

Thesis

Creating insight into Black racial identity development: A Trevor Noah Case Study

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Abstract

This Thesis researches racial identity development in a South African context. To achieve this there has been chosen to conduct a case study on Trevor Noah's cultural production. The theoretical framework discusses the South African context, Racial Identity and the Nigrescence Model. The methodology includes qualitative content analysis on Trevor Noah's cultural production. The Results show how Trevor Noah from Childhood to Adulthood passed through the stages of the Expanded Nigrescence model. The Conclusion discusses the limitations of the research and Trevor Noah's uncommon standing in the Expanded Nigrescence model due to his mixed race and South African upbringing. At the end it is concluded that the research on Trevor Noah highlighted the limitations and lack of fluidity in South Africa racial structure and classification, and special standing of mixed race South Africans in this system.

Key Words: Nigrescence Model, Racial Identity, South Africa, Trevor Noah

Introduction

Born in Johannesburg on 20 February of 1984, Trevor Noah spent the early years of his childhood during Apartheid. Noah has a White (Swiss) father and a Black (Xhosa) mother, placing him in a mixed race category (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). This mixed race category fell under the official category of colored (Dalmage, 2018). During Apartheid interracial marriage was forbidden and thus so was the existence of Trevor Noah himself (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). However, his mixed race also provided him with a unique perspective on racism and racial classification in South Africa, during Apartheid and later also during the fall of Apartheid and the rise of a new South Africa. His later immigration to the United States of America (USA) introduced him to racism in a new context. Noah now had to navigate American racism (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024; Levin, 2023; Mark, 2022). However, living in new environment often enlightens new perspectives on the country of origin and their societal workings, such as racial classifications. Literature on the concept of reverse culture shock has shown that reentering, reacquainting or reacculturating oneself with their initial culture after spending some time removed from this culture into another can lead to shock and a difficult readjusting process (Gaw, 2000). This is because of the individual now being able to see their culture through a different lens obtained from intercultural experiences (Gaw, 2000). I postulate that this also is applicable to racial identity development. Racism, racial identity and culture are interlinked. Racism and racial identity is shaped by culture and vice versa (Juang et al., 2021; Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018). Additionally, racial identity has strong connection to racism, as racism can influence racial identity (Arumugham, 2017). The process of developing a racial identity in South Africa may differ from developing one in the USA. Trevor Noah may thus have achieved a unique insight in how (his) racial identity is developed in South Africa through (cultural) experience. This possible growth in racial identity development only proves the scientific need to analyze Trevor Noah's racial experiences in an attempt to give an insight in South African society. Although Trevor Noah's cultural production is highly studied, utilizing the lens of the Nigrescence Model, originally written for Black Americans, is new. The scientific relevance is ,especially, rooted in the context of researching a mixed raced individual in South Africa, who then emigrated to The USA. Hence, he has lived in both contexts. This gives unique insights into how racial identity, especially Black identity, could academically be understood through the Nigrescence

Model and through the perspective of South African, mixed race individuals. Academic literature on mixed raced individuals, particularly in South Africa, is understudied, and to provide more in such is of high social relevance. South African individuals with mixed race identities deserve to be represented in academia. A study on the racial identity development of Trevor Noah can aid a better comprehension of racial identity and racism in South Africa.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on racial awareness and racial identity development, in an attempt to diminish the negative consequences of racism. With a specific focus on Black awareness and Black identity. This thesis will focus on the South African context, however I believe that the findings in this thesis will be applicable to a much greater and global context. For the reason that, we live in a racialized world where racism and racial identities are present in many societies (Jason & Epplen, 2016; Juang et al., 2021).

My thesis will answer the following questions:

- Research question: How can racial identity development in South Africa be understood through the lens of Trevor Noah?
- Subquestion: What can Trevor Noah's cultural production reveal about the process of Trevor Noah's racial identity development through the stages of The Expanded Nigrescence Model?

My thesis will include a theoretical framework that has an overview of previous scientific literature on racism and racial identity in South Africa. I will also establish the theory used for this analysis, the Expanded Nigrescence Model. Next, in the methodology I will define the data and methods used for this thesis and explain the reasoning behind the case study on Trevor Noah. This section will also mention the ethical aspects of my research and my own positionality. Ensuing, in the results I will underline the research findings on the case study on Trevor Noah and the additional analysis with the Expanded Nigrescence Model. Finally, ending the thesis with a conclusion.

Theoretical framework

The South African Context

The history of South Africa is deeply intertwined with colonialization. South Africa has been colonized by the Dutch and the British. The Dutch first settled in Cape Town in 1652, starting a two and a half centuries long settlement, conquest and expansion in South Africa by varying European settlers. During the centuries of colonization in South Africa, the country shifted from Dutch Colonization to British Colonization (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). Racism cannot exist separately from colonization, besides racism the idea of Whiteness in South African was also constructed during its colonial era. (Horiuchi, 2009). In 1910, South Africa gained independence from the British Empire and became a self-governing nation state. This however did not diminish the racism prevalent in South Africa. It is important to note that a focus on the history of South Africa only after colonization, dismisses centuries of pre-colonization history. South Africa, hence, becomes a country whose perception of race and racism is shaped by its colonial history and its consequences. Nearly half a century after South Africa's independence, Apartheid was established by the newly elected National Party in South Africa (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). Before Apartheid South Africa was already heavily racialized and segregated. However, with the introduction of Apartheid in 1948, came the introduction of official racial classification with the purpose of legalizing racial hierarchy in South Africa. The National Party was responsible for implementing several racial discriminatory laws in South Africa. The Population Registration Act of 1950 made it mandatory for all South Africans to be placed in official racial categories and to carry a South African Identification Card with this racial category at all times (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). The official racial classifications were White, African (Black), Colored and Indian. A White person was a person who was clearly visibly White in appearance and socially accepted as a White person. An African/ Black person, also referred to as a Native, was somebody who was socially accepted as a member of any aboriginal tribe or race of Africa and also showed this in their appearance. A colored person was somebody who was neither White nor Black. The Indian classification was also based on appearance and social acceptance, but also on the possession of Indian heritage (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). The Indian/ Asian classification was originally part of the Colored classification, but with a legislative change in 1959 became a separate racial

