“Speak As You Want To Speak: Just Be Free”

A linguistic-anthropological monograph
of first-language Iscamtho-speaking youth
in White City, Soweto.

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Introduction

White City: a rough place?

On the night of 31 December 2007, White City was a glittering place. The full moon in the sky was hardly veiled by a few clouds, on which its light was reflecting, thus enlightening the entire township. The round roofs of the elephant houses had a bright glance. Here and there, fireworks were being lightened up. The cricket-bangers of the children were exploding every minute. And the streets were full with people, from kids to grand-parents.

White City looked just like a very lively and happy place, with a party in every street, to which anyone was invited. Most people on the streets were not even surprised to see umlungu enjoying the night's air in the streets of the location. By the time, I was actually ready to leave, since my flight back was scheduled twenty four hours later, on New Year's Day. People had come to be used to my presence, even if most of them probably didn't know what I had been doing around, although they had seen me driving, walking, or chilling in White City almost every day for the previous five months.

Yet, I had been warned many times. Actually there wasn't one week from 2 August 2007 to New Year's Day 2008 during which I wouldn't meet some person in Soweto, most of the time above the age of 50 years old and especially women, to warn me that White City was far too rough for me: “Something is going to happen to you!” were words I heard several times. In Orlando East and West, in Dobsonville, in Diepkloof or in Meadowlands, many were worried for me to see a white student who was not only staying in Orlando, but who was working everyday in White City.

The reader must be aware that the township of Jabavu in deep Soweto, more famous under the name of White City, has earned a reputation over the past sixty years: it is known as one of the worst centres of gang violence and crime in Soweto. Some even consider it the most dangerous location in the entire Soweto, although the whole of Soweto experienced at different historical times the reign of gangs which were terrorizing the residents. An anecdote is most revealing of the perceptions of outsiders about White City: I once was for a night at Sun City, an entertainment Park in the North West Province, some three and a half hours drive from Soweto. I was there with two friends, including one from White City, when a man we were discussing with, and who had once lived in Soweto, asked my friend: “Why in White City do you always take a gun when there is a problem?” Some prejudices are resistant.

In the 1970's, White City was nicknamed Kansas City, as gangs and gun violence evoked America, as pictured in the classical American movies which Sowetans could see in cinemas; in the 1980's, Kansas had turned into Cancer, as life in the location became most precarious; the nickname now has become

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1 A White person.
Khenza, a common name of the place among the youth. White City's fame is today largely exaggerated, especially since gun violence has become rare. However, there was once a permanent risk to be the victim of the different violent fractions of the population: gangsters at first, who fought several gang wars in decades for the territorial control of the different parts of White City, and who could assault, mug, or rape residents anytime; later the school students and the political activists who were aiming at criminals at the same time as they were fighting government agents; and finally the police, who would in some periods impose a bloody repression on struggle movements and social troubles, shooting freely at any suspicious person on the street from their hippo trucks during the states of emergency of the 1980's.

In the 1990's, White City didn't really experience any improvement, as many youngsters who could see no opportunity opened for them by the democratic transition joined existing gangs or organised new ones. Boys as young as 15 years old would by then commit house break-in or car theft in the White suburbs, both of them involving sometimes murder. Muggings and rapes were daily events in the township. As the opportunity to gain money through criminal activities was the best way sometimes to feed entire families, it could easily justify to loose interest in a more regular trajectory, which didn't seem to offer a better hope anyway. The causes of the permanence of crime in White City are old: generations of criminals succeeded to one another, youngsters being often shown example by their own fathers, uncles or brothers; the precarious childhood spent in shacks, those shelters “which hardly protects from anything else than the neighbour's sight” (Guillaume 2001), often with the yard and the house overcrowded with twelve or fifteen people; and an adulthood with no perspective of improvement in the conditions of living, due to apartheid, then to the deteriorating economic conditions. Finally, following an amnesty offered to anyone who would hand out firearms to the police in 2001, most young gangsters abandoned crime and began to change their lives. Some had experienced jail, and most were willing to believe in the dream of a “new South Africa”.

At first glance from European eyes, White City still looks like a difficult place: children play barefoot on the tar of the large streets, which is still more comfortable than the dust and stones of the sidewalks; the heavy concrete houses with their strange forms seem raw and cold, not particularly comfortable, and most of them are overcrowded; 90 percent of White City's yards are full with two to five shacks, often small but which serve as a room for one person as well as to couples with one or two children. The place isn't exactly wealthy: like the rest of Soweto, it is hit hard by unemployment, especially among the youth; teenage pregnancy is a banality; and funeral tents spring up every week-end, as a reminder of the high rate of AIDS prevalence in South Africa.

Why do a sociolinguistic research in White City?

It is circumstances which made White City to become the field of this research. As I was visiting a community centre which I know well, the Soweto Kliptown Youth (SKY) in the Kliptown squatter camp, I was introduced to B., a young man from White City. He later introduced me to the place and to his

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2 A shack is a hut built from corrugated iron, steel, or zinc, or even from wooden and plastic wastes.
3 See chapter 3 and picture n°5.
friends, after agreeing on helping me with my research. At the time, my only directions in terms of research were: a field, multilingualism; a place, Soweto and especially deep Soweto; and a focus on an age category, namely “young adults”. It is some times later that I understood that B. and his friends had themselves gone through a past of crime and violence.

Why then decide to re-focus the research topic on a linguistic anthropological study of these White City youth? The reader must be aware that White City and especially the young men which I had met obviously embodied one of the most fascinating linguistic phenomena in South Africa: Iscamtho. Iscamtho is a name given in Soweto to the local tsotsitaal, or street language.

So Iscamtho is a tsotsi-taal, from tsotsi, a criminal, and taal, 'language' in Afrikaans. It indeed has a criminal origin. But the name Iscamtho does not reveal this: it means “talk” or “chat” and comes from the Zulu word ukuqamunda meaning “talk volubly” (Ntshangase 2002). Its other most common name, Ringas, comes from English “ring” and describes the way people form a round to chat. Starting out as a language of people involved in crime, Iscamtho became the street language of the youth, as it conveyed a feeling of urbanity and city-slickness, and because gangsters had some attraction power on the youth, due to the prestige of an outlaw life in a system that was to be fought, and to the financial case that gangsters could attain (Van Onselen 1982, Glaser 2000, Ntshangase 2002).

As crime became a permanent feature of certain townships, Iscamtho came to be the main language of some residents, and permanently settled within their households. In the course of the 1980's, it became what can be considered a native language, as some children learned it from early childhood, and inherited it from their parents along with the family's other languages. During the 1990's, a cultural wave, kwaito, the foremost post-apartheid musical trend, took Iscamtho up to the status of a cultural and a media language, as it spread on the radio and on TV.

This trajectory undergone by the lingo – as tsotsitaals and especially Iscamtho are often termed by their speakers – from crime to a common use on the street, and to a cultural dimension through kwaito, is the very same experienced by the young men who were to constitute the main core of informants in this research: from crime in their teenage years to a normalized adult life in which kwaito – which they compose, write and sing – is the main occupation through which they hope to achieve an improvement of their social condition; and all along their trajectory, Iscamtho has held a major part in their lives, since they are first-language speakers. It is this obvious parallel between the anthropological curriculum of these youth and the historical curriculum of the lingo which convinced me to confine my study to White City youth. Hence the project of a case-study of first-language Iscamtho-speaking youth, meant to expose the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of the native and/or first speakers of the urban variety which is Iscamtho, and to understand the functions and uses of this urban language.

Iscamtho is playing an ever bigger role in the South African society. In Soweto, it has long reached the status of lingua franca among the youth, and as the youth of twenty or thirty years ago have grown older, Iscamtho has become proper for more trans-generational exchanges. In places such as White City where most youth speak Iscamtho as a main language, it is even usual that the lingo is used when
addressing relatives such as parents or grand parents. Although this is not considered respectful by most
Sowetans, it is all generations of Sowetans who can understand Iscamtho, and a majority of individuals who
actually speak it. The 2001 official census acknowledged a bit more than 1 million inhabitants in Soweto, but
according to more realistic estimates commonly heard in the media or from NGOs such as representatives of
squatter camp dwellers, there might be between two and four millions. Thus, one can roughly give a high
estimate of up to 5% of South Africans who understand and/or speak Iscamtho. This thesis will cast light on
some of the issues raised by a growing number of Iscamto-speakers towards the multilingual regime of the
Republic of South Africa.

Iscamtho is also spreading in the media: the foremost post-apartheid cultural movement in
South Africa, kwaito has been epitomized by artists such as Arthur Mofokate, Brenda Fassie, up to Zola7,
who reached a great name with songs in Iscamtho over the last fifteen to twenty years. The prestige of
Soweto and its impact on other Black youth around the country were a strong resort explaining this success.
Iscamtho is heard on many radios, especially YFM (for Youth FM), which is specialized in kwaito and is
very popular among the youth all over South Africa. On television, many dramas depicting the life of
township youth, or of young Black adults who achieved a successful life in the “new” South Africa, use
Iscamtho, as the main vector of dialogues, or as part of speeches involving language-mix. Through television
as well as through radio, youth outside Soweto have become interested in Iscamtho, which has emerged as a
prestigious variety to them, although it is tsotsitaal.

Problematisation of the issue

The main purpose of this thesis will be to answer this question: to what status have the
evolutions of its social functions brought Iscamtho? From the time when Iscamtho was a criminal jargon to
the present times, when it is a native language and the vector of kwaito and its cultural movement, this thesis
follows a primarily social approach, which allows to reconsider issues such as native language acquisition,
the formation of multilingual codes, or the social characterization of what is a language.

