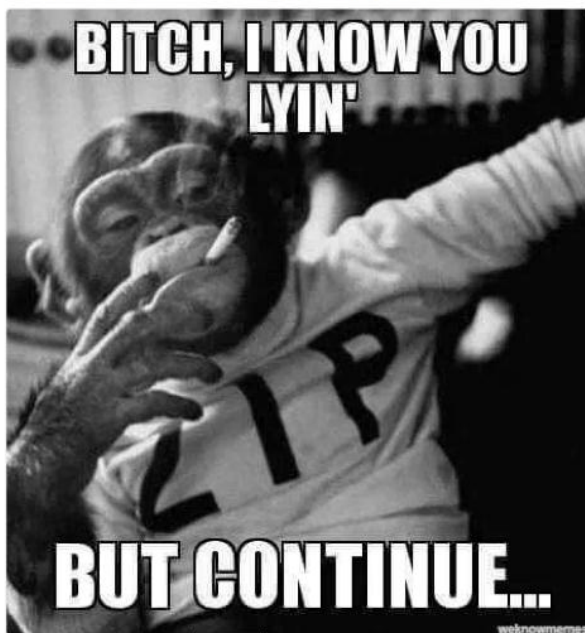
**Macua wa ma Guerrila** @KamauMacua · 4 Jan 2016
Chilling in traffic right now like :/ I have bananas waiting to be peeled at my cave!
#RacismMustFall #PennySparrow



**Kenji Milano** @KenjiMilano · 4 Jan 2016
This was me at the beach #PennySparrow didn't you like how I got out ...



**Free King Dalindyebo** @Spiwo · 4 Jan 2016
I think I must go to sleep now. A long day it was. I've eaten my peanuts already.
Goodnight #PennySparrow!



**Sir-Ksnacker MacPooe** @kgosipooe · 4 Jan 2016
Did she just say the M word well this is my response to you. #PennySparrow



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### ii.    "We just want to talk"

Black Twitter wanting to discuss Penny Sparrow's post with her is a recurring theme throughout the case study. The doxing[7] Tweets were featured in the case study provide Penny Sparrow's personal information with the express intention of inciting others to contact or visit her.

The suggested threat of violence is possibly a cause for concern although it is not clear whether these are just an expression of pain, frustration and anger or if there is any real threat to Penny Sparrow's safety. As previously stated these could also represent a desire to confront the issue of racism forcefully.

It is not possible to ascertain the particular meaning intended by the poster but the presence of humour and violent threats within Tweets, may simply reflect a desensitised and brutalised society.



Davi @davikunga · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow .... monkeys just wana talk to u please!.



Pearl Motaung @pearlmotaung · 4 Jan 2016
Hope you have enough bananas. We just want to talk and taste some peanuts.
#PennySparrow #RacismMustFall #racism

Hi Penny. We're outside. Please answer the door..

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[7] Doxing occurs when a group or individual reveals another individual or group's private information. This is frowned upon in digital spaces and contravenes Twitters usage rules – see the section on forms of argumentation on page 104.

**Biso L'bitz** @BisoLbitz · 4 Jan 2016
"When I find #PennySparrow" 😂😂😂😂😂 - my sister and have been cackling for an hour!

**Tasha_Mac** @T_dawg555 · 4 Jan 2016
I wonder if #PennySparrow realises there is black people all over the world. Where u gonna run to???

Zimbabwe police would like to have a word with #pennySparrow

**hlayisanani salani** @hlayisalani · 4 Jan 2016
I just did the same"@blak_terrorist: The watsapp I just sent #PennySparrow they gon learn today! "

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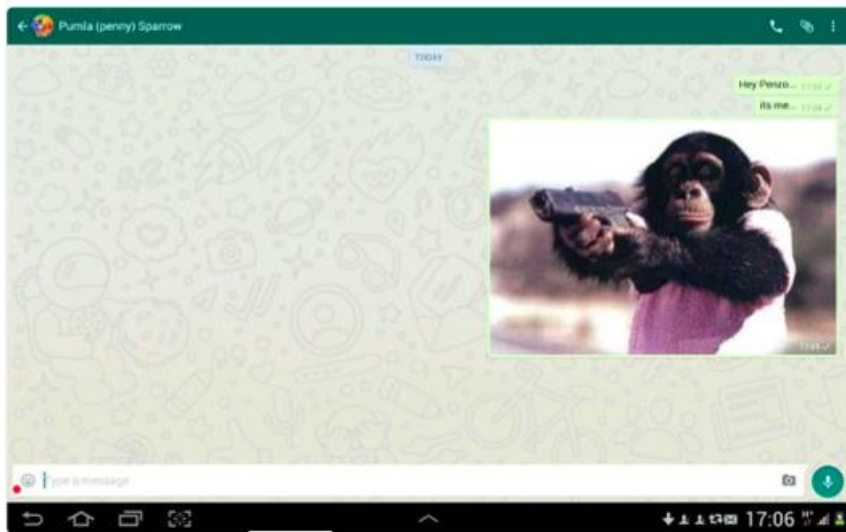
### iii.    Pop culture references and existing memes

The references to popular culture are fascinating as they draw on contemporary
international references whilst reflecting on local issues. This suggests that South
African Black Twitter has been inspired by and incorporated elements from hegemonic
Western media discourses.