classification (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). The three markers for racial classification were thus ancestry or descent, appearance and social acceptance (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). Racial classification had an all-encompassing impact on the life experiences of South Africans. Hence, the difference in the life led between White and Non-White (Black, Colored and Indian) South Africans was immense (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). This is because racism was prevalent in all aspects of South African life, such as the job market, education, health care, residency and many more (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). Racism shapes interactions and life experiences (Essed et al., 2007; Robles & Shrikant, 2021). The country of South Africa is no exception to this rule (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023).

Due to the fact that current day South Africa was undeniably largely formed by the tragedy that is Apartheid, its history and its original intentions and effects are necessary to understand racism and racial identity in South Africa in the here and now. As aforementioned racial classification was a clear-cut distinction between members of South African society (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023). Although these racial categories are not held to the regard they once were, their consequences are still visible to this day (Pellicer & Ranchhod, 2023).

Racial Identity

Racial identity is described and perceived in various ways in academic literature. Racial identity is, for example, described as how a person defines themselves in respect to race. Racial identity is also linked to an individual's self-concept wherein the meaning and personal significance race has is stored (Neblett et al., 2016). Racial identity is also deemed vital in the psychological process of healing wounds left by racism. Years of justified racial inferiority of Non-White people has left the racially marginalized often severely psychologically damaged (Root, 1998). Racial identity development is in this case the key to racial healing (Root, 1998). Racial Identity is also believed to be formed through external forces, Duster (2001) states that racial identity is created in response to political, historical and economic influence, leaving little room for individual choice.

As stated by Dolby (2001), racial identities are unstable and are prone to change. Through conceptualizing racial identities as unstable entities, it is possible to follow the progress of change in racial identification happening over time (Walker, 2005). Racial identities differ from racial categories. Racial categories belong in the process of racial classification where people are assigned to a racial category. Individuals are put in a racial category with no consideration for self-identified racial identity. This is often done by authoritative institutions, for instance. Internalized racial identity focuses on an individual's choice to make their one racial identification. Racial identity is therefore not imposed by others but created from within through personal racial awareness (Ndimande & Neville, 2018).

The significance of racial identity is represented in its impact. Having a positive outlook on the internalized racial identity correlates positively with health. Internalizing racial oppression can harm the psychological health of the oppressed (Ndimande & Neville, 2018). Ndimande & Neville (2018), mention the variety in South Africans' comprehension of the meaning Blackness holds in their lives. It puts the importance on the self-identified Black identity instead of an imposed Black identity. Furthermore, Ndimande & Neville (2018) state the significance of encouraging the possessing an affirmative and positive Black identity, as well as racial awareness. Racial identity can also create (Racial) Empowerment. Racial pride and Blackness are something to strive after as these can be the tool to make change in one's personal life (Ndimande & Neville, 2018).

Racial identity is not only of importance for Black people in South Africa. Sellers & Shelton (2003) conducted research on racism regarding African Americans. The results show that the dimensions of racial identity, for example racial ideology, impact the perceived racial discrimination among these African Americans. Perceived racial discrimination could influence mental health. A high frequency of perceived racial discrimination leads to more negative psychological outcomes, often resulting in psychological distress (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). However, the meaning African Americans gave to race also influenced their experience of racial discrimination. Dimensions of racial identity could make perceived racial discrimination more prevalent, as well as form a barrier against psychological distress caused by racial

discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Furthermore, another study states that a strong racial identity does not only increase perceived racial identity, but also the psychological burdens of racism (Woo et al., 2019).

Nigrescence Model

For my thesis, it is of interest that the research is centered around the Nigrescence theory by Cross. It is a model focusing on the process of developing Black consciousness and Black identity (Neville & Cross, 2017). The Nigrescence Model originally was created by Cross for African Americans. Although, the Nigrescence Model has been used for Black People whom are not Black Americans over the years (Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen, 2023).

Neville & Cross (2017), dive deep into concepts of racial awakening or epiphanies of Black people. Exploring what kind of meaning being Black holds to people who identify as such. The original Nigrescence Model by Cross in 1971 was made up of five stages (Neville & Cross, 2017). In chronological order those stages are: the Pre-encounter Stage, Encounter stage, Immersion-Emersion Stage, Internalization Stage and the Internalization-Commitment Stage. The Nigrescence Model underwent two major revisions by Cross. First, resulting in the creating of the Revised Nigrescence Model in 1991, wherein he combined last two stages of the Nigrescence Model in a one Internalization stage. The Second revision, created the Expanded Nigrescence Model, wherein Cross concept of The Nigrescence model changed from a stage model to an attitudinal model (Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen, 2023). Additionally, Cross in his Expanded Nigrescence Model added another Salience Stage comprising of Race salience and Ethnic-racial salience. This Stage is used a Scale to measure the race salience in the model (Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen, 2023). Race salience can be described as the extent to which an individual's race is of relevant to its self-conception at a specific point in time. Ethnic-racial salience can be understood as the degree to which one considers race in their everyday life (Worrell et al., 2020). During the analysis

the Expanded Nigrescence Model was used for a most inclusive use of the Nigrescence Model and well-rounded results.