In the case of Iscamtho, it is not clear, judging from the appellations given to it in various
publications, if one is dealing with a language, a jargon, an argot or a slang. Those categories correspond to a
number of linguistic concepts, and a spoken code must match a number of characteristics to be classified
under one of these conceptual categories. However, the approach of this thesis is not a linguistic one, but
rather linguistic anthropological one. As such, it won’t deal much with linguistic structures or form features,
especially as it will be shown that these are not defining features of Iscamtho; but rather, anthropological and
social observations about Iscamtho will be the core of the approach: how Iscamtho is used, how it is
considered, and through which processes it is shaped. To be able to provide an insight in the social functions
of Iscamtho, one must focus on three social dimensions of the variety:

- What expressions of social position and social relationships does Iscamtho convey? This
  question leads to examine the evolution of the social meaning of Iscamtho.

- What are the identity and social values at stake for first-language Iscamtho-speakers? Their
perceptions about the South African society and its numerous languages is the source of linguistic strategies and of a specific use of Iscamtho.

- In what settings and situations, in what purpose, and in what way do its speakers express themselves in Iscamtho? The conscious and unconscious attitudes towards Iscamtho will allow us to embrace its present functions and status.

Iscamtho, this is for sure, is a code which can and does change permanently. Therefore it is necessary to analyse the reasons of this ever changing dimension of the language. This thesis aims at analysing how primarily Iscamtho-speaking youth experience their language in a complex context such as the South African democratic society and its numerous social developments and transformations; how they understand and express their identities; and how Iscamtho’s symbolic values structure their behaviours. The thesis was conceived as a monograph, in which will be exposed:

- the context of Iscamtho: its origins, how it became the main language in White City and the first if not native language of White City youth;
- the perceptions of these first language Iscamtho-speakers on the South African democratic society: where they locate themselves on the social scale; what identities they claim, promote, or reject in the post-apartheid society: as Blacks, youth, Sowetans, Iscamtho-speakers...; how they see their linguistic situation as a marker of their social position;
- the perceptions and attitudes of first language Iscamtho-speakers about languages: the values they tie to Iscamtho; their feelings and attitudes towards other South African languages – the nine African languages on the one hand, the former colonial languages English and Afrikaans on the other hand;
- the social and linguistic mechanisms through which Iscamtho is transmitted and is permanently reshaped by its speakers; what values and behaviours make Iscamtho an ever changing form of speech and yet a successful lingua franca and cultural marker.

By exposing the everyday and individual experience of first language Iscamtho-speakers, this thesis aims at providing an in-depth understanding of the resorts lying behind the growth of Iscamtho, but also behind its power as a representative feature of Sowetan youth culture.

**Clarification of the terms**

A number of terms and concepts now need to be defined, as they will be used in the thesis in a somehow specific meaning. Three domains especially need to be clarified: the geography of the research field; the typology of the languages which are mentioned and analysed in the thesis; and the definition of the studied group, White City’s young adults, and its relevance. In addition, some terms regularly quoted from the informants need to be translated.
The place:

- **Soweto**: the term *Soweto* was used from the late 1950’s but it became official only by 1963. It is nothing but an acronym for South Western Townships. The administrative Soweto is not the same as what is commonly considered by locals to be Soweto. Thus, Dobsonville, Meadowlands, or Diepkloof are usually considered as being part of Soweto, but it is not true from the point of view of local authorities (see map n°2). New extensions have appeared in the last decade, such as in Protea Glens, Bram-Fisher, Lusaka, Joe-Slovo… these new locations are not all administratively inside the limits of Soweto, but as part of the agglomeration, they still are part of Soweto as commonly referred to by residents and neighbours. It is the social acceptation of the name Soweto, not the administrative one, which is retained in this thesis. Thus, Diepkloof or Kliptown for instance will definitely be considered as parts of Soweto. The entire agglomeration represented on picture n°1 is Soweto as referred to in the thesis. Our point of reference will be what is sometimes term as Greater Soweto.

- **Deep Soweto**: deep Soweto is the centre of the agglomeration, and the parts which are the farthest from Johannesburg. It matches more or less the townships gathered under the acronyms of JAJAZZEM: Jabavu, Jabulani, Zondi, Zola, and Emdeni. It is distinguished from Orlando, Meadowlands, Diepkloof, or Kliptown by its history of settlement, its original social composition, and its harder criminal history. It is also geographically located on a lower ground, surrounded by the other townships of Dube, Pimville, or Chiawelo.

- **White City**: The township of Jabavu was officiously renamed White City quickly after its creation, due to the completely white houses. Since it is the usual name of the place when people refer to it, but also in advertising for instance, we will use the term White City rather than Jabavu, except when historical references are made to Jabavu before it was formally built and renamed White City.

The languages:

- **Iscamtho**: Iscamtho is a variety which has many names, such as *Ringas, itaal, kasietaal, sekasie, sescamtho, isitsotsi*, etc. However, the term Iscamtho being the most often used in scientific literature, it is the one which was chosen for this thesis. Iscamtho is defined as Soweto’s street language, or *tsotsitaal*, but it is differentiated from Tsotsitaal. The former, *tsotsitaal*, is a generic term for street languages of criminal origin in South Africa; the latter, *Tsotsitaal*, is one original variety, which served as a model for criminal and street languages all over the country, and which was developed in
Sophiatown and the Western Areas of Johannesburg, before being taken to Soweto through the forced removals of the mid-1950’s.

- **Tsotsitaal**: the original Sophiatown variety is built on a grammar from Afrikaans, mixed with words mainly from Tswana and Zulu. It symbolizes the cultural emulation of the racially mixed Sophiatown, as well as its gangsters, since it started out as a criminal code. Today, it is a moribund variety in Soweto, as most of its speakers are now above 70 years old⁴.

- **Shalambombo**: another criminal code from the first half of the 20th century, Shalambombo was born in the slums of Orlando and Pimville, before the formal creation of Soweto. It is based on a Zulu grammar. Shalambombo spread first in the South African prisons, before the youth of Soweto adopted it, and renamed it Iscamtho in the 1960’s (Ntshangase 1993, 1995, 2002). Today, it still exists under the name of Shalambombo and it is spoken by prison gangs in diverse varieties.

- **Prison languages**: in South Africa, the main prison gangs, known as the 26 gang, 27 gang, 28 gang, Big Five gang, or Air Force gang, are structured hierarchically and they are distinguishable by their criminal activities: some prefer money theft, others do car theft, or murder, etc. Each gang has its own language, based either on Tsotsitaal or on Shalambombo. Thus, one speaks of the 26 language, 28 language, etc. Prison inmates learn them, and criminals from the same gang speak them to each other.

- **The official languages**: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognizes 11 official languages, termed as follow in law and in their original versions:

  “The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.”

  (1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, title 6, Languages)

For a matter of comfort, these languages will be referred to in the English version of their names: Pedi, Sotho, Tswana, Swati, Venda, Tsonga, Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Xhosa, and Zulu⁵. However:

- In the case of Sotho, a distinction will sometimes be necessary between Southern Sotho, or Sesotho, and the Sotho linguistic family, which includes Sotho, Tswana and Pedi. When necessary, the language Sotho will be referred to as Sesotho to avoid miscomprehension.

- In the case of Swati, this latter form is preferred to Standard English “Swazi”, because South

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⁴ Only one of the informants claimed to speak it, since she learned it from her Grandmother. However, she does not master it. Most others have some comprehension of it, as long as the Tsotsitaal speaker doesn't draw too much on unknown features of Afrikaans.

⁵ The prefixes used in the original versions indicate, in each name, that one is dealing with a language. Thus in Zulu, *isiZulu* is the language, *amaZulu* are the people, and *kwaZulu* is the territory.
African people when speaking English rather transform the original *isiSwati* into Swati, rather than into the “colonial” Swazi.

In the case of Tsonga, the name Shangane, used in Nguni and Sotho languages, will commonly be used in the interviews excerpts, since it is the most common way to refer to Tsongas among non-Tsongas. There is also mention of the plural name *Mashangane*, but this is taken as an insult by Tsonga people, since it refers to “those who flee”, as Tsonga people were not originally one nation but congregated while fleeing Nguni wars in the first half of the 19th century.

- **Soweto Zulu**: there are important differences between the standards of African languages and the languages actually spoken by African speakers. In Johannesburg, languages have evolved under the pressure of the urban and multilingual environment, to a point where speakers of the urban variants can have great difficulties to understand the standards. Thus, the terms Soweto Zulu, or Soweto Sotho, refer to the urban variants, as it is in Soweto and the other townships of Gauteng that variations are the most important. In general, reference is made to the urban variants of Zulu, Sotho, and other languages, without any specification. It will be specified when necessary if reference is made to the standard language.

- **Matrix language**: Iscamtho is a language which lacks its own proper grammar. Thus, it operates on a grammar from another language: one can say that Iscamtho is spoken *in Zulu* or *in Sotho*. The speakers of the different varieties still identify the speech as Iscamtho, and because they are multilingual, they understand the different kinds of Iscamtho. The language used to support the Iscamtho speech is called matrix language.

The people:

- **The population groups**: in the South African context, social groups and individuals are still referred to in racial terms. This is a normal feature of the South African society. It corresponds to a certain imaginary inherited from the categories of colonization and apartheid, as well as to a certain social reality, since historically unequal situations and divisions haven't yet been overcome and largely translate into present social divisions. Although scholars often choose to soften terms and weaken the racial references, in an attempt to forecast and avoid individual susceptibilities, this thesis will use the terms commonly used by White City residents to refer to each fellow South African group, although some will consider this terminology as improper or maybe pejorative. They are actually considered here as purely neutral, and correspond to a common social use:
  - The term *Black* will be preferred to *African*, especially because Africanness as a concept will be discussed in the course of the thesis.
The term Coloured refers to those which apartheid termed as such, who are mixed descendants of White settlers, indigenous Khoikhois (or Hottentots as they were formerly named), African slaves imported from other African regions than South Africa, and Asian slaves from Malaysia and China. They have their own physical type and skin complexion, they speak Afrikaans in a non-standard variant, and most are followers of the Dutch Reformed church. Around Cape-Town, there are also a number of muslim Coloured communities, descending from Malay muslim slaves.