In Chapter 2, Haffajee suggested that the American Civil Rights movement had strongly
influenced the South African struggle, but according to her the more recent borrowing
is a different type of American influence which is not emancipatory in nature (2015: 5-
6).

 In the first Tweet, the image references popular American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*
which features a character named Penny. It cross references the notion that Black
Twitter is looking for Penny Sparrow.

Zani Prinsloo @zaniprinsloo · 4 Jan 2016
Wake up, #PennySparrow

Penny, Penny, Penny.

The second Tweet makes reference to Johnny Depp's character, Jack Sparrow, in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film franchise.  It cross references the denials from white Twitter users seeking to distance themselves from Penny Sparrow.



Biggupta_khumza @kwl_daddy · 4 Jan 2016
"@JasonMcCall01: White people be like #pennysparrow "lol

I AM NOT RELATED

TO THAT WOMAN!

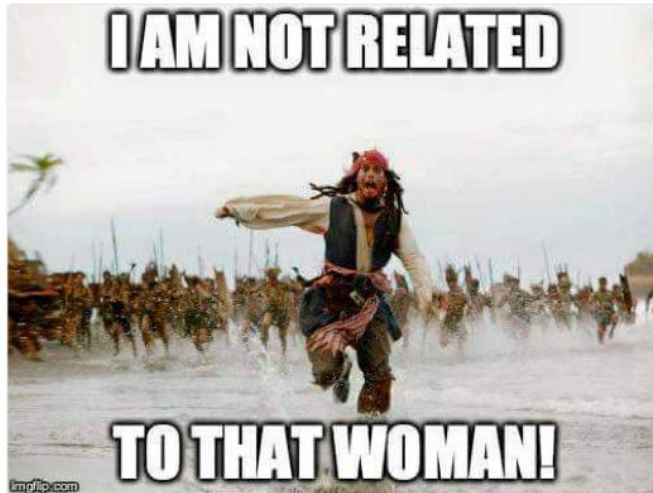The third Tweet shows the High Sparrow from popular series *Game of Thrones*. It cross references the previous Jack Sparrow Tweet and the distancing of white people from Penny Sparrow.



Yebocan @yebocan · 4 Jan 2016
#Highsparrow denies allegations that #PennySparrow is from his bloodline...follows on heels of #jacksparrow denial.

NEWS JUST IN FROM KINGSLANDING...

HIGH SPARROW CONFIRMS, PENNY SPARROW IS NOT OF HIS BLOODLINE

The fourth Tweet shows a screenshot from series *American Horror Story: Coven*, depicting Angela Bassett's character Marie Laveau. Its use of the phrase "Listen up,

white devil" refers back to the theme questioning how long black people can be expected to tolerate racism.



The fifth Tweet uses the meme showing the bulging-veined face of a young man, which has circulated the Internet in many guises. In this case it refers back to the suggestion that all white people are racist.



The sixth Tweet is also a popular meme shows a woman's shoe with the small toe sticking out. It also refers back to the suggestion that all white people are somewhat racist.

The seventh Tweet uses an image of popular musician Drake, whose face is a popular choice for memes. In this case it links to the theme relating to white people attempting to assure others that they are not all racist.



The eighth Tweet uses a generic meme about anger, which can be cross-referenced with the question regarding how long racism should be tolerated.

### iv.    We are all the same

These Tweets are the most optimistic within this section. They also align with the themes explored in section two of this chapter. The first, third and fourth Tweets reflect a call for unity, while the second Tweet seeks to distance other white people from Penny Sparrow racist sentiments.

Nic and 26K others @iam_Nicolson · 4 Jan 2016
We all belong to the same set of species at the end of the day #PennySparrow #RacismMustFall

## 5.6.2 Humour

These humorous Tweets can be analysed in a manner similar to the previous discussion on the use of monkey images as a subversive strategy.

In the first Tweet, reference is made to Jack Sparrow in order to suggest that Penny Sparrow's Tweet is absurd and should be treated with derision.

The second Tweet makes reference to Hendrik Verwoerd, the so-called "Architect of apartheid" and suggests that Penny Sparrow was excreted from his anus. This also suggests that Penny Sparrow is deserving of contempt and that her sentiments are as out-dated and discredited as Verwoerd's.

The third Tweet refers back to a trend on Twitter which saw Black Twitterati amusingly mispronouncing white names and surnames as a sarcastic take on the constant mispronunciation of vernacular names by white South Africans.

The fourth Tweet suggests that Penny Sparrow's Tweets are so absurd that they must be satire such as the films made by South African director and actor Leon Schuster, which often parody South African racial stereotypes.