The Pre-encounter stage is the description of one's Eurocentric worldview and anti-Black and anti-African identity. Attitudes include: Pro-White, Anti-Black, Assimilation (mostly to nationality or Whiteness), Miseducation (endorsing negative stereotypes of Blacks) and Self-hatred (Internalizing racism). This stage low race salience. The Immersion-Emersion stage is the transition stage. Immersion is about immersing oneself in Blackness and takes the form of hyper engagement with Black culture. Also, the individual is escaping mental slavery with the awaking of their negative emotions as a result of the realization of their misguided Pro-White worldview. Emersion is the emerging of intense Black pride and realistic ideas on Black people and Black culture. This stage includes the following attitudes: Pro-Black, Anti-White (feeling anger towards Whites about racism and discrimination), Anti-dominant (feeling anger towards non-White oppressors about racism and discrimination), and Intense Black Involvement (hyper engagement with Black culture). This stage has moderate race salience. The Internalization Stage is about finding a sense of security and positivity in one's Black identity and Blackness, as well as committing to action that change and uplift Black people. The attitudes in this stage are: Afrocentric (living by African-centered principles), Ethnocentric (living by ethnicity-centered principles), Black Nationalist (committing to activism in support of Blacks), Biculturalist (Living by the principles of two cultures), Multiculturalist Racial (willing to engage meaningfully with other oppressed groups) and Multiculturalist Inclusive (willing to engage with all other groups). Multiculturalist attitudes are created through the embracing of one's Black identity. This stage has high race salience (Hocoy, 1999; Neville & Cross , 2017; Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen,2023).

In the article by Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen (2023) it has been highlighted how Cross has made many adaptations to his original Nigrescence theory from 1971. For example. in the Racial Awakening Model (Neville & Cross , 2017), the concept of Black Consciousness is analyzed in more depth, with more focus put on the emerging stage. Many authors have paid homage to Cross' original Nigrescence Theory (Endale, 2018; Worrell, Cross & Vandiver, 2001; De Walt, 2013). Even though Cross's view on

Nigrescence is famous, other thinkers have emerged themselves in this theory as well. For instance, Parham (1989) has added the concept of recycling and stagnation, as two additional stages in racial awakening (Hocoy, 1999). Recycling refers to how an individual can regress to an earlier stage and stagnation refers to staying indefinitely in one particular stage awakening (Hocoy, 1999). Many other authors have made contributions to The Nigrescence Theory overtime, these contributions are further discussed in the Analysis as they are applied to the case of this thesis. The Nigrescence theory shows its strength by being a theory that is also applicable to many contexts. The Nigrescence theory has already been applied to countries as the USA, the country where the theory initially was developed, Bermuda, Australia and lastly, South Africa what is especially interesting for this particular thesis (Worrell, Vandiver & Fhagen, 2023). The previous use of the Nigrescence model in the South African context emphasizes the applicability of this theory to a Trevor Noah case, as he is also a South African.

Methods

Case study on Trevor Noah

Trevor Noah is a person whose cultural production manifests in many different media forms. To create an well-rounded understanding of who Trevor Noah is as a person, as well as how his racial identity is presented to his audience, diversity among cultural production material was acquired for this research. His biography book *Born A Crime* was an important aspect of this research, as it contains stories of his childhood and early adulthood in South Africa. These stories include elements and experiences of Trevor Noah's early years that have shaped the rest of his life. As the title of Trevor Noah biography states he was *Born A Crime*. The biography is the only type of cultural production that did not include his identity as a public figure, as it precedes his becoming a comedian. Other types of cultural production included in this research are visual media fragments of interviews, comedy shows, *The Daily Show*, documentaries and award shows. There has been chosen for only video material for data collection, because of Time Restrictions. Video Material was obtained through YouTube, including Trevor Noah's official YouTube channel. Other video were collected through the recommendations of YouTube, as form of snowball sampling. Trevor Noah's four Netflix stand-up comedy shows were also analysed. Those were: *Trevor Noah: Afraid of the Dark* (2017), *Trevor Noah: Son of Patricia* (2018), *Trevor Noah: I Wish You Would* (2022), *Trevor Noah: Where was I* (2023).

My analysis was a qualitative content analysis and case study. I began the data collection by using Trevor Noah's autobiography book '*Born a Crime*' (2016) as a main source of data for this thesis. Many other authors have already analyzed Trevor Noah as a person or in connection with his book in scientific literature (Butcher, 2021; Carolin & Bennett, 2022; Levin, 2023; Mark, 2022; Rubiya & Swamy, 2019; Tembo, 2022). Another source of data is video footage of moments that Noah has discussed racism, and especially South African racism, in public, for example during episodes on *The Daily Show*. Trevor Noah has acquired fame all over the world, especially after his role as the host of the internationally broadcasted television program *The Daily Show*. Lastly, any other piece of media that would contribute to the cause of this thesis was be analyzed. For example, Trevor Noah's comedy show: '*That's Racist*' regarding Trevor Noah's perception of or interaction with (South African) racism is considered for analysis. Noah is an excellent candidate for the analysis of the research because he can give insight into racism in South Africa due to his mixed race. Being mixed raced gives an individual access to at least two racial identities, in Trevor Noah's case these are Black and White racial identities through his parents. Having grown up immersed in two different types of

racial categories, provides Trevor Noah with a perception of the difference between the two categories and additionally of the mixed race category. Different racial identities can lead to experiences of different types of racism or lack of racism. Trevor Noah can help understand this difference in racism through his racial identity. I postulate that in Trevor Noah's case his mixed race has led him on a different racial identity development path with a unique perspective on racial identity.