The terms Indians and Whites will also be applied to former apartheid categories.

However, Whites are also to be distinguished between the two historical groups which composed the White population of South Africa: the British, who speak English, and the Afrikaners, who speak Afrikaans.

The Afrikaners might also sometimes be termed Boers, but only in reported speech and quotations, and in the context of the conflict that has existed between the Blacks and the Afrikaners. Thus, the negative meaning of the word Boer when used by Black township residents doesn’t translate the author’s position, but the perceptions of the informants.

Young adults: the studied group in this research is young adults in White City. The terms young adults will be alternatively used with the term youth. It groups people between the age of 18 and 32, who have in common to belong to an age group which grew up during the end of apartheid and the beginning of the democratic society, and which developed its final adult identities under the democratic regime. Members of this group might however be or not yet be established as independent in life, they might have or not have their own place, a job, or children. The common factor rather lies in their experience of the 1990’s upheavals, and the following normalisation of South Africa. One should note that according to South African law, adulthood starts from the age of 21.

In the interviews extracts, a number of terms are used by the informants, which have been kept in the transcription to safeguard the tone and attitudes in the speech. These terms are common in Sowetan speech, even when English is used:

- kasie: it is a township, or sometimes more specifically Soweto. It is sometimes written kasi, but as it come from Afrikaans lokasie, as townships were officially termed Bantu Locations, or Bantu Lokasie, the form kasie is favoured.
- location: equivalent to township, or kasie. It can desigate any township, but it is often used for Soweto specifically. Location can become lokishin in Zulu, Sotho, or Iscamtho speech.
- eish: this is used in South Africa to express surprise, incomprehension, disappointment, or relief.
- ntwana: in Standard Zulu, umntwana is a child, or a prince. In Iscamtho, it means “boy” or “friend”.

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• *ne*: this is used to check that someone is following or agrees with your speech. It is typical of Sowetan speech.
• *yabon?*: this could be translated as “ok?”, “you know?” or “you see?”. It is to check that the receiver of the speech follows or agrees with the speaker.
• *mfethu*: from Standard Zulu *mfowethu*, meaning “my brother”. The Zulu word has undergone a phonetic simplification to become Iscamtho.
• *sho*: from English “sure”, it means “yes” in Iscamtho.
• *ubuntu*: the concept of *ubuntu* is used in the interviews, and discussed in the analysis. It is a traditional concept of generosity, care for the others, and togetherness. It is not directly translatable in English, but it will be explained more intensively in the course of the thesis.

**Methodology**

The research was conducted mainly through participant observation, and it translated into a *quasi* daily presence in White City during five months, while the rest of the time would be mainly spent in other parts of Soweto. From the group of six young men who became first research informants, the investigations were extended to their friends and relatives, in different parts of White City. In total, about thirty to forty people regularly took part in informal discussions on the topic and were aware to be doing so. Formal interviews were conducted with eighteen people in White City, from which twelve were used in the writing. These included males and females between the age of 18 and 32, with different backgrounds and trajectories: most have always lived in White City, others have also lived in other places in Soweto, in Gauteng (see map n°3), or in South Africa, but all of them consider White City as their home place; some have children of their own, others not yet, but they then usually live with their nieces or nephews; few have a job, some are still at school, and most of them are struggling to get ends meet.

The formal interviews were recorded on video, in order to record the speech as well as the attitude. An interview was also conducted in Orlando West with the program manager of a young television channel, *Soweto TV*, since Iscamtho is the main language used on the channel, which is popular among the youth. This interview was not recorded, but notes were taken.

In addition to observations and interviews, a questionnaire was used in two purposes: on the one hand, it allowed the collection of Iscamtho vocabulary; on the other hand, it allowed a comparison between Iscamtho and Soweto Zulu, and showed the preferences of the speakers between Iscamtho, Soweto Zulu, and their home language.

Finally, material from printed supports such as newspapers, local councils’ information, or cellphone manuals were also collected, as part of the linguistic environment which surrounds the research informants. A photographic survey of commercial advertisement in Soweto was also made, consisting in photographs of dozens of commercial paintings and placards all around Soweto. The purpose was to show the prominence of English on the commercial stage within the township.

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6 Original videos of the interviews available from the library of the Africa Study Centre, Leiden university.
Main literary references

The analysis relies on three perspectives, provided by three main literary sources:

- on the topic of the socio-history and sociological origins of Iscamtho, Dumisani K. Ntshangase (1993, 1995, 2002) provided most of the information. Especially, he is the one who demonstrated the origin of Iscamtho in Shalambombo. The social context of gangsterism and how the criminal lingos spread is described also by Nthsangase, as well as Clive Glaser (2000), and in a complementary perspective, Charles van Onselen (1982). These two last authors are historians, who studied intensively the phenomenon of gangs in the Witwatersrand.

- On the topic of South African multilingualism, Sinfree Makoni (2003) was the main reference: he proposes a critical vision of the South African linguistic regime, on the ground of the artificial character of the Standard languages. To him, African speech is always changing and adapting to the speakers, and language as a fluid item can change and be shaped under the deliberate behaviour of the speakers. This vision is completely verifiable in the consideration of Standard languages by Soweto speakers, and in their language-transforming attitudes.

- On the topic of multilingualism and native acquisition, Suresh Canagarajah (2007) was the ground of the analysis of individual trajectories in Soweto, and of the effect of a highly multilingual society on the mixed and multilingual lingua franca. His description of multilingual crews on cargo ships shows many common elements between this setting and Soweto.

A number of other authors studied the phenomenon of tsotsitaal in South Africa, and sometimes more specifically in Johannesburg or Soweto. All of them are not quoted in the thesis, but mention should be made of Slabbert and Finlayson (2002), Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1996), H. Brookes (2004), Childs (1997), or S.C. Satyo (2001). Generally, tsotsitaals as mixed urban languages have been studied for long now. However, little focus has been made on Iscamtho specifically, despite the importance of Soweto and Johannesburg in South Africa. Ntshangase remains the most reliable source on this specific variety, but he focused on the period going up to the mid-1990's.

Presentation of the informants

A short presentation of each of the informants who participated in formal interviews, and who is quoted in the thesis is necessary to understand the background of their testimonies. It will also provide a description of the linguistic experience of youth in White City. For a matter of respect of the confidentiality of some of the testimonies, none of the informants will be identified by his/her name:

B., male, 25 years old: born at Baragwanath Hospital7, B. lived in different places in Gauteng, but he spent most of his lifetime living at his grandmother’s place in White City. He attended school in

7 Officially renamed Chris Hani-Baragwanath hospital, it is located at the main entrance of Soweto, about five kilometers from White City. It is said to be the largest hospital in the world in number of beds.
White City, and completed his matric\(^8\) in 2001. B. defines himself as a Tsonga, from his father, but his mother’s family are Xhosas.

B. used several languages at home as a child. Tsonga was the grandmother’s language, Sotho was the aunt’s and cousins’ language. When he lived with his mother's family for a few years, he was speaking Xhosa. He learned Zulu, the main *lingua franca* in Soweto with his friends as a very young child, as well as Iscamtho, which he learned on the street but also from his father, whom he did not see regularly, as the father was a gangster. Iscamtho was used at home between B. and his cousin G. He went to school in Zulu for his first year, then in Pedi – which he didn’t speak by then, but which is close to Sotho. He kept Pedi as school language up to the age of ten, when school switched to English. So in addition, B. can speak English fluently. He can read and write Tsonga, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and English.

As a teenager, B. was not a regular school-goer. As young as 12 years old, he would go with his friends and steal brand new mountain-bikes from the Indian shops in Kliptown, which he could exchange in White City for AK-47 machine-guns. Taking example on his father, he involved in criminal activities with his friends from school and from the street. Still today, some people in White City are afraid of him, as he’s seen as a gangster. From his own words, misery is the reason why he turned to crime, as he was eager to get some of the wealth that he could see with others out of the township. In 2001, he handed out his guns and benefited from an amnesty. Since, he’s been trying to make a living through drumming and kwai.\(\text{t}o. He is an author, a rapper and slammer, and he founded with three of his friends a production company, to try and promote his kwai and make a living out of it.

D., male, 28 years old: born at Baragwanath hospital, D. never lived out of White City. He considers himself a Zulu, although he's half Tsonga. He lives in a shack with his girlfriend, in the yard of the family house shared with his mother, his sister, and his two brothers. One older brother died years ago. At home, the family would speak Zulu and Tsonga, but the main language of D. is Iscamtho, which he speaks to his brothers, sister, and mother. Iscamtho has been a common language in the household for as long as he remembers. D. can speak Pedi, Tsonga, Zulu, English, Xhosa, a bit of Ndebele and a bit of Tswana. This means that he can follow the news in these languages, and he can have a conversation with a local in these languages. He can also read and write any of them, although not fluently except from English and Zulu.

D. was not a regular school-goer, and he also was a gangster in his teenage years. About him too, people remember this fact and might be afraid of him. Since he left crime, D. has become an artist in different ways: he’s a professional drummer who used to play for *Umoja*, one of the biggest and internationally famous South African shows, and he now works with *Umkhonto*, a dance company from Phiri, Soweto. His occupation has given him the opportunity to travel abroad on several occasions. During the course of the research, D. went for two weeks to China with his dance company. Apart from drumming, he is also a kwai composer. He works on computer-assisted music software, from which he draws kwai

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\(^8\) The South African high school degree.
beats. He installed a rudimentary recording studio in a shack of his yard. On the basis of his compositions, his friends write and sing their songs.