The fifth Tweet suggests that it is useless to try to reprimand white people for racism and refers back to colonialism.

The sixth Tweet is an amusing reference to bananas which parodies the stereotypes associated with monkeys.

The seventh Tweet also makes reference to stereotypes relating to monkeys and to the fact that Penny Sparrow was previously employed as an estate agent.

Whilst these may seem shallow and simplistic, they draw attention to the absurdity of Sparrow's Tweets and racism itself using humour as a vehicle for delivery. This subverts racism in a non-confrontational manner.

**Zintle Zwane** @_Zinclaire1 · 4 Jan 2016
Loool :v :v :v bathi #PennySparrow thought she was Jack Sparrow kanti NO she is not the captain of our beaches.

**Ashraf Booley** @ashraf_booley · 4 Jan 2016
From which of Hendrik Verwoerd's orifices was #PennySparrow excreted? His anus. Definitely his anus.

**Buhlebethu** @intomb_yomuZulu · 4 Jan 2016
Racist woman? Who is she vele?

Pendile Spalion?
Pentsi Spaloni?
Huh?

#PennySparrow

**Niven Spence** @thisotherdude · 4 Jan 2016
Still hoping any moment now... Leon Schuster is gonna take the #PennySparrow mask off and shout "nee wag dis ek Leon"

**Tshepo** @tshepo_209 · 4 Jan 2016
"@MVNDISI: It's useless to ask white people to stay in their lane because they couldn't even stay in their own continent #PennySparrow"
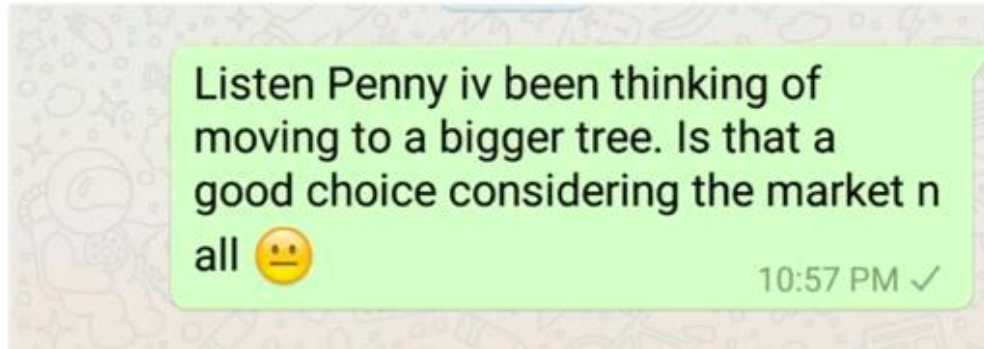
**BuckzMercury** @Buckz007 · 4 Jan 2016
That awkward moment wen u want to eat a banana and u look around to see if #PennySparrow is watching... Mara why, Penny, why??

Philasande @ufeely_phill · 4 Jan 2016
#PennySparrow and I are having a rather "fruitful"conversation

Listen Penny iv been thinking of moving to a bigger tree. Is that a good choice considering the market n all 😐                    10:57 PM ✓

## 5.7 Forms of argumentation

### 5.7.1 The rules

Twitter has a number of rules relating to what kind of behaviour and content is considered acceptable[8]. A number of these rules are applicable to our study and should be reflected on when considering argumentation.

All Twitter users must comply with their own national laws regarding online behaviour and content. In a South African context this would mean that Tweets must comply with the Constitution as well as local laws and statutes. According to the rules, Twitter advocates "freedom of expression and speaking truth to power" whilst also recognising need for certain protections (Twitter, 2017). For this reason the rules state that: "In order to ensure that people feel safe expressing diverse opinions and beliefs, we do not tolerate behaviour that crosses the line into abuse, including behaviour that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user's voice" (Twitter, 2017). Twitter also specifically prohibits violent threats, harassment and sharing of private information. This private information includes addresses and identity numbers.

These rules are however not enforced or ultimately enforceable due to the sheer number of Tweets being posted continuously. As such, the researcher can confirm that Tweets with Penny Sparrow's address, phone number and identity number were found within the sample. They have not been duplicated here for legal and ethical reasons.

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[8] A full list of Twitter's rules are available from https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311

Further to this, threats and hateful speech were also present in the case study. These Tweets are now more than 18 months old, from which one can reasonably infer that if they were going to be deleted or moderated that this would already have taken place.

This is important when considering what kind of behaviour exists on Twitter and what measure of control there is over what type of viewpoints and information is being shared. In Chapter 6, the researcher will reflect on this when considering whether this contributes to the enhancement of deliberative democracy.

### 5.7.2 Agonism or antagonism

Arguments and debates on Twitter are constrained by a 140 character limit. External content can be linked but the researcher took the conscious decision to analyse only what was visible on Twitter in order to limit the sample to the social media site in particular. This was also done in order to assess the public sphere potential of a platform such as Twitter where brevity is enforced through strict character limits.