As mentioned before, there has already been done scientific research on Trevor Noah and his autobiography (Butcher, 2021; Carolin & Bennett, 2022; Levin, 2023; Mark, 2022; Rubiya & Swamy, 2019; Tembo, 2022). For instance, Levin (2023) has already examined racial passing and racial identity development in Trevor Noah's 'Born a crime' (2016) book. As mentioned in the introduction, the aim for this thesis is to add to this study of racial identity in South Africa. As this is already done and visible in articles of Levin (2023) and Mark (2022), for example. This thesis offers a new perspective on the use of Nigrescence theory. During my analysis I will apply the Expanded Nigrescence Model by Cross, and its four stages: the Pre-encounter Stage, Immersion-Emersion Stage, Internalization Stage and the Salience Stage. I will then attempt to distinguish Trevor Noah's position in this model, what stage he is currently in and his development and transition through the stages of this model.

In this analysis I made use of deductive coding. I established themes and codes for recognizing major concepts like racism, racial identity development, racial identity, Black identity and Black awareness in all the data found on and self-produced by Trevor Noah. From my interpretation of the results from my analysis, I was able to make conclusions on the case of Trevor Noah and link them to a bigger picture of the role racial identity plays in South Africa.

Positionality & Ethics

Considering my own positionality, I am a self-identified Black Eritrean-Dutch woman. Consequently, I may recognize signs of racism or oppression of Black or any other marginalized individuals and groups that people with other racial identities do not recognize. I may also be biased in my interpretation of codes, because of an underlying interest in acknowledging Black identity and raising Black awareness, as well other minority or marginalized ethnic and racial groups. The ethical impact of my thesis remained minimal. I did not use any type of participation and, thus I minimize the negative impact my thesis can have on society's members. However, my thesis is centered around one specific person for the main part, that person being Trevor Noah as a case study subject. I did not have any personal interaction with Trevor Noah, nevertheless I will interact with data produced by Trevor Noah. Consequently, my data can be perceived as a reflection of Trevor Noah and his media presence. It is therefore of great importance to be truthful in my interpretation of Trevor Noah and the data he has produced on ethical terms.

Results

In this section the following things will be discussed in the four following sections. Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood and Trevor Noah's Stage in The Expanded Nigrescence Model. There has been a chronological approach for results presentation to create an understanding of the journey Trevor Noah went through as his racial identity developed. Each chronological period, will have an comparison of Trevor Noah's journey to the theoretical journey presented in the Expanded Nigrescence Model. At the end Trevor Noah's final stage of the Expanded Nigrescence Model and the limitations of this model will be discussed. This all concludes in the answer to the research questions.

Childhood

The Pre-encounter stage is defined by Pro-White and Anti-Black sentiment. Expectations of the pre-encounter stage include Trevor Noah showing signs of assimilation, miseducation and self-hatred. Trevor Noah descending partly from Black people and his upbringing in Black culture has made him susceptible for developing a Black identity, as far as that is possible for a mixed race individual. Some aspects of Trevor Noah's journey as a mixed race person through the Expanded Nigrescence Model echo that of a Black person in the Nigrescence Model.

Assimilation

Trevor Noah did partake in assimilating towards his White Oppressors even in his early childhood years. Probably the most obvious form of assimilation was through language. Trevor Noah, as a consequence of his mother's belief that this language would help him further in life, has learned English as his first language (Noah, 2016). Another form of assimilation that took place in Trevor Noah's life was through religion. Trevor Noah discusses how through oppression Black South Africans converted to Christianity. Over time, this trickled down to Trevor Noah and his family as they assimilated in a religious sense to the demands of their oppressors. Consequently, the

fortitude of religion in Trevor Noah's household shaped a great part of his childhood (Noah, 2016). As Trevor Noah (2016) narrates in *Born A Crime*:

My mother was – and still is – a deeply religious woman. Very Christian. Like indigenous peoples around the world, black South Africans adopted the religion of our colonizers. By “adopt” I mean it was forced on us. The white man was quite stern with the native. “You need to pray to Jesus,” he said. “Jesus will save *you*.” To which the native replied, “Well, we do need to be saved – saved from you, but that is beside the point. So, let's give this Jesus thing a shot. My whole family is religious, but where my mother was Team Jesus all the way, my grandmother balanced her Christian faith with the traditional Xhosa beliefs she'd grown up with, communicating with the spirits of our ancestors. (pp. 5-6)

Trevor Noah spend Sundays attending three different churches. Each church he went to had its own distinct racial makeup. First he went to White church, than Mixed church and lastly Black church (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah grew up with Christianity and is still in contact with today, for instance through the daily Bible scriptures his mother sends him (Lit Up, 2017). This is a form of assimilation forced upon him through centuries of White oppression in South Africa (Noah, 2016).

Additionally, Trevor Noah (2016) also made the following statement:

I became a chameleon. My color didn't change, but I could change your perception of my color. If you spoke to me in Zulu, I replied to you in Zulu. If you spoke to me in Tswana, I replied to you in Tswana. Maybe I didn't look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you. (p. 56)

As a cultural chameleon, Trevor Noah learned how to blend in. As a chameleon he was able to float between groups as he explained who he was. Trevor Noah, here, displaces a striking example of assimilation when he conformed to other people. His self-proclaimed identity as a chameleon made him fit in various groups: the Black kids, Colored kids, White kids, kids who liked sports or kids who liked computers (Noah, 2016).

Assimilation and Miseducation

Trevor Noah describes how his experiences made his life rich, despite the poverty he grew up with. His mom showed him spaces where Black people were not typically welcome or commonly found, like rich White neighborhoods, drive-in movie theaters or ice rinks. His mom, according to Trevor Noah raised him like a White child, unbounded by reality to dream big as to who he could be. She encouraged him to voice his opinions loudly, as he should regard his thoughts, ideas and decisions with high importance (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah, consequently, grew up with the belief that one's imagination can be quite limited by one's origin and that it affects one's ability to dream. He believes that one should know the world outside of theirs, to be able to dream big. He mentions how his family's dream was to put another room in their house in Soweto. Only Black people lived in Soweto. The way Trevor Noah presents his idea it is clear that he puts limitations on the dreams of Black people (Noah, 2016). He engages in a stereotype of Black people that because they do not know about a world outside their own, they do not dream outside of a world of their own and, thus are hindered in living in that world in the future. This idea of him, also, completely disregards the systemic oppression of Black People in South Africa, which he so openly talks about in his book. This assimilation to whiteness pushed by his mother, that whiteness and wealth and success are inextricably linked lives on in Trevor Noah's miseducated perception of dreams (Noah, 2016).