**L., male, 32 years old:** L. was born in Molapo, Soweto. He left his mother at the age of 13. She was then serving as a domestic worker in a white household in Booysens, between Soweto and Johannesburg. After he left, L. spent a few days on the streets of Soweto before he was accepted by a band of gangsters of White City who took care of him. By the age of 15, he was touring White City with an AK-47 on his shoulder, and would shoot at people for minor reasons. In the mid-1990’s L. experienced jail twice, and finally got out in 2000. In jail, he learned dance and theatre, and he reconverted into a dance professor. Many of his former apprentices are now dancing for some of the biggest South African shows.

L. was raised in Sotho, but his grandmother was a Xhosa. Therefore he knows Standard Sotho and Xhosa. Today, he can speak as well Tswana, Pedi, Swati, a bit of Tsonga and Zulu, the latter in its Sowetan as well as Standard version. He developed proficient skills in most of those languages in jail. But his main language is by far Iscamtho, which he speaks with everyone if he wishes so, without much consideration about the age or position of the person. In addition to Iscamtho, as a former member of the 26 gang, L. can speak the 26 Tsotsitaal, and Shalambombo.

Today, he is trying to earn a living from dancing, and has worked in the building of a tourism and development project in White City.

**L., female, 21 years old:** L. is the cousin of B. She was born at Baragwanath Hospital, and always lived at her grandmother’s place in White City, although she would sometimes go to her parents’ house in Emdeni. She has a son of 3 years old. She completed matric, and she is now studying as a post-matric student at Sikwe Maseko Finishing School in White City, thanks to a government scholarship. All her friends live in White City, and she rarely has the opportunity to leave the location. L. cannot say if she is a Tsonga, like her grandmother, a Pedi like her father, or even a Coloured, as she sometimes define herself, since she suspects that her grandfather on her father’s side might be an Afrikaner: although the grandmother never spoke about him, they have in this branch of the family a light skin complexion⁹, and the father has an Afrikaner first name.

Although her grandmother’s language was Tsonga, she understands it but can’t speak it fluently. She also understands Zulu, but doesn’t speak it much. She speaks Soweto Sotho with her parents and relatives, and with her son; but as she went to school in Pedi and as this is her father’s language, she also knows it well. Apart from this, L. speaks English but not very fluently, and she would love to learn Afrikaans, because of her belief about her origins. L. claims not to be able to speak Iscamtho, a language that she considers improper, but she can understand it.

Apart from school, L. has no occupation, and she mainly spends her free days taking care of her son

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⁹ Whereas Tsongas as well as Pedis are commonly considered to have a dark complexion compared to other South Africans.
and her cousin’s son, both aged 3. She has what can be considered a “traditional” way of life, meaning that apart from school, she spends most of her time taking care of the children, the house, and the laundry. She rarely goes out, except when she is around with her friends; she doesn’t leave White City; and has a very critical perception of the outside. Especially, she is very unhappy with the South African government, which she sees as incompetent since some new policies, like abortion or children rights over their parents’ authority, make her very angry. She actually argues for a move back to an Afrikaner rule in South Africa.

G., male, 26 years old: G. is L.’s brother and B.’s cousin. He was also born at Baragwanath Hospital, and learned at home Tsonga and Sotho. He defines himself as a Tsonga as well as a Pedi. He speaks fluent Zulu, Xhosa, and Pedi, which is his father’s language, and which he learned at school. He speaks Sotho with his parents. G. is able to read and write only in English and Pedi, the languages that he learned at school, and in Sotho. However, he speaks a perfect Tsonga. He can also understand most of Afrikaans and Swati, although he doesn’t speak those languages. Finally, he can speak fluent Iscamtho, and he’s used to speaking it at home.

G. was a quite teenager, a regular school-goer, and he avoided to follow his cousin B. into crime. He is now studying human resources management at the University of Johannesburg and hopes to find a job when he has completed his studies. He shows a peculiar interest for English, which he cherishes as an intimate and romantic language.

F., female, 22 years old: F. was born in Leratong Hospital, in the East rand, Gauteng. She first lived in Walkerville, South of Johannesburg, before she came to White City to stay with her grandmother. She has one half-brother, but she doesn’t know him well. Between the age of 16 and 20 again she left White City to follow her mother, but finally came back. She has lived on her own in White City for one year and a half.

F. was raised in Zulu, and as she was most interested in this language, she also learned how to speak and write Standard Zulu. She defines herself as proudly Zulu, although primarily Sowetan. She speaks fluent Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana, and she can understand but not speak Swati, part of Ndebele, and Pedi. F. attended a multiracial school in Johannesburg where she learned English and Afrikaans, although she is not fluent in this latter one. She can read and write English and Afrikaans, and also Xhosa.

F. has two occupations: on the one hand, she is a freelance tour guide, who takes tourist buses to Soweto. On the other hand, she is a fashion designer, and she created her own label, called Anarchy. So although tourism is her main source of income, fashion design is her favourite activity.

F. speaks two languages much more than any others: English, for professional reasons, and Iscamtho, which is her favourite language. F. is used to speaking Iscamtho with her friends, and she learnt it as a teenager when she liked to hang around with boys more than girls. Iscamtho is for her a very emotional and valuable language. She also knows some Tsotsitaal, which she partly learned from her grandmother.

N., male 28 years old: N. was born at Baragwanath Hospital, and he spent his all life in White City.
His family language is Bhaca, a variant of Xhosa, but at home he would speak a mix of Bhaca, Xhosa, and Zulu. He can speak excellent Xhosa and Zulu, including the standard versions which he knows well; he also speaks Sotho, Pedi, and English, but he is not fluent in these languages. Finally, he understands some Tsonga, but speaks it very little. Most of all, N. speaks Iscamtho, which is by far his first language.

As a teenager, N. was involved in crime, at a time together with B. and D.. He was arrested and spent sometimes in jail, but not “big prisons”, only the arrest facilities of Soweto’s police stations, where people serve short sentences. Thus, he can understand about half of the 26 language, which he likes. He never was a regular school-goer, and doesn’t have matric. Although he hasn’t been involved in any criminal activities for some years now, N. doesn’t have an occupation. So he is part of the kwaito band formed with his friends. He is an author and rapper.

M., male, 29 years old: M. was born in Baragwanath Hospital, and spent his entire life in Soweto, apart from one year which he spent in the Eastern-Cape. At home he speaks Zulu, which he can read and write. But the family language is actually Xhosa: M. knows it very well, but they don’t really speak since they’ve lived in Soweto. He can also understand and speak Sotho, Ndebele and Swati. He speaks very good English, and he can write and read it. However, M.’s main language is Iscamtho, which he speaks to his friends, but also sometimes to his 3-year-old son.

As a teenager, M. got involved in crime. He left school at standard 9 and never completed matric. Since he left criminal life, he has been working as a drummer for Umkhonto Dance Company. Thus, he has travelled to Europe and China.

L., male, 25 years old: L. has lived in different places of Gauteng, mainly the West rand, where he used to speak Tswana. He arrived in White City at the age of eleven. He can speak fluent Tswana, Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele. He also speaks very fluent English and Afrikaans. However, Iscamtho is by far his main language.

L. was involved in crime, from car theft to mugging people in the township. He was sent to jail at the age of 20, and came out only a few months before the research took place. It is in jail which he learned a number of languages, including Afrikaans. Especially, he learned the 26 language and Shalambombo. He can speak those two languages fluently, and since he hasn’t been out of jail for long, it happens regularly that he unconsciously uses some words of those prison languages.

Since he came out of jail, L. has started his own legal business, namely a carwash on the street, which draws to him a number of taxis every evening. Thus, he manages to make a modest living and to keep far from crime.

E., female, 18 years old: E. was born in Baragwanath Hospital. She has no children, but she lives with her two older brothers and takes care of the two daughters of her older sister, who died of AIDS one
year ago. E. is still at school, and she has one more year to complete before matric. Although she is young, she is already largely responsible for her household.

Her home language is Tswana, and she speaks also fluent Zulu, and English, which she learnt from school. But E.’s main language is Iscamtho, by far. She knows all kind of lingos around Soweto, including *Slista*, in which words are reversed. She prefers to hang around with boys, with whom she speaks only Iscamtho. E. is also attracted by “gangster style” and has a number of friends who experienced jail. Thus, she learnt prison Tsotsitaal and Shalambombo, although she doesn’t speak them fluently. E.’s taste for *tsotsitaal* in general led her male friends to nickname her *mshoza*, which normally is used for women of bad living, formerly gangsters' girlfriends or shebeen\textsuperscript{10} girls.

**N., female, 26 years old:** born in Rustenburg, N. moved to White City when she was three years old. She is a Zulu, and primarily speaks Zulu, especially at home where she stays with her mother and her daughter, aged 6. In addition, she can speak fluent Sotho and English; she knows also Xhosa, which she doesn’t speak fluently.

N. was a serious school student, and she now works for ABSA bank in Johannesburg CBD. Thus, she has a number of White and Indian friends from work, and she is used to speaking English with them, at work as well as outside the workplace.

Apart from the words that she might use in her Zulu, N. doesn’t really speak Iscamtho, which she sees as a boys’ language. But she understands it very well, and she appreciates it a lot, since she sees it as a typically Sowetan language.

**T., male, 21 years old:** T. was born at Baragwanath Hospital, and lived in White City until he was 7 years old. Then, he was sent to a boarding school in Swaziland, and would only come back to White City for holidays. Last year, he went back to White City, completed his matric, and he has been here ever since. He stays with his grandmother and considers himself a Swazi. At home, he speaks Swati. T. also likes very much speaking English since it was the language he used during his 13 years in boarding school. English is for him a language for elaborate speech and intimate exchanges. However, he is not fluent in English, and speaks with some hesitations.

Iscamtho is a language that T. learned as a child, and which he loved to speak in his boarding school when he happened to meet another student from Soweto. This was to him a very emotional thing to do. Although he considers that Iscamtho is not proper for women, he values the language and wants to transmit it to his future son.