The sample is both textual and visual and as such argumentation is considered in both these forms. As previously stated Tweets by their very nature can not measure up to verbal debates or unlimited text-length discussions. They do however cater to the current audience which favours bite-size snippets of data over lengthy text.

In Chapter 3, Mouffe's agonistic public sphere model was introduced. Mouffe asserts that conflict, rather than rational detached debate is the ultimate enabler of democratic consensus. To explain the type of conflict which can be considered productive, she describes antagonism and agonism as two key types of engagement. Antagonism takes place between enemies whereas agonism takes place between adversaries (Mouffe, 1998: 16).

Mouffe contends that adopting politically adversarial positions in discussion is healthy whereas adopting the position of moral enemies is counterproductive (2005:6; Ruitenberg, 2009: 273-274). The primary difference in the agnostic model is that adversaries are recognised as having legitimate concerns, whereas moral enemies immediately dismissed in discussion. In the agonistic model the public sphere provides a safe space for the free expression of legitimate conflicts by adversaries (Mouffe, 1998:16).

The case study was characterised by both antagonistic and agonistic relations. This is congruent with the complex and contradictory nature of race relations online. Some of the Tweets employed a civil tone when expressing views on racism and its place in South African society. Others were entirely antagonistic, featuring threats of violence and rape, without advancing any position successfully. Conciliatory posts from white South Africans were matched with calls for a greater focus on black on white racism.

The blend of agonistic and antagonistic relations suggests the presence of "race trouble", which we defined in Chapter 2 as a "social psychological condition that emerges when the history of racism infiltrates the present to unsettle social order, arouse conflict of perspectives and create situations that are individually and collectively troubling" (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011: 27). In addition to this the type of incivility present in antagonistic discourse represents a threat to the democratic potential of online discussions (Papacharissi, 2004: 279).

Discussions about race are troubling and certainly for some people a moral issue, in which other opinions are automatically delegitimised. It is therefore difficult to imagine a race relations scenario in which antagonistic relations are not present in some form. However, the agonistic argumentation suggests that there is the potential for meaningful animated sparring (Mouffe, 2000: 16).

### 5.7.3 Counterpublics

In Chapter 3, counterpublics were defined as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1990: 67).

In viewing the case study in its entirety, it is the researcher's assertion that a number of counterpublics are present. The themes which were highlighted in section 5.5 of this chapter reflect a number of conflicting views and positions. From these one can deduce that the common denominator is racism but that the perceptions of who is being racist differ.

South African Black Twitter is a counterpublic because it seeks to challenge the historical legacy of apartheid. Similarly, those who suggest that no one is interested in racism perpetrated by black people against white people are also a counterpublic. They too "seek to invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional

interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1990: 67). Those stating that not all white people are racist also form a counterpublic.

If one approaches the analysis from a cultural studies perspective, one may be tempted to see only Black Twitter as a legitimate counterpublic in terms of historical oppression. Legitimacy and perceptions thereof are important to public sphere theory. Mouffe's agonism suggests that legitimacy in a public sphere seeking deliberative consensus is aligned with adherence to liberal democratic principles (Mouffe, 2000: 15). The two most basic principles are liberty and equality (Mouffe, 2000: 15). A counterpublic therefore does not necessarily need to express a popular view for it to be legitimate.

This process of reasoning regarding counterpublics within the case study illustrates how necessary counterpublics are. The researcher's initial impulse was to overlook the unpopular white counterpublics in favour of recognising Black Twitter as a counterpublic. The presence of the counterpublic is necessary to ensure that unpopular or minority views are able to participate in the public sphere.

## 5.8 Ideological rhetoric and positioning

The original Penny Sparrow post itself represents only one level of what #PennySparrow connotes. It serves more as a synecdoche – which takes on levels of meaning greater than its specific referent. It is the researcher's assertion that #PennySparrow not only evokes the incident itself but also the historical legacy of apartheid, the racial divide and the mistrust which exists between races.

By comparing black people to monkeys, Penny Sparrow was drawing upon a historical narrative of white privilege in which black people where considered so other as to be non-human. Despite the fact that South Africa is now a democracy in which all South Africans are guaranteed equality and dignity, these kinds of sentiments serve as a reminder of the past.

Haffajee asserts that assigning continued dominance to white people is profoundly disempowering for black people but one must also consider the role that symbolic power plays in race relations (2015: 21). Political, economic, social and cultural power have in theory been transferred to the majority black population of South Africans, but that does not mean that there are no remnants of historical power relations.

The power to evoke memories of past oppression associated with white on black racism as displayed in Penny Sparrow's post suggests that the white minority still retain some ideological power. In this regard, South African Black Twitter can be considered as both subversive and counter-hegemonic.