Self-hatred and Internalized Oppression

In a story told in Trevor Noah's (2016) autobiography about his first Valentine's day as twelve years old, after a recent transfer to another mostly White primary school. Trevor Noah and a fellow colored female student and friend, Maylene, agreed to be each other's valentine, after White female classmates convinced Trevor Noah to ask Maylene to be his valentine. These classmates insisted that Trevor Noah and Maylene be together, solely for the reason that Trevor Noah was the only mixed race student in

school and Maylene was the only colored student. However, on Valentine's day Maylene decided to have another white male student, Leonardo, as her valentine instead of Trevor Noah. Trevor Noah (2016), as a result of his internalized racism and conformation to South Africa's racial structure, had the following inner monologue:

I felt like someone had taken a gun and shot holes in every part of me. But at the same time some part of me said, "Well, this makes sense." Leonardo was everything I wasn't. He was popular. He was *white*. (pp. 132-133).

Trevor Noah has shown self-hatred when it comes to his own natural hair (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah (2016) describes his hair, his 'enormous Afro' as follows: "I was forever trying to get the perfect 1970s Michael Jackson Afro. What I had was more Buckwheat: unruly and impossible to comb, like stabbing a pitch fork into a bed of crabgrass." (p. 171). In high school for his grade twelve matric dance also called a senior prom, Trevor Noah decided to braid his hair into cornrows after chemically relaxing his hair. He describes the situation as a makeover scene in an American movie, where the ugly duckling is transformed in a swan (Noah, 2016). This story from Trevor Noah's late childhood shows that he was still conforming to Eurocentric standards of beauty which fits within the characteristics of the Pre-encounter stage.

Differences from the Nigrescence Model

Chameleon - not only to whiteness

As previously mentioned, Trevor Noah regards himself as a chameleon (Noah, 2016). This is a unique perspective in comparison to the Nigrescence Model is based upon. For in the Nigrescence Model only acknowledges assimilation to White people and Whiteness. Trevor Noah went beyond that and in his life, also, assimilated to Black, Indian and Colored people. However, because of his mixed race and Black upbringing he more easily fitted into the Black Group (Noah, 2016).

Confronting 'colored' as oppressed

In South Africa the closest racial identity Trevor Noah has is colored, based on his appearance. He has mentioned that he regards himself Black, because of Black family members he grew up with, the Black Township of Soweto in Johannesburg he grew up in, him feeling more at home with Black people, him being able to be himself around Black people, speaking multiple African languages, being not embraced in the colored community (Noah, 2016). Even though he looks similar to them, he does not behave or think in a way similar to the people that belong to the colored category and thus they often hated him. He reflects back on a story about being bullied by colored kids as a child in *Born A Crime* (Noah, 2016). He tells how bombarded with Mulberry berries and chased by these kids until he burst out in tears. His feelings being hurt by him he tells his stepfather about the situation and he stands up for him, although it didn't go as planned (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah (2016) has written as follows:

Looking in that boy's eyes, I realized how much he and I had in common. He was a kid. I was a kid. He was crying. I was crying. He was a colored boy in South Africa, taught how to hate and how to hate himself. Who had bullied him that he needed to bully me? He'd made me feel fear, and to get my revenge I'd unleashed my own hell on his world. But I knew I'd done a terrible thing. (p. 125)

Trevor Noah shows empathy in his reaction to being confronted with a new reality. A reality where colored people are oppressed, in addition to Black people's oppression (Noah, 2016). This example of the immersion-emersion stage, shows Trevor Noah's anti-dominant attitude. Trevor Noah (2016) also says the following about his racial identity:

It was illegal to be mixed (to have a black parent and a white parent), but it was not illegal to be colored (to have two parents who were both colored). So my mom moved me around the world as a colored child. (p. 28)

Early recognition of structural racism: early/simultaneous example of immersion-emersion stage

In a story about primary school, Trevor Noah puts a focus on the fact that racism often in the end will force you to choose a side, Black or White (Noah, 2016). In his second primary school, Trevor Noah was finally introduced to the severity of racism and saw how it inhabited places like educational settings. This was because of his mixed race Trevor Noah was admitted to the superior A-classes for students who were deemed smarter. A-classes were classes where White students who were a clear minority in the school's racial composition became the majority. And a minority of mixed race, Indian and Black students were accepted into Trevor Noah's class. Afterwards, when Trevor Noah became aware of the deliberate racial composition of A-classes. He decided to confront the school counselor that he would like to be transferred to the B-classes, the lower classes where Black students were the majority. During the break between classes Trevor Noah came in contact with the Black students, he decided he was more similar to them and would prefer to be in a class with the Black students. Even after being made aware of the possible negative consequences the transition of A-classes to B-classes would have on his future educational journey and attempt to dissuade him from this choice by the usage of negative Black stereotypes by the student counselor, Trevor Noah decided he would rather be held back with people he liked, the Black students, that progress with students he did not know (Noah, 2016). That day, Trevor Noah fully grasped the extent of his black identity. He saw the institutional racism that was in play through admitting mostly White students to A-classes and chose to stand in solidarity with his fellow Black students by joining the B-class. He threw away his privilege to become closer to Black people. His affinity for Black people, rooted in his Black upbringing and Black family, made him unapologetically choose black. According to Trevor Noah the Black children embraced him (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah here is clearly in the second stage of the Expanded Nigrescence Model, the Immersion-Emersion stage. This choice in received school education was a very Pro-Black move of his. Nevertheless, Trevor Noah mixed race identity gave him the privilege a choice to stand with Black people. People with solely a Black identity as shown in this story, do not receive the option to choose. They are simply labeled Black and are required to live

with the consequences, like being put in B-classes. This example of Pro-Black behavior was only possible through Trevor Noah's mixed race and would probably not exist for someone being only Black. Thus, Trevor Noah had a different journey through this Immersion-Emersion stage of the Expanded Nigrescence Model than a Black person would have (Noah, 2016).