T. now works for an informal carwash, which allows him to earn a small leaving. He still hopes to find a formal job.

\textsuperscript{10} Shebeens were illegal home-bars during apartheid, and most still exist, although they tend to become more formal.
Part 1: The socio-historical and functional origins of Iscamtho

Chapter 1:

The complex multilingual patchwork of South Africa

This chapter aims at presenting the complex linguistic reality of post-apartheid South Africa, a country in which the life of the linguistic and cultural mosaic is still organised along the separations created or strengthened by apartheid. The 1993 and 1996 Constitutions instituted a linguistic policy which has been presented as a model by many, since it tries to take account of all the possibilities of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the country, and to prevent and counter the effects of four decades of apartheid. It is not meant here to detail the historical process that led to the present situation, although some contextualisation is necessary.

The linguistic diversity of South Africa actually is far more complex than the policies might acknowledge. To understand the linguistic environment in which a Black South African young adult has grown up, this chapter first describes the national perspective on languages (I), with an overview of the fundamental linguistic legislations of South Africa and an account of the geography of languages on a national scale. Once the larger environment is clarified, a focus on the reality of linguistic division within the South African society (II) will show the precise linguistic distribution on a local scale, and the balance of power between languages in the media. Thus, the experience of South African people towards languages will be exposed.

I. South African multilingualism from the nation-broad perspective

Languages and linguistic practices in South Africa were given a framework during the transition negotiations, not to protect and empower the “formerly disadvantaged communities”, but under the pressure of the Afrikaner representatives, who feared that Afrikaans would be overwhelmed by the Black majority’s languages and English (Lafon 2004, 2006). As a result, the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights contain the dispositions which ensure linguistic diversity in the country. However the geographic distribution of languages will show the first weaknesses of the policies involved by those dispositions.
Two fundamental legal texts

The South African linguistic policy relies firstly on the Constitution, which provides a number of dispositions concerning languages, and on the Bill of Rights, itself attached to the Constitution, which lists the individual and collective rights in terms of practising cultures and languages. Here are the excerpts of each text which are concerned with languages:

**Constitution of the Republic of South Africa:**

*Title 6: Languages*

1. The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.
2. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
3. a. The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.
   b. Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
4. The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without retracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
5. A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must -
   a. promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of -
      i. all official languages;
      ii. the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
      iii. sign language; and
   b. promote and ensure respect for -
      i. all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu; and
      ii. Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

**Bill of rights**

*Title 29: Education*

2. Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account -
   a. equity;
   b. practicability; and
   c. the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.

*Title 30: Language and culture*

Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights.

*Title 31: Cultural, religious and linguistic communities*

1. Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community -
   a. to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language; and
   b. to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

*Title 35: Arrested, detained and accused persons*

3. Every accused person has a right to a fair trial, which includes the right -
   k. to be tried in a language that the accused person understands or, if that is not practicable, to have the

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11 The Bill of rights was designed as a means to prevent abuses on human rights such as those committed under the apartheid regime. Thus, it details individual and collective rights in a very precise manner.
proceedings interpreted in that language;

The framework built by these texts supposedly allows every person in South Africa to use his/her own language in a private setting, but also in his/her relations to public institutions, as long as the language is one of the state’s eleven official languages. In fact, examples will be given in this thesis of the impossibility to always guarantee the second right.

The eleven languages count two languages of Indo-European origin, English and Afrikaans, both belonging to the sub-family of Germanic languages, and nine “indigenous” languages, all belonging to the family of Bantu languages. In this category, three belong to the sub-family of Sotho languages, namely Sotho or Southern Sotho, Pedi or Northern Sotho, and Tswana, or Western Sotho; and four belong to the sub-family of Nguni languages, namely Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele. Finally, two official languages are not related to any other South African language: Venda forms its own group. It originates in the North of the country, but the Vendas, however a rather small population, are divided in groups among which cultural and linguistic diversity is actually quite high. The Venda language contains Sotho and Nguni influences. Tsonga is part of a larger group spread over the southern half of Mozambique.

**Linguistic geography**

The distribution of languages is very unequal on the South African territory, with each language apart from English having a regional stronghold and none of them enjoying a national domination, as shown on map n°1. As a result of this distribution, the efficiency of the national policies is compromised: indeed, and despite the formal equality among languages, how could all languages be spoken everywhere when there is such a distribution of each language’s influence? As mentioned in Title 6–3a of the Constitution, realism determines actual possibilities for a speaker to use his/her own language, “taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned”. This leads to a localization of the use of languages in state institutions, since it includes the economic efficiency of developing a translation system for all documents and recruiting a multilingual staff: those measures only make sense if there are a sufficient number of people to be interested in the service. There have been decisions by some provinces to provincialize the language policy: in 2003, the Western Cape has adopted official trilingualism, with English, Afrikaans and Xhosa being the administration's work languages. The province of KwaZulu-Natal has not yet made such a step, but the eventuality of bilingualism Zulu/English or trilingualism Zulu/English/Afrikaans have been under discussion for a few years. Venda is not normally used outside Limpopo, and the same can be applied to Tsonga outside Limpopo and Mpumalanga – with the exception of multilingual Gauteng. A regionalization of the use of these two languages would make sense.

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12 The Sotho family extends through Botswana up to Zambia, where it is related to the Lozi group.
13 A number of Nguni groups have migrated from the Cape’s eastern coastal region to the North, up to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and even to Zambia and Tanzania.
To complete the overall picture, there exists in South Africa another kind of languages, which don’t appear on map 1: mixed languages, referred to sometimes as pidgins, sometimes as jargons, sometimes as argots. It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the functions of one of these mixed-codes, Iscamtho, in order to define it. Some of these mixed-languages have a very specific domain of existence and use, like Fanakalo (Adendorff 1995; Brown 1988), which is a language of the mines, and is a code meant to give and receive orders, in a mixture of Zulu, English, and Afrikaans.

But more intriguing is the case of tsotsitaal, which will be discussed intensively in the next chapters. The term means “gangster language” and is used to refer generically to street languages in South Africa, as these have the same criminal origin and are still today associated with criminals. It goes back to one specific variety, Tsotsitaal, a criminal argot created in Sophiatown in the early 20th century, which became very popular and remains as a symbol of the 1950’s’ Golden Age for the Black middle-class in Johannesburg. The influence of Tsotsitaal, along with its twin Shalambombo, in South African prisons would soon spread mixed-codes nation-wide, and all the street languages of South Africa are originally based on its model: a language-mix between Afrikaans and one or more African languages (originally Tswana). The term tsotsitaal was always kept, especially because these languages would be mainly spoken by criminals. There is a certain diversity in tsotsitaals today, due to two different varieties of origin, Tsotsitaal and Shalambombo, but also because the nature of the mix depends on the vernacular language(s) of the place. In addition, the respective influence of Afrikaans and English is not the same from one place to another, and from one generation of speakers to another.

As a result, tsotsitaals, which are also termed lingos, form a very heterogeneous kind of speech, which present the particularity of being always changing, as lexicon creation or the incorporation of items from other languages are usual practices. The reader should also bear in mind that tsotsitaals are spoken only by Black and Coloured youth, but that the varieties are not the same between those two groups. Tsotsitaal has gone through profound changes in its social meaning and its place in society.

2. The reality of languages divisions and intertwining within the South African society

The large-scale picture can only provide a very imprecise account of what South Africans experience in their everyday life in terms of languages. The reasons are multiple: the greater linguistic diversity which was hidden by the officialisation of a restricted diversity, through the languages mentioned in the Constitution; the important geographic segregation which still characterizes South Africa today; and the economic and practical realities of the society, which reflects especially in language distribution in the media.

A greater diversity than the policies may acknowledge

The account of the national distribution of languages reflects only little of the country's linguistic mosaic: there are in South Africa many more languages than the 11 official ones or even than the
ones listed in Title 6 of the Constitution. In fact, the classification of so-called indigenous languages into separate and definite varieties is most hazardous, as argued by Sinfree Makoni (2003, p.132-151):

“We should note that the discourse that constructs African languages as separate categories has its genesis in colonial thinking, namely in an ideology of “linguistic fixity” that disregards the historical context in which they were invented. […] In African language communities, there are significant linguistic differences between the official “standard” version of the language and the version that is actually used and spoken. […] Misclassification overlooks the great diversity within each of the distinct language labels, as can be easily illustrated through the case of one of the languages officially recognized by the South African constitution: Xhosa. As with many other languages, Xhosa has several spoken varieties as Ngqika, Thembu, Hlubi, Bhaca, Bomvana, Mpondo, Mpondomise, and others […]. Speakers of Hlubi and Bhaca from the Eastern Cape may experience problems with standard Xhosa represented in textbooks. The written representation of African speech has historically run parallel to, but rarely intersected with, the daily language practices of most speakers of those languages.”

The standardization of South Africa’s Bantu languages is actually the result of the settlement of numerous Christian missions, and of the competition that existed between them to evangelize the local populations. Two good accounts of how artificial the categorization of these languages can be are given by Harries (1995) about Tsonga, and by Bailey (2001) on Nguni, Sotho, Tsonga and Venda origins. For decades, the proximity between so-called languages, their dialects, and their neighbour languages has lead some scholars and politicians to argue in favour of a vast enterprise of linguistic planning in order to reduce the number of standards, a solution sometimes referred to as the Nhlapo-Alexander proposal\(^\text{14}\), and described by Lafon (2006):

“The core element is harmonization of the different spelling systems within the Nguni and Sotho groups: that would tremendously facilitate the circulation of texts within both groups, whether they are written in any of the existing varieties or in a unified language (Nguni or Sotho). That would result in obvious economies of scale, for school manuals in particular […]. This does not raise insuperable technical difficulties, as has been demonstrated by numerous studies but does break away from habits born from colonial and apartheid legacy.”