There is a clear interplay between the Tweets and the contemporary anti-racist discourse which exists on social media. The most popular hashtag accompanying #PennySparrow was #Racismmustfall. This shared hashtag is reminiscent of the #Blacklivesmatter hashtag, in that it serves as a rallying call to others to take a strong stance against racism.

The use of #...mustfall is not only part of the anti-racism discourse however as it has also been used by civil society to express dissatisfaction with the current South African president (#Zumamustfall). It is a rhetorical strategy evocative of a society seeking change.

By using a hashtag to mobilise individuals, activism can be practiced from in front of the computer and at the picket lines. So called "slacktivism" or "armchair activism" is often the subject of derision but when social media movements gain critical mass by going viral, real-world changes can be effected as a result.

There are however other subversive and counter-hegemonic views present in the case study. The reduced economic and political power of the white participants also renders their views as subversive in terms of the current racial narrative.

Durrheim, Mtose and Brown assert that "one thing that transformation in South Africa has taught us is that race trouble has a remarkable ability to mutate as it adapts to new contexts" (2011: 206). The presence of complex and polarised perceptions of racism in the case study simply mirrors the troubling state of race relations present in the offline world.

## 5.9 Implications resulting from the discourse

In Chapter 1, the legislative implications of online racist conflict were summarised. State intervention based on actions online suggests that the type of mass outrage sparked by comments such as those made by Penny Sparrow carries weight with the South African government. At the same time, the perceived lack of outrage with regards

to incidents of black on white racism has strengthened the position taken by some within the case study.

The suggestion of legislated censorship does not address the source of tension at the root of online racial conflicts. Instead it may well eradicate the solution which a functioning public sphere possibly provides. Sustained dialogue which acknowledges a range of opinions, popular and unpopular is the only route to democratic consensus. Purely legislative intervention would simply rely on coercive state power.

Racial conflict also has severe implications for freedom of expression if a workable solution to the importance of safeguarding free speech whilst protecting people from hate speech is not found. Durrheim, Mtose and Brown suggest that understanding how race trouble is put together in different social contexts is necessary in order to seek ways of counteracting it (2011:206). A functioning public sphere represents a potential space in which to grapple with these contexts.

## 5.10 Resolution or consensus

The case study did not lend itself to reaching a consensus or finding a resolution to the problem of racial conflict. Although there have been legislative consequences, these cannot be traced back to a tangible consensus on Twitter. The suggestion that racism should carry penalties was one of the themes present within the Tweets but whether this was the most prolific reaction to Penny Sparrow's outburst was not apparent.

In a broader sense, there was a significant amount of anger and unhappiness with the perceived status quo in the Tweets as evidenced in the themes which were outlined earlier in the chapter. Perceptions of what the status quo is, were also multiple and the subject of contestation.

## 5.11 Summary

In this chapter the selected methodology was reviewed and limitations associated with the methodology were outlined. Key concepts from Chapter 1 including hegemony and counter-hegemony, power and racism were highlighted. A sample of Tweets using the hashtag #Penny Sparrow was unpacked and analysed using critical discourse analysis.

The researcher identified a number of themes and discursive strategies which were discussed. Forms of argumentation were considered and Mouffe's agonism and Fraser's counterpublics which were present in Chapter 3's theoretical framework discussion were also applied to the case study. The researcher then briefly explored possible implications resulting from the race conflict in the case study as well as the potential for resolution or consensus on the matter.

**Chapter Six: Conclusion**

**6.1 Introduction**

This Chapter will focus on the findings of the research and conclude this study. Each research question will be addressed and the conclusions reached will be used to answer the primary research question: whether or not Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy?

**6.2 Chapter summaries**

**6.2.1 Introduction**

In the introduction the researcher provided context for the research as well as the motivation for the study. Contextual information regarding the Penny Sparrow incident as well as other viral racial incidents was provided. Thereafter a brief discussion of the legal ramifications was introduced. A number of important concepts were introduced, including:

- Public sphere
- Network society
- Networked public sphere
- Social media and Twitter
- Hegemony and counter-hegemony
- Power
- Deliberative democracy
- Racism, othering and non-racialism

Thereafter the researcher introduced the focus of the research as well as research questions which will be used to answer the primary research question, detailed below:

Research questions

- Does Twitter encourage a multiplicity of voices?
-  Do contemporary South African racial conflicts on Twitter echo historical racial conflicts?

- Is it possible for subversive counter-hegemonic discourse to take place in a dominant hegemonic context on Twitter?
- Is any form of consensus reached on Twitter when racial conflicts occur?
- Does Twitter meet the criteria for a functional networked public sphere?

Primary research question:

- Can Twitter be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy?

### 6.2.2 Literature review

The literature review covered a number of themes including:

- Race Trouble
- Racism and social media
- Deliberative democracy and social media
- Political discussions on Twitter
- The power of the hashtag
- Black Twitter – American and South African
- Racism in online comments sections
- The digital divide

Each of these provided valuable insights into existing research and formed a basis for much of the research contained herein.