Adolescence

The Immersion-Emersion stage is defined by Pro-Black and Anti-white sentiment. Expectations of the Immersion-Emersion stage include Trevor Noah showing signs of Anti-White, Anti-dominant and Intense Black Involvement.

Intense Black Involvement and Sense of Belonging

Trevor Noah spent much time in another Township Alexandra, also often referred to as Alex or the hood, after graduating high school. As is expected from a Township, Alex is full of Black people. It is also a place with deep poverty and criminality (Noah, 2016). In Alex Trevor Noah learned the deep connection between poverty and crime. Trevor Noah had only visited and never lived in Alex. So, he was technically an outsider. However, since the hood didn't judge and oppress people, even as a presumed colored person, he quickly felt more at home there than he did in high school. He spent his time in Alex as an DJ at parties, where Alex was famous for, and selling CDs and other items. In Alex he excessively involved himself in another side of Black culture, hood culture in South Africa (Noah, 2016).

Pro-Blackness expressing Anti-White and Anti-dominant

In Alex to improve his DJ performances, Trevor Noah and his friends decided they needed to add a dance crew. The best dancer in this dance crew was a man called Hitler. Although, Hitler may be an unconventional name in many countries, under South Africa's Black community members the name held no negative connotation, Trevor

explained (Noah, 2016). By South African law, Black People were required to have an, often English, name that White people could pronounce aside from their traditional names. For Black people these English names often held little to no meaning, and their child was often named after whatever commonly heard English name or word. Furthermore, because of South Africa's deliberate poor education to Black people, many people did not know who or what Hitler was. For example, Trevor Noah's grandfather thought Hitler was an army tank defeating people in Europe. In South Africa if you wanted your child to become strong you called him Hitler (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah and his dance crew were once invited to a Jewish school to perform for a cultural, or diversity, program, among culturally diverse acts. During the performance Trevor Noah and his dance crew were encouraging, Hitler their main dancer, by screaming "Go, Hitler!" repeatedly, as they usually did and was common in Hip Hop culture. This however ended up in a huge misunderstanding. The Jewish audience was shocked and one teacher climbed on stage berated them for their seemingly anti-Semitic performance, calling them disgusting. Trevor Noah assumed that the teacher was angry for their possibly provocative dance moves, commonly found in Black culture. While the Jewish teacher thought this performance was meant to oppress Jewish people, Trevor Noah thought White people, as Jewish people were classified in South Africa, were once again trying to oppress Black people even after apartheid. That day Trevor Noah did not hesitate to stand with the Black community and fiercely defend their performance, in a seemingly Afrocentric, pro-Black and anti-White way (Noah, 2016).

Differences from the Nigrescence Model

Trevor Noah is not a perfect fit for the Expanded Nigrescence model. From a young age Trevor Noah had to socialize with different kinds of people and learn how to get along with them. Trevor Noah's mother made sure of this. For instance, through visiting multiple churches with different racial makeups (Noah, 2016). This included associating with White people. So, Trevor Noah has never felt true hatred for White people. In addition, Trevor Noah being mixed race and having a White father has prevented him

from fully accessing anti-white sentiment in his journey through the Nigrescence Model (Noah, 2016).

Adulthood

The Internalization stage is defined by appreciation and security in one's Black Identity and showcasing a commitment to Black people. Expectations of the Internalization stage include Trevor Noah showing him being a Afrocentric, Ethnocentric, Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, Multiculturalist racial and Multiculturalist inclusive.

On The Daily Show Trevor once mentioned how "Africa won the World Cup", when the French football team won the World Cup in 2018. In a Between the Scenes fragment from The Daily Show, he reads out loud a letter he received from the French ambassador in response to this comment (The Daily Show, 2023). The French ambassador states that he, who of course is also representing France in its entirety, was displeased with this comment of Trevor and stated that the football players were just French (The Daily Show, 2023). Trevor Noah responded on this as follows:

So, I will continue to praise them for being African, because I believe they are of Africa, their parents are from Africa and they can be French at the same time. And if French people are saying they cannot be both then I think they have a problem and not me. (The Daily Show, 2023,10:55).

Through this statement given by Trevor Noah he shows that he believes that identity is not singular and he continues to praise countries like the USA that promote the strong multiplicity of the identity of some of its citizens (The Daily Show, 2023). According to Trevor their Frenchness does not take away from their Africanness. These football players are Black, African and French (The Daily Show, 2023). Trevor Noah shows how, in this situation, he operates from strong Afrocentric principles and shows strong pro-black behavior.

In his comedy show Trevor Noah: Son of Patricia (2018), he mentions the positive aspects of being Black, like conforming to the stereotype of Black people quickly

evading from dangerous situations. This is perceivable, in his story about how he was the only Black person in his friend group that went to Bali in Indonesia, and again was the only Black person in their touring group. The tour guide had prepared to attend a traditional Balinese performance involving a Snake, where Trevor Noah was the only one who retreated to the back of the room. This decision made him the person who could flee the scene the quickest when the snake attacked the snake charmer and escaped towards the audience. By telling this story he jokes how being Black saved him in this situation (Noah, 2018). This is an example of Trevor Noah establishing what it means to be Black in a certain situation and acting accordingly to these Blackness criteria informed by an Afrocentric worldview. Internalizing this aspect of Black mentality set him apart from the other tourists in this situation.