Depending on one’s point of view, there are many more languages than eleven in South Africa, or many less: for instance, if one considers the nine variants of Xhosa as separate languages – which can be argued for since mutual comprehension is not always the rule – it will be many more than eleven; if one considers the three Sotho languages, Sesotho, Pedi and Tswana, as being only dialects of one common

\(^\text{14}\) From Neville Alexander, based on the writings by Jacob Nhlapo. (See Alexander 1989; 1991)
variety – again a position which is fairly acceptable, since differences between the three are mainly orthographic and lexical – then it’s going to be less than eleven.

Local segregation and unequal linguistic distribution

Map n°1 on the national distribution of languages may create an illusion of homogeneity of the distribution of languages in circumscribed areas. Yet, local geographic divisions reproduced all over South Africa have deep consequences on the linguistic distribution: one of the main characters which South Africa inherited from the apartheid regime remains residential segregation along race. The typical pattern of the South African is shown on the schematic map n°4.

Under apartheid, each area would be a location declared as reserved to Blacks, Coloured, Indians, or Whites. It was the purpose of apartheid to separate nations, understood as racial and linguistic groups (Zulus, Pedis, Xhosas... or the Afrikaner Volk), by constraining them to their supposed territory of origin, to the privilege of the Afrikaners. In urban settings, people would not be allowed to dwell outside their reserved location. As a consequence, the linguistic setting of each of those locations would not be the same, and the differences have largely remained today. The city centre would be white, with its margins being reserved to Indians; further away would be the Coloured locations and the larger Indian townships; and even more remote or less easily accessible, the Black locations. The Coloured and Black locations are separated from the centre and the White designated areas by a “buffer zone”, generally empty land, and “physical barriers”, such as a railway, a motorway, an industrial zone, a mine dump, or any kind of obstacle to the circulation of people (map n°4). As a result of residential segregation, people of different skin colours would hardly meet themselves, apart from the inequal professional relations which they might have. In private life, but also in the life of the community of their place of residence, transracial contacts “have tended to be self-conscious, and it is almost impossible to be truly colour-blind in human relationships… For the majority then, race zoning has kept people from knowing and understanding one another” (Lemon 1991, quoted in Lester 1996, p.116).

Still today, geographic segregation is the rule in the South African city, as most people never had the opportunity – or the intention – to move from their location and explore others. However, the formerly White suburbs, with their large and comfortable houses in quiet and highly protected quarters have attracted a number of “formerly disadvantaged people” who have become upper class people, especially Blacks, but also Indians and a few Coloureds. Segregation is now as strong, in the same locations as before. Yet the criterion for segregation is no more race, but financial status, as selection of residents is made through the high rents and prices in these quarters. Yet, this rough picture is submitted to important variations depending on the region, since there are not the same proportions of Black, White, Coloured, and Indian population across the nine South African provinces.

Today, the situation could be sketched as follow:

- Residents of the formerly White suburbs hardly speak anything else than English or Afrikaans in public places, although their domestic workers would speak their own languages between them, and
despite the presence of many different home languages – which may include European languages such as Dutch, Portuguese, or Greek, and local African languages as well among the Black upper class.

- In a Coloured township, one will find Afrikaans, and other home languages will be exceptional cases.

- Concerning Black townships, two cases must be distinguished: in most of South Africa, Black townships are rather linguistically uniform, with the regional vernacular dominating, and where only those who don't originate from the place might have a different language. This is especially the case in small towns in the more remote areas, but also in cities such as Durban, Port Elisabeth, Bloemfontein and others, in which the local vernacular – respectively Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho – dominates the public space and private exchanges in the townships. However in Gauteng the situation is very different: originally, Gauteng's central region, the Witwatersrand, developed from the mining industry, which required massive labour. Workers were first “imported” from all over South Africa, before a rural exodus that would not stop until today kept bringing new migrants in search for a job, or simply for a better life in Jozi\textsuperscript{15}. As a result, Gauteng's townships are highly multilingual.

In addition, the economic heart of South Africa has beaten since the fifties around the so-called PWV region, for Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereiniging (see map n°3). PWV became Gauteng, the smallest but still the richest and most densely populated province in South Africa. Consequently, massive migratory fluxes transformed the Black townships of Gauteng into a concentrate of all the languages of South Africa. The linguistic environment of White City will constitute a relevant example of the concrete reality of life in a multilingual township. At first, the apartheid government divided the townships of Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Vereeniging: different locations were attributed to different ethnic and linguistic groups. Sothos were separated from Ngunis, while Tsongas and Vendas were usually grouped together, sometimes with Pedis, according to their geographic origin from the North. This is the case in Soweto, in the township of Chiawelo.

The linguistic consequence of the townships of Gauteng is summarized by Lafon (2006):

“In particular, Gauteng varieties have integrated not only words, but also sounds and even grammatical structures from varieties and languages with which they are in constant contact. Still, the standard and norms remain static, based on its rural varieties; recent changes are not acknowledged by language committees which, as a rule, entertain a purist notion of language.”

The media: linguistic utilitarianism

As well as with the rest of society, the representation of each official language in the media is in fact very unequal, as the media are nothing but a reflexion of social forces at work in the South African

\textsuperscript{15} A nickname of Johannesburg.
society. Private media tend to favour English, which is the trans-cultural language of the country. In the written press, papers in all languages exist, but not always on a national scale: English is the best represented language, far ahead of Afrikaans. The main titles of the country, *The Sowetan*, *The Star*, or *The Mail & Guardian*, are published in English. The *Beeld* is the biggest paper in Afrikaans, but doesn’t reach the same aura. Only one national paper exists in an African language, *Ilanga*, which is published in Zulu. Especially when the paper’s commercial aim is the Black population, English is favoured, as it is neutrally and equally accepted by all linguistic communities.

The media were given a role in the democratic transition, which involves the promotion of democratic values and diversity, including linguistic diversity. A number of legislations guarantee media freedom and set the objectives of the media. Abebe Zegeye and Richard Harris (2003) offer a comprehensive analysis of these objectives about the 1999 Broadcasting Act:

“[The act] aims at establishing and developing a broadcasting policy that will regulate and control all broadcasting in South Africa so that it: contributes to democracy, nation-building, the provision of education, and strengthening the moral fibre of society; encourages and control of broadcasting services by people from historically disadvantaged communities; ensures fair competition in this sector; provides from a three-tier system of public, commercial, and community broadcasting services; and establishes a strong and committed public broadcaster to service the needs of all South Africans.”

The South African Broadcasting Corporation, SABC, as a public broadcaster, is clearly the main tool for achieving the purposes set by the 1999 Broadcasting Act. According to Zegeye and Harris (2003), “SABC broadcasts 20 national and regional radio services in 11 languages including: the national English-language network *Safm*, a contemporary music station, *5 FM*; a national Afrikaans station *Radio Sonder Grense*; a national Zulu station *Ukhozi FM*; and a Sesotho station *Lesedi FM*”. Although all languages are present on the radio, urban speakers might sometimes have difficulties to follow the programs in African languages, since broadcasters usually use a “deep” language, meaning the standard variety.

In addition to these, one main national radio needs to be mentioned: YFM, a youth station broadcasting kwaito and hip-hop music, and which usually uses Iscamtho, since its listeners are *tsotsitaal* speakers. YFM will be analysed later in this thesis as one important vector of Iscamtho on a national scale, since the popularity of kwaito has strongly increased the use of Iscamtho in the past 15 years.

On television, English dominates especially because it is the main language of *eTV*, the country’s biggest private channel, and of the second private channel, which is accessible only on satellite
television, *M-Net*. However, SABC broadcasts programs in most of the eleven official languages through three channels: SABC 1 is reserved to Nguni languages, mainly Zulu and Xhosa with especially a number of programs for the youth, and a bit of English is also present in some programs; SABC 2 broadcasts in Sotho, Pedi or Tswana, and in Afrikaans; SABC 3 is in English, but there are news programs in Venda and Tsonga. Several dramas strictly in African languages are broadcasted such as *Muvhango* in Venda, or formerly *Yiso-Yiso, Shaka Zulu, Emzini Wesinsizwa, Velaphi, Inqgumbo Yeminyanya* (Mjwacu 2003).

All channels broadcast what is called in South Africa “soapies”, which are TV sitcoms. In these programs, languages are mixed as actors may perform language-mix and language-switch if it fits their characters and their roles. For some (*Isidingo, Scandal, Shooting Stars,...*) English is the main language, but others favour Zulu or Sotho in their urban variants (*Generations, Rhythm City...*), since they picture an idealized modern urban youth, in the cities or in the townships. One soapy, *7de Laan*, is in Afrikaans with English subtitles, but characters may sometimes switch to English. Finally, South African televisions now broadcast quite a lot of Iscamtho, whether in youth soapies, or in some specific shows such as the one presented weekly by Zola7, a notorious kwaito star, on SABC 3.

The balance of languages in contemporary South African society is summerized by Zegeye and Harris (2003):

“The position and use of South Africa’s various languages in the media reflects the interrelationships between language, culture and power in post-apartheid South Africa. […] For practical reasons, English has become the lingua franca in South African public life. […] English is also the dominant language in television, education, government, administration, the courts, and the South African Defence Force […]. English is also the dominant language in the workplace, even though 75 percent of the workforce are not proficient with English.”