### 6.2.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chapter explored various facets of public sphere theory. It made use of Jürgen Habermas' bourgeois public sphere as a departure point before exploring additions and alternatives to public sphere theory. The range of theorists and theories covered all added to a contextually appropriate theoretical framework.

The theorists and theories discussed within this chapter included:

- Jürgen Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere and deliberative democracy
- Nancy Fraser and subaltern counterpublics

- Chantal Mouffe's agonism

- Manuel Castells and the network society

- Yochai Benkler's networked information society

- Lincoln Dahlberg and the fragmentation of the public sphere

These were all combined to form a public sphere framework which consists of the key criteria for a functional public sphere:

- Access

- Equality

- Freedom of expression

- Relevance to topic and quality of discussion

- Adherence to behavioural norms

### 6.2.4 Methodology

The selected methodology for the research was a qualitative case study utilising critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse was selected because of its focus on power, dominance and inequality (Van Dijk, 1995: 17-18). It was appropriate for exploring racial conflict because it deals with discursively enacted structures of dominance which include race and acknowledges the associated underlying ideologies (Van Dijk, 1995: 17-18).

An analytic strategy was formulated to fit the parameters of critical discourse analysis and to uncover the information necessary to answer the research questions.

### 6.2.5 The case study

Using Chapter 4's analytic strategy as a guideline the following parameters were set for the case study:

- Identify themes and specific discursive strategies

- Identify and analyse forms of argumentation

- Identify subversive potential via presence or lack of counterpublics

- Identify and analyse ideological rhetoric and positioning

- Explore possible implications resulting from the discourse

- Analyse the potential for the resolution or consensus

**6.3 Response to general questions**

**6.3.1 Does Twitter encourage a multiplicity of voices?**

Twitter does encourage a multiplicity of voices in as far as anyone with computer access and literacy can make use of social media platforms. There are however limitations and restrictions which should be acknowledged.

The case study showed that the vast majority of posts were in English. This is understandable as it constitutes the *lingua franca* but it is not the most widely spoken language in South Africa. According to the South African Government:

> English is most widely used for official and commercial communication. IsiZulu is the most common home language spoken by 22,7% of the population, followed by isiXhosa at 16%, Afrikaans at 13,5%, and English at 9,6%, Sepedi at 9,1%, Setswana at 8%, Sesotho at 7,6%, and Xitsonga at 4,5%. Siswati is spoken by 2,5% of the population, Tshivenda by 2,4% and isiNdebele by 2,1%. (2017)

Although many South Africans are bilingual, many who are not proficient in English will be left out of larger debates which only occur in English. Vernacular voices are therefore lacking.

In terms of metaphorical voices, the case study showed that a number of opposing perspectives were present. The lack of censorship meant that even posts which violated Twitter's use policy were present. The use of the hashtag as a digital marker and entry point into the discussion also meant that Twitter users were easily able to become part of the discussion simply by using the hashtag. In this regard Twitter's simplicity means that it is a largely inclusive platform created specifically to reflect a diversity of opinions.

**6.3.2 Do contemporary South African racial conflicts on Twitter echo historical racial conflicts?**

The case study revealed that racial conflicts on Twitter echo historical racial conflicts but are also reflective of contemporary race relations in South Africa. The initial post by

Penny Sparrow aligned with historical apartheid narratives but the responses reflected that racism is not only experienced by black people.

Haffajee argues that social media (including Twitter) is the primary transmitter of the counter-narrative of whiteness – which is reminiscent of the white privilege associated with apartheid (2015: 62). Haffajee suggests that may be because it is simply easier to "default into the language of powerlessness" (2015:62). Ultimately she contends that the racialised views and conflicts present in contemporary South African society are comparable to blacks and whites playing bumper cars to determine how history is understood and defined (2015: 9).

The case study also reflected the strategy of defending racist comments outlined by Hughey and Daniels in Chapter 2's discussion on racism and social media. This includes the invocation of the right to free speech, accusations of victimhood which appeal to political correctness and stereotypes and myths disguised as matter of fact statements (2013: 338).

### 6.3.3 Is it possible for subversive counter-hegemonic discourse to take place in a dominant hegemonic context on Twitter?

The case study revealed the complexity of identifying what the contemporary hegemonic position around race in South Africa is. White privilege is reflected through symbolic and economic power despite the fact that political power  falls under the auspices of the black majority as represented by the ruling ANC alliance in South Africa. This complicates the identification of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses within the case study. However, the analysis in Chapter 5 revealed that subversive counter-hegemonic discourses were present in seemingly contradictory forms.

Black Twitter constitutes a counter-hegemonic counterpublic because it challenges historical hegemony which retains symbolic power in contemporary South Africa. Conversely, white voices highlighting perceived racism by black South Africans also constitute a counter-hegemonic counterpublic in the sense that it calls into question the

hegemonic non-racial new South Africa narrative espoused within the South African Constitution.