In addition, on *The Daily Show* he continues to advocate for the issues of Black people and people of color (POC). Trevor Noah comments on the controversy surrounding POC and Black people portraying originally White roles. He addresses the right of these people to play those White roles, as was the case in movies like *The Lord of The Rings* or the live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid* (*The Daily Show*, 2023). He argues that hate comments from White people that state that the accuracy, representation and realism of these movies are being compromised are racist. He does this by pointing out the flaws in their arguments, as these movies are not real and are in fact fantasy, so there is no truth to pursue (*The Daily Show*, 2023). Additionally, he communicates the skin color or race of these characters are not integral to the story of these movies. So, these roles, in theory, should be played by the best candidate, regardless of these characteristics (*The Daily Show*, 2023). This is an Black Nationalist attempt from Trevor Noah. Another example from *The Daily Show* is Trevor Noah pointing out the racism that the British prime minister Rishi Sunak faces for being of Indian descent. He does this while joking about British Colonialism in India and explains how Brexit, whose great promise was to make Great Britain more White, directly led to Rishi Sunak securing his position as prime minister (*The Daily Show*, 2023). This is an example where Trevor Noah stands up for members of oppressed groups that are not Black. It is an example where Trevor Noah shows him racial multiculturalism, which is an attitude belonging to the third stage of the Expanded Nigrescence Model, Internalization.

Trevor Noah acknowledges police brutality is a battle fought by Black people numerous times on The Daily Show, when discussing police brutality happening in the USA (The Daily Show, 2020b). Moreover, during the height of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) protest Trevor Noah went out of his way to make a personal video addressing and justifying the existence and the action, like looting stores, done in the name of the BLM protests (The Daily Show, 2020a). Trevor Noah explains how the social contract Black Americans have with the police is not being upheld when they provide them not with safety, but with threats and death (The Daily Show, 2020a). He fiercely stated: “Police in America are looting Black bodies!” (The Daily Show, 2020a,15:28). Trevor Noah here is intensely occupied with advocating for Black people, this is a clear moment where he exhibits being in the Internalization stage. Trevor Noah used his platform to comment on ongoing issues outside of his comedian persona, doing away with the humor Trevor Noah in this video addressing the seriousness of the situation with the seriousness of his tone.

As an adult, Trevor Noah makes great effort to mention many injustices committed against Black, Colored and Indian people in South Africa (Noah, 2016). He explains how the White minority in South Africa, specifically the Afrikaners, managed to oppress them. For instance, Trevor Noah mentions how the White oppressors used colonialism and police brutality as tools to control the oppressed in South Africa (Noah, 2016). So, he painted a true but very negative picture of White people in South Africa in his life, but also prior to his existence. He highlights how it has affected both his family and South Africa as a country. Trevor Noah has strived to educate his audience about his personal situation and the situation of his country South Africa while writing his book *Born A Crime* (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah has passed through the Immersion-Emersion stage exhibiting Anti-White, Anti-dominant and Intense Black involvement in his desire to empathize with and educate about oppression in South Africa into the Internalization stage by highlighting his contact with the Black experience in South Africa and advocating for the acknowledgement of the horror, but also the beauty, of the situation. Through writing his autobiography Trevor Noah is informing the reader about the journey of the country and needed areas of improvement for South Africa through his criticism of oppression based on both personal as impersonal experiences (Noah, 2016).

Trevor Noah's affinity for Black people transcends into his adulthood. Through his Trevor Noah Foundation, he has made efforts to bring progress in educational quality to children (Microsoft, 2020). His foundation is mainly based in South Africa. He focuses on helping the children living in poverty in the country (Microsoft, 2020). It is a form of advocating for Black people and residing in an Internalization stage. The poor students tend to be children of color, so Black, Colored or Indian children, as a result of their oppression (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah is a man who loves and sees the value of education (BigBoyTV, 2017; Microsoft, 2020). This desire to educate others is present throughout his cultural production (Noah 2016; Noah; 2018; The Daily Show, 2020a). Apartheid severely impacted the life of Trevor Noah, as it did with other South Africans. As a result Trevor Noah (2016) makes great effort to explain and comment on Apartheid in South Africa:

The genius of apartheid was convincing people who were the overwhelming majority to turn on each other. Apart hate, is what it was. You can separate people into groups and make them hate one another so you can run them all. (p 3)

In the way Trevor Noah here describes Apartheid implies that oppression mostly comes from the Oppressors, the White people in this case. However, the hateful intermingling of other groups implies, as he also further addresses in *Born A Crime*, that other racial groups and even tribes throughout apartheid have tried to oppress each other (Noah, 2016). As with the Colored did with the Black people, and the longstanding feud between the Xhosa and the Zulu. Making his view on Apartheid on apartheid not only anti-White, but anti-dominant as well (Noah, 2016).

Differences from the Nigrescence Model

Trevor Noah never fully unlocked the potential of his Immersion-Emersion stage because, he never truly became Anti-White. This manifested in the Internalization stage where it can be postulated he spent most of his adulthood in. Trevor Noah is seen to express many moments of him being a Black Nationalist, but this does not reach the same extent of an individual with solely a Black Identity would have. As aforementioned,

while discussing the Africanness within the Frenchness of the French football players. He pleads for the acceptance of non-singular identities (The Daily Show, 2023). It can be argued that this opinion originates from his own mixed race identity. Frankly, to disagree with the existence of multi-layered identities would be to deny his own existence, after all the hardship of growing up mixed race in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa (Noah, 2016). Black communities around the globe also celebrated the French win of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and applaud the football players for their Blackness. Trevor Noah, however, is special because he not only focusses on their Blackness, but also their Frenchness (The Daily Show, 2023). The structure of The Nigrescence Model does not allow for analyzing interpretations of hidden, but rather rich insights in manifestation of the journey of Black Identity. Trevor Noah mixed race perspective is not given the space in this manifestation. The nuance is lost, because the Nigrescence Model does only highlight Trevor Noah living with Afrocentric, Ethnocentric and Bicultural principles, in this particular example.