The South African patchwork has given several means for all languages to organise their own developments. But the realities of necessity for the media, as well as for the corporate or the administration, to reach the larger number of people in the easiest and least expensive way has turned English into a transcultural *lingua franca*. This status relies on the criterion of efficient communication, but also on the one of prestige, as will be demonstrated in the next section, dedicated to a micro-level study of the linguistic environment of White City and the perceptions of White City youths.
Chapter 2:
Individual and Social Multilingualism in White City

This chapter aims at giving an account of the micro-level experience of South African multilingualism by White City youth. The specificities of the township life as well as the culture of Soweto define the environment in which the youth grow up, and as such it influences their values towards languages and multilingualism. On the other hand, outside factors such as the media are also influencing perceptions and behaviours. But since the youth shows a great conscience of linguistic phenomena, they tend to actively practice the respect and development of all languages. The complex and diverse linguistic conditions in which White City youth develop will also be analysed as the source of their native multilingual skills, and at the same time as the reason for a shift in the very notions of language and native speakers.

On the one hand, this chapter will expose the diversity of multilingual skills (I) in terms of the many languages spoken by White City youth, and in terms of the levels of proficiency attained. The multiplicity of trajectories in the complex multilingual setting of Soweto will be described. On the other hand it will describe the actual behaviour and considerations of the youth when it comes to languages on other supports than direct speech (II), including when they write themselves, and the written and broadcasted media.

I. Quantitative and qualitative diversity

In an environment which includes many languages and in which, despite the use of Zulu and Iscamtho as linguae francae, no variety is effectively considered more prestigious than the others, it is a natural phenomenon for individuals to become multilingual. Permanent exposure to a large number of languages has been, from birth, a reality for any White City youth as it had been for the previous generations:

“Here, we've got every language in Soweto. Our great-grandfathers they had to come from Natal, they would come here, to get some work. And our mothers, all of them, they were born here. And even our fathers, they are living here with their culture. And here 3A\textsuperscript{18} it's a Zulu, 3B it's a Xhosa, 3C siSwati, the next one it's Xitsonga... [...] It's all about what you found it first. It's about what makes it interesting, you know, what language you find interesting. Like there's a different language, that one it's such, that one they speak it so nicely... Some they are interested in Xhosa, some they are interested in Zulu...”

N., male 28 years old

\textsuperscript{18} Each house of White City has a post address with a number for the whole house, and a letter for each of the three divisions.
it doesn't go with ways that you were born in with a Zulu, a Sotho or a Xhosa granny... As long as you speak the language that you feel, if it makes you tickle... If it tickles you, that's the language that you're gonna use.”

L., male, 32 years old

If they are expected to know the standard languages, especially for tradition issues which will be much developed in the course of this thesis, White City youth not only rarely speak them perfectly, but they are rather not well educated about African languages in general, and it is often not clear to them what these languages are, where they come from, and how they are precisely related:

“In the past, I thought that Shona was the language used in Africa. But people like you and others corrected me, that no, it wasn't like that. But concerning Tsonga, I felt like it really hurt, when you told me that the French or the Dutch, or whatsoever, they are the ones who came with this language. [...] But what I know is about Mashangane. I know that word, Mashangane, people who fled from KwaZulu... Those are not their names. On their side, they call themselves the Tsongas. But what I'd like to know about the Tsongas is: them and the Zulus, their language is much more closer than with the Ndebeles, or the Vendas. Then with the Zulus, we even have the same surnames. [For instance] there is Mabaso and Mabasa. Mabaso is Tsonga. So you see, there's a huge similarity. [...] From Mozambique19? Those ones are not Tsonga people. These people are Shangane. [...] We don't speak the same language. Me I'm a Tsonga. Tsonga people when you call them Shangane, to them it's an insult. [...] But I met them, even here in Soweto, there are most of Shangane... or Tsongas. I know lots of Tsongas around here. And yes, we speak the same language. It's the one which is written in the eleven official languages, the one that we speak.”

B., male, 25 years old

Individual trajectories

This diversity on every corner of White City and Soweto is perceived and appreciated. It also necessarily enhances the chances for the youth to experience multilingualism in their intimate sphere: as they grow up, they find themselves exposed to either several languages at home, or several homes with different languages. Then come the language used at school, those learned from the other children with whom one plays as a child, and those acquired at teenage or adulthood. It results in extremely complex linguistic trajectories, in which the languages experienced and practised can be related to each other, but not necessarily, as the three following testimonies attest:

“Personally, in my family, I'm used to speak Xhosa, but generally I speak tsotsitaal. Because tsotsitaal, it's dominating every youth in the area. [...] At home, we would mix Zulu and Xhosa, yabon?, and Bhaca. Bhaca and Xhosa it's similar, but in Xhosa you have words and in Bhaca we're taking them deeper [...] like they're using “q” as we're using “c”. But at home we're talking Zulu most of the time, because most of the people we are growing up with they're talking Zulu. But it is a good way to communicate...”

N., male 28 years old

19 The Tsonga language spreads over Southern Mozambique.
20 In Standard Xhosa, c [k] translates into a dental click, close to [t] with the flat of the tongue stuck onto and above the front superior teeth; q [k!] translates into an alveolar click: the tongue is placed on the palate behind the front teeth, and pulled back strongly. Its sound is often compared to a cork taken out of a bottle.
full-blood Tsonga, because I'm half and half: my mama is a Xhosa; my grand-mother is a Xhosa... I understand Xhosa as I understand Tsonga. But at school I never did neither of the two. I did only Zulu, then I switched to Northern Sotho, Sepedi, after one year, cause the Tsonga schools were so far... Here in Soweto maybe there were two or three. And the Zulu too, you had maybe three or four. So I had to do Northern Sotho, and I grew up with Northern Sotho at school. And I know the customs\(^{21}\) and whatwhat of the Basotho\(^{22}\), as if it's my language. And, because it's Soweto I know Zulu, but not the same Zulu as the rural areas one. It's multilingual Zulu: in it you'll find English, you'll find Afrikaans, you'll find Sotho, you know...”

B., male, 25 years old

“I know many languages. I know Sotho. I know Afrikaans. As you can hear I'm speaking English right now. I know Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa. And most of all I know tsotsitaal [...]. My main language it's tsotsitaal, but my first language is Zulu. [...] It's the language I speak at home. [At school] I learned English and Afrikaans, and before I was attending a school in Zulu. But my family here it's Tsawanas. But people they speak Zulu here, so I grew up with them and I got used to Zulu. So they put me in school in Zulu, but at home it was Tswana. [...]Tswana I speak perfectly, and Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa... I've got relatives of Ndebeles, and I've got relatives of Xhosas, and Tswana... and I'm speaking Zulu.”

L., male, 25 years old

Yet, one must take a closer look to the levels of proficiency to understand that the informants’ knowledge of so many languages is not equal, and that one is not dealing with “pure” languages. In the context of Soweto, language is oral before anything. As a result the understanding of the standard which people write is not always easy, and it is necessary to be trained to the standard at school if one wants to master it. In addition, the oral variants from Soweto are mixed with each other, with English, or with Afrikaans. Thus, the youth can't speak the standard of many if any language, and when they claim to speak a language, their knowledge of it rarely matches what they call “the language from the dictionary”:

“I am Tsonga by blood, but I'm not a typical one. I never went to schools of the Tsongas. Hence there are some words... For instance I can't count from one to ten in Tsonga. So there are some words, I won't be able to know what they said. But you know, the Tsonga that you speak and the Tsonga that is written are two different Tsongas. Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi, it's different. When they're speaking Pedi, there will be some words that I can't... capture to my brain. But I'll be familiar to them because of the sentence. With the sentence I'll know, he means this. [...] To me there is no [other] language that I can say I master this language than the Sowetan language. I know it, I can speak it, but I don't master it: Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, a little bit of Ndebele... I know them, but I don't master them, even English.”

B., male, 25 years old

“We've got eleven in South Africa... But what I'm sure of is eight: Afrikaans I can hear, but not speak, or speak basics; English; Shangane, but I cannot read Shangane, I cannot write Shangane, but I can speak excellent Shangane; I can speak excellent Zulu but I cannot write or read Zulu. I can speak and write in Sepedi. Southern Sotho I can write and read; I know basics of Ndebele; I know basics of Swati. I don't know Venda... I sure don't know Venda...; Xhosa, I can hear Xhosa, I can speak Xhosa. [...] I can speak with anyone who can speak these languages. I've learned the languages of South Africa before the new South Africa. [...] My mother is a Shangane, so at home I learned Shangane; my friend Dladla is a Zulu, so that's how I learned Zulu; my auntie is Xhosa, so I would speak Xhosa... So, it was not difficult for me to learn all these languages. If I had a Venda friend, maybe I would speak Venda.”

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21 Of the Pedis, which implies a good knowledge of Standard Sepedi.
22 The Southern Sothos.
“It's Soweto Sotho, because I mix everything. There are three languages, it's Sesotho, Western Sotho, and Sepedi. So I mix everything. And even Zulu, it's not typical Zulu. It's mixed. It's not like in Natal, where they speak proper Zulu. Here we mix everything.”

N., female, 26 years old

Sometimes, the knowledge of the language is only oral, sometimes it is also written. In addition, there are some items which might be unknown. In the case of B., he can't count in Tsonga, which is a home language to him. However, in the context of Soweto, this is no problem, as missing words can easily be replaced:

“You can't talk Zulu or Xhosa that doesn't use English. Even with Sotho, you just force it to put some words which are English words. We grew up like that. It's not a problem, because it's natural. We were born like that. Even my child, child of my child, will live like that. [...] Even greeting somebody in the street: Hola; Sawubona; Hi, how are you?... It goes like that.”

N., male 28 years old

The material used to fill up the blanks can be from English, as well as Afrikaans or any of the languages of Soweto. Through such behaviours, the Sowetan speech draws on wide-scale borrowing from any language to any other.