This bodes well for South Africans as it suggests that neither current nor historical hegemonic discourses have managed to suppress opposing voices.

### 6.3.4 Is any form of consensus reached on Twitter when racial conflicts occur?

The case study revealed that there were a range of opinions expressed using the hashtag #PennySparrow.  Deliberative democracy flourishes when different voices are able to be heard equally, after which the arguments presented are judged on their merit. The results of this deliberation are then theoretically the basis of consensus.

However, the case study suggested that whilst various arguments were presented no consensus was reached. When deliberating on an issue as complex as racism, the shortcomings of deliberative democracy become apparent. It is ideal for situations where argumentation retains more rationality than emotion. The case study illustrates how conversation and deliberation occurs when complex issues related to self-identification are present.

The case study suggested that many white participants were not able to separate their own "whiteness" from the Penny Sparrow incident. Similarly, some black participants were unable to separate Penny Sparrow's individual sentiments from their association of "whiteness" with racism.  This resulted in ad hominem attacks and highly emotive reactions which do not facilitate the reaching of consensus.

According to Durrheim, Greener and Whitehead, racism is produced through interaction and is formed in the liminal space between speaking and hearing (2015: 86). Indeed one can see how any discussion about race has the potential to devolve into racism partly because there is such a disjuncture between what is said and what is heard.

One cannot generalise and claim that consensus is impossible on Twitter but in this case study there was no clear consensus. It should also be noted that the sheer size of the conversation precluded any conclusive findings regarding actual outcomes.

**6.3.5 Does Twitter meet the criteria for a functional networked public sphere?**

In Chapter 3 a set of five criteria for a public sphere was established. These are access, equality, freedom of expression, relevance to topic and quality of discussion, and adherence to behavioural norms. These will be considered individually below.

### i.    Access

The digital divide severely limits the universal potential of social media. Overall ICT penetration across South Africa reflects a historical legacy of economic exclusion. This legacy makes it impossible for a majority of South Africans to participate in online discussions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are an estimated 7.7 million Twitter users in South Africa, out of a total estimated population of 55.9 million (World Wide Worx, 2017:1). In addition to this while 59.3% of South African households have at least one member with Internet access, only 1.6% of people living in Limpopo have household Internet access (Statistics South Africa, 2016: 51).

In order to fulfil the access aspect of a functional public sphere, Internet access will need to be more widely available and affordable. Many South Africans have cellular phones but data costs are prohibitive. Internet connections at libraries and schools are limited and social media is often blocked in an attempt to ensure that users make "productive" use of their Internet access.

Twitter, in South Africa, therefore does not yet meet the access-related criteria of a public sphere.

### ii.    Equality

As previously stated, the digital divide already makes any potential for equality on Twitter redundant. If a major determining factor in Twitter access is socio-economic positioning, there can only be equality among the privileged, which was one of the major shortcomings of the bourgeois public sphere, as it was first described by Habermas. There can be no true equality if the most basic determinant to entry is based on exclusion.

However, the public sphere potential of Twitter is still noteworthy. It would be short-sighted to dismiss it without considering the impact that Twitter and other social media have had in driving global and local movements for social change.

The researcher therefore acknowledges that Twitter in South Africa is not equitably accessible or made use of but that international trends suggest that they have the potential to play a far greater role in advancing equality in the future.

### iii.    Freedom of expression

The variety of sentiments shared in the case study suggests that Twitter enables freedom of expression. The lack of enforcement of community participation guidelines allows participants to express sentiments which are potentially harmful, without recourse. They also create a far more balanced view of what South Africans actually think and feel about race, racism and racial conflict.
These platforms represent a significant regulatory challenge as can be seen in the draft National Action Plan to combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2016 – 2021) and the Draft Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill of 2016.

The racist posts made by people such as Penny Sparrow and Vicky Momberg and the hateful responses which they elicited reflect the divided nature of South African society but they also serve as a departure point for difficult national dialogue surrounding race relations.

The case study revealed minimal regulation which encourages freedom of expression. Twitter therefore meets the requisite criteria for a public sphere in that regard.

### iv.    Relevance to topic and quality of discussion

The use of the hashtag on Twitter indicates that posts relate to a specific topic. However, as was noted in the case study, perceptions of what is relevant are based on individual interpretation. The bourgeois public sphere was characterised by notions of erudite participants engaging in reasoned, intelligent discussion. This is not necessarily what one finds on Twitter.

There are numerous straw man arguments, ad hominem attacks and obscure references which share the same space with insightful informed posts. This is evidence of free participation, which is fundamental to an agonistic public sphere.

Furthermore, how does one define relevance without limiting freedom of expression? One could say that all posts relating to black on white racism in the #PennySparrow case study should be excluded but that would require censorship.