Trevor Noah's Stage in The Expanded Nigrescence Model

Trevor Noah's journey through the Nigrescence Model was not linear, as he floated between stages and went back and forth between stages. Some stories or instances of his life did show aspects of multiple stages and it could be argued that they could fit in multiple stages. Nevertheless, after a thorough review of all the data collected on Trevor Noah's journey from childhood to adulthood, there is one stage on the Expanded Nigrescence Model in which Trevor Noah still currently resides in is the Internalization stage. The results have shown how Trevor Noah expresses excessive pride and confidence in his Black identity. It also shows the tremendous amount of effort Trevor Noah has made in creating positive change in the Black community. This effort is reflected in the South African Black community, but also in Black communities existing on an international scale, such as the Black community in the USA.

The Expanded Nigrescence Model also as aforementioned has an Salience stage, this however is not applicable in the same way to Trevor Noah. It can be concluded that his

racial salience is connected to his love for educating others. He is aware of his racial identity and uses it to inform others. As for his level of racial salience, it can be concluded that he currently has a high salience as he is nowadays residing in the Internalization stage. His racial salience was not constant; there were instances of low racial salience when he was in the Pre-encounter Stage for example.

Some limitations are the excessive use of *Born A Crime* throughout the analysis. This was the prime source of data where Trevor Noah mentioned his childhood. Video material of him referring back to his childhood was often in connection with this book. Consequently, these did for the most part have additional value to the book. This all resulted book and video material not being in equilibrium. Moreover, Trevor Noah, especially through his book, is creating his own cultural production and he is choosing what to put into the world and how to present himself to the world. Lastly, a lot of data found on Trevor Noah that was integral to his racial identity was not able to fit into the Expanded Nigrescence Model and therefore had to be omitted. This includes his identity as an outsider, his relationship with humor and comedy and how it is a way for him to speak the truth and process pain, the significance context in comedy holds for him, instances of him highlighting white privilege, many of his personality characteristics including authenticity and openness and, lastly, the many, mostly African, languages he speaks and uses in his cultural production, especially in his comedy shows.

Answer to Research Question

There are characteristics of the Nigrescence Model that Trevor Noah does not fit within. His mixed race and upbringing in South Africa during and after Apartheid prevented himself from fully fitting in a model that was designed for African American, but was successfully used for Black individuals existing worldwide. His racial identity has resulted similarities and differences to the typical use of the Nigrescence Model. Trevor Noah cultural production reveals that his racial identity development was first constructed by South Africa's racial structure. He did not fit in the racial classification. It shows the lack of inclusivity of South Africa's perception of racial identity that is limited by its own racial classification system. As *Born A Crime* tells of this can ensue in racism. Positive racism was shown in the privileges Trevor Noah received, because of the

whiteness in his mixed race. Negative racism is executed in the discrimination he faced from various racial groups, often for not inhabiting an official racial category as intended (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah was an outsider in his life and is an outlier in development through the Expanded Nigrescence Model. However, his existence reflects the limitations in fluidity in racial identity and racial identity development in South Africa.

Conclusion

This thesis, delved into racial identity development through the utilization of The Expanded Nigrescence Model by Cross. The Nigrescence Theory developed for exploring Black Identity development was chosen to explore the Black Identity of Trevor Noah. His mixed race and life experience of growing up in South Africa showed us the complexity and limitations of South Africa's racial identity perception and racial structure. This is visible through the lens Trevor Noah provided. Apartheid's racial classification system deemed Trevor Noah mixed race identity illegal and Post-Apartheid South Africa treated him still as an anomaly. Trevor Noah being colored by color, but not by complexion made him detestable by colored standards. Trevor Noah never fully integrated in to the Blackness and Whiteness of his racial identity, as consequence of, being Black by culture, but not by color and seemingly only White in race and dreams. Trevor Noah was a self-proclaimed Chameleon, an outsider, in South Africa and in his applicability to The Expanded Nigrescence Model. Trevor Noah's cultural production reveals the influence of South Africa's racial context in Trevor Noah life. His Black Identity did indeed develop through The Expanded Nigrescence Model, albeit unusually through the influences of him being mixed raced and South African tainted the chance of a typical transition through the model. Future research is required on Mixed Race identity and racial identity development, specially to South Africa. South Africa poses to have a unique racial structure and racial classification, as a result of Colonialism and Apartheid (Noah, 2016). Trevor Noah's affiliation with South African context resulted in him the racial identity development as discussed, had he grown up in another country such as The USA, due to the one drop rule he would have been perceived as Black (Khanna, 2010). Certain life experiences of Trevor Noah life, like choosing the B-classes in Black solidarity, would not have happened had he been raised in The USA. Hence, further research on the South African racial context is advised.

The research this Thesis conducted was limited by time restrictions. A plethora of data on Trevor Noah remained undiscovered, as only his autobiography and video material was analyzed. Written material or Auditory material, like Trevor Noah's podcasts were omitted from research. It is suggested that upcoming scientific research on Trevor Noah

does include data collection in these areas of his cultural production. Additionally, Trevor Noah being a well-known comedian by the masses could have had an impact on his imposed racial identity. It may have changed the people perception of him, as fame may have given him an closer connection to various racial groups. Furthermore, it can be argued that comedy has provided Trevor Noah more room to discuss uncomfortable topics as race and racism, as a result of its unserious setting.

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