Quality of discussion is also entirely subjective. The individual, who posts about how white people are victims of racism too, believes that his post is relevant and adds to a robust discussion. Moderation implies exclusion and censorship which are antithetical to a democratic public sphere. Facilitation of discussion by experts in the field may serve to focus and direct discussion but it would negate the organic sharing of views and ideas present in unregulated environments.

### v.    Adherence to behavioural norms

Behavioural norms on Twitter are determined by the community usage guidelines. The case study revealed that these are not enforced, which suggests that it is up to individuals to self-regulate. Insults, threats and anti-social behaviour were present in the case study. In order to enforce adherence to behavioural norms, censorship would be required. One would therefore have to weigh-up what amount of anti-social behaviour could be tolerated in order to further freedom of expression. Some level of self-regulation was apparent in as far as participants were able to point out that certain behaviours and statements were inappropriate, which creates further discussion and deliberation.

## 6.4 Response to primary research question: Can Twitter can be considered a networked public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy?

This research has cemented the researcher's view that the Habermasian conception of the bourgeois public sphere cannot be applied to a networked public sphere in 2017. It provides many useful insights but does not reflect a modern understanding of "actually existing democracy" a described by Fraser (1990: 62). If one becomes too mired in theoretical assumptions it becomes impossible to assess Twitter holistically.

Having considered the research questions as applied to actually existing democracy, it is the researcher's assertion that Twitter can in some ways, although not definitively, be considered a public sphere which enhances the potential for deliberative democracy.

Twitter is a space where multiple voices can be heard and diverse opinions can be shared. In an uncensored public sphere, all voices could theoretically be equal. The lack of enforcement of usage guidelines as evidenced by the Tweets doxing or threatening Penny Sparrow, suggests that very little if any censorship is actually taking place.

In *Race Trouble* Durrheim, Mtose and Brown sum up why discussions around race are so problematic:

> Race is absent precisely because it is so troubling. We prefer not to speak about it. We prefer not to think about it. We hardly have a language to express ourselves properly. We are scared of giving offence, of saying something that might be seen to be racist or that reflects oversensitivity to racism. We struggle to talk to each other about the past because we are scared to cause hurt or be hurt (2011: 56).

Certainly Twitter and other social media are not going to eradicate centuries of racial oppression and provide South Africans with the closure that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed to, but it does create a space for citizens to connect and deliberate informally.

Deliberation can only be truly representative if popular and unpopular views are present. Racist sentiment is deeply hurtful and individuals are by rights protected from hate speech by the Constitution but merely supressing the issue of racism does not address the ideologies which allow such beliefs to proliferate. Durrheim, Mtose and Brown propose that there is one universal space in which people are able to suspend their discomfort around race – namely the "*braai* or *shisinyama* (barbecue)" and it is the researcher's assertion that Twitter could represent a digital *shisinyama* of sorts (2011: 56).

If the digital divide is bridged and citizens actively make use of social media platforms to voice their concerns, democracy can only be strengthened. In this chapter the researcher has shown that Twitter has the potential to strengthen deliberative democracy in many fundamental ways

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**6.5 Directions for further research**

Social media research is a growing field of inquiry across all disciplines. It presents a wealth of untapped data which can help scholars understand how global citizens interact across multiple channels. From a cultural studies perspective there are a number of potential directions for further research.

Twitter is only one form of social media. YouTube and Facebook play host to billions of interactions daily and each offer the potential to better understand power relations in society. Just like Black Twitter there are myriad counter-hegemonic discourses taking place across counterpublics. What role these counterpublics ultimately play in subverting hegemonic power structures across societal structures should be examined.

A range of potential further avenues for research were uncovered during the research process. These include:

- The role of anti-democratic groupings in South African social media
- Social media self-censorship strategies
- Comparisons of what are considered acceptable in face to face discussions compared to online interactions
- Considerations of legality when making statements on social media
- Exploration of online comments sections and their role in strengthening or weakening democracy
- Perceptions of what constitutes hate speech
- Comparisons of digital antagonistic and agnostic public spheres
- Specific democracy-building strategies using social media
- An assessment of whether online community standards are enforced or enforceable
- Motivations for participation in political discussions online
- The development of Black Twitter in South Africa
- The influence of American Black Twitter on South African Black Twitter
- The potential of YouTube to serve as a public sphere
- Social media use by vernacular groups

## 6.6 Summary

In this chapter the researcher reflected on the preceding chapters in order to situate the conclusion within the research in its entirety. Research questions were addressed based on the findings of the case study and the larger theoretical framework presented within this research. Issues such as the need for a multiplicity of voices, the presence of counter-hegemonic discourse, the reaching of consensus and the potential consequences of racial conflict online were considered. Access, equality, freedom of expression, relevance and quality of discussion and adherence to behavioural norms were also evaluated in order to assess the viability of social media as networked public sphere. Using these findings the researcher concluded that although Twitter in South Africa does not yet meet the requirements for a networked public sphere, it nonetheless enhances deliberative democracy in a number of ways. Finally, the researcher suggested a number of potential future research angles related to the research presented here.

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