**Linguistic skills and mixing abilities**

In fact, the use of mixed codes, such as Iscamtho, Soweto Zulu or Sotho, or any vernacular mixed with the other varieties present in Soweto, allows communication even when there is only an incomplete control of the variety which serves as a base in the exchange. In this way, they are very comparable to *Lingua Franca English* on cargo ships as analysed by Canagarajah (2007, p. 923–939):

“The speakers of LFE are not located in one geographical boundary. They inhabit and practice other languages and cultures in their own immediate localities. Despite this linguistic-cultural heterogeneity, [...] they recognize LFE as a shared resource. It is unclear what constitutes the threshold level of English proficiency required to join this invisible community. Though some proficiency in English is certainly necessary, it is evident that even those individuals with rudimentary knowledge can conduct successful communication while further developing their proficiency. This facility is no doubt attributable to the language awareness that they developed in other contexts of communication with local languages. Multilingualism is at the heart of LFE’s hybrid community identity and speaker proficiency.

A radical implication of this multilingualism is that all users of LFE have native competence of LFE, just as they have native competence in other languages and cultures. This characterization goes against our usual ways of using the concept of *Native Speaker*. [...] Thus, LFE raises serious questions about the concept of language system. Is it possible to consider form as constituting an indeterminate,
open, and fluid system?

How does such a fluid system facilitate harmonious communication? It is obvious that LFE speakers cannot depend on a preconstituted form of meaning. They activate complex pragmatic strategies that help them negotiate their variable form. It is amazing, therefore, that misunderstandings are not frequent in LFE interactions.”

In the above quotation, one can easily replace LFE with Iscamtho and English with Zulu or Sotho, and the essence of the analysis will remain valuable. In his article Canagarajah refers especially to multinational crews on cargo ships. In such an environment, the speakers are not necessarily immersed in the same multilingual setting for a lifetime term, which increases the changing character of the language structure, as newcomers regularly enter the environment with their own forms. In White City, the youth lived and grew up mainly if not strictly in the township's multilingual environment for their whole life; therefore the structure might be more regular, as influences are numerous but unchanged for decades. However, deliberate strategies keep this structure moving. The life-long experience of White City's multilingual setting also enhances linguistic awareness towards the surrounding varieties: it becomes complete, up to the point of speaking fluently all languages. And as Canagarajah points at, a “radical implication” is that “all users have [...] natural competence” in the lingua franca. Thus, White City youth don't only acquire competences in the diverse languages they might formally learn or be in contact with in the family; but as these languages are mixed they can develop a native competence in certain languages even before they formally encounter them. For instance, if a baby grows up in a Sotho speaking family, as their Sotho contains English and Zulu, the baby will naturally acquire a certain competence in English and Zulu, even before anyone speaks to him in English or Zulu. This is fundamental in the understanding of Iscamtho as a native language: all languages in Soweto, especially the Zulu lingua franca, might be mixed with Iscamtho. Thus, a Soweto child is very likely to achieve a native acquisition of parts of Iscamtho from his/her birth through language mix, before he/she actually speaks what others will recognize as Iscamtho. At this stage, the acquisition is incomplete, yet it is native. Canagarajah points out that “this characterization goes against our usual ways of using the concept of Native Speaker”. If the concepts of native speaker and native acquisition are different, the native competence in part of one language will favour the understanding and later the complete acquisition of this language. It is language-mix in the multilingual environment which gives native competence in many languages to Soweto and White City children, and the informants confirmed for instance the role of Iscamtho in improving one's fluency in English or Afrikaans.

The notion of fluency can be discussed, since proficiency in one code could find its limits if the speaker was faced to some form of specialised speech for instance, or expected to use the standard form of the language. On the other hand, not only converting a language into a mixed lingua franca allows easier comprehension and develops natural competences in the different components of the mixed-code; but also, might the speaker express himself/herself in an urban variant of one of the official languages or in Iscamtho, the reference to a corpus of lexicon items, idioms, or grammatical forms from a multitude of languages at
once or simultaneously offers an extended reserve of possibilities to express meaning. It naturally leads most speakers to a good proficiency in all the varieties that they have around them, since those varieties have become closer to each other through their shared mixed corpus. Canagarajah (2007) again explains the mechanisms involved here, and why there is room for linguistic creativity in the context of a lack of a clear or stable linguistic norm:

“Both LFE speakers and Native Speakers have native competence in their respective varieties, though there is no limit in the development of their proficiency through experience and time. [...] The speakers are able to monitor each other's language proficiency to determine mutually the appropriate grammar, phonology, lexical range, and pragmatic conventions that would ensure intelligibility. Therefore, it is difficult to describe this language a priori. [...] The dominant orientation is to treat solely or mainly form as defining competence, with communicative competence given a secondary role. In LFE, form receives reduce significance; or rather, form gets shaped according to the context and participants in an interaction. More important are a range of other skills, abilities, and awareness that enable multilingual speakers to negotiate grammar [...] speakers can make instantaneous interferences about the norms and conventions of their multilingual interlocutors; strategic competence to negotiate interpersonal relationship effectively; and pragmatic competence to adopt communicative conventions that are appropriate for the interlocutor, purpose, and situation.”

The use of one or several mixed linguae francae in a highly multilingual environment requires that the speakers focus on meaning and sense, rather than form. The impact of this attitude and of the actual behaviours that it implies, is that the notion of language relies far less on structure, and is rather grounded on intelligibility and the efficiency of communication. As a result, speakers can have the perception that they “speak” many languages, although they know those languages sometimes very incompletely in terms of formal construction and/or lexical corpus. But they don't encounter communication failure, thanks to their ability to convey meaning efficiently by cobbling together pieces of several language structures and lexicon corpuses. This is favoured by, and cannot be separated from, the ability of the receivers of their speech to interpret and extract a meaning from a form which is not expected. Their perception is that of a good or at least efficient proficiency.

These interactive ability and attitude are partly what allows an individual to learn so many languages without finding the task difficult. On the contrary, the reverse attitude of conservatism towards the form of the “pure language” can prevent a person from acquiring the linguistic awareness necessary to develop skills in a great number of (very) different languages: people who give prevalence to the careful respect of traditional, official, or literary forms of their language – in grammar, lexicon, as well as phonology – will tend to have more difficulties to recognize meaning in an irregular or unexpected form. They may also develop a position of disregard towards argot words, regional accents, or foreign languages, which would result in less linguistic awareness and more difficulties to acquire one or many new languages. An example
of conservatism, and a demonstration that not all youth in White City manage to attain high levels of proficiency in lots of languages, is given by L.:

“I can't speak Tsonga properly... I was raised by my grandmother. She talked Tsonga, but I can't talk Tsonga fluently. [...] Here at home we speak different languages; that's why I can't speak Tsonga fluently. When my mum is here we speak South Sotho, when my grandma is here we speak Tsonga. But most we speak Tsonga if my grandma she's around. So that's why I can't speak Tsonga fluently. I've never done Tsonga in my school. [...] I did Northern Sotho, but I can't really speak Northern Sotho. [...] It's not very different from Soweto Sotho, but... I've always been in Soweto, and here in Soweto there are few people who speak Sepedi. So you don't want to speak Sepedi. We laugh at you when you speak Sepedi: “haha, ko magaeng”, means he's from the rural areas. [...] We say that, me and my friends. Or we're almost saying that. [We speak] Sotho and Zulu only... We don't speak English. If you speak English, we'll call you that you're a coconut. Why not speak you're language, than English. [...] They think they are better than us; that's why they don't want to speak our languages. Because there are people who can speak English and who cannot pronounce some words, and they just laugh at you.”

L., female, 21 years old

One should read these comments by L. under the light of her attitude towards the social improperness of Iscamtho, which she refuses to speak. Her concern for not speaking a rural language is another proof of her sensitivity to the negative values and social considerations tied to a code, as well as her worry to appear as a coconut, which would be equivalent to a denial of her Black identity. Her sensitivity is different from the active interest to all languages expressed by many informants. It also seems to leave L. in a position of vulnerability towards languages:

“I watch the news in English, because, it's a simple language to understand. If you take for instance Sotho... They talk deep Sotho, and they talk deep Xhosa, and you can't understand. It's too different. [...] But sometimes I watch in Sotho, and if I don't understand I'll ask my mum or [my brother].”

L., female, 21 years old

Language awareness as a social value

Although there are individuals who didn't develop their multilingual skills more than necessary, language awareness works on almost everyone in White City, because it is not only an aptitude developed through exposure to many varieties; it is also a cultural value in Soweto, and probably more largely in most urban Black communities in South Africa. This value is articulated around two main lines: the duty to accommodate and respect the interlocutor by knowing and using his/her language; and the interest and mind-openness expected towards other languages and cultures, at least not to find oneself stuck in a position of incomprehension:

“It's my job to make sure that I can understand, because if you can't understand you can't do anything. [...] When you go, there is this place they're talking Sotho, or that place they're talking Tswana. But they can understand Zulu. [...] So this one he'll be happy to speak his language, and

23 L.'s grandmother passed away some years ago.
24 A coconut is a person who is “Black on the outside and White on the inside”.
25 See chapter 10.
one day you'll be happy to speak similar to him. Let's say that guy is talking Shangane, and we go to that place, and we're talking Shangane. That one he will be pleased, he will say: “hey, my friend is talking my language...” *Yabon?*

N., male 28 years old

“If you are with people who can understand you're language, then it's fine. But if you are with people who can't understand it, I think you should try and reach out to them. Because it's not fair. Even with me, I don't like it if someone speaks around with a language that I don't understand, because I think that they are talking about me.”

N., female, 26 years old

“I won't say that there's a language which I prefer or dislike. You don't say you don't like the language when you're facing a challenge with people who can't understand [...]. So there you have a difficulty... unless you're not there for a short time, because if you're there for a long time maybe you'll learn. But if you're there for a first time, you have a difficulty... [...]”

D., male, 28 years old

“There isn't [a language which is better]... because to me, the languages that I use, they are the same. I can speak, let's say, Zulu with L., and he speaks Sotho. I don't feel offended. And even with T., I speak Zulu, when T. I've known him from school. They taught us together in Northern Sotho, but when we are together, we speak Zulu. [...] I'm a rapper. In my songs, in my verses, I don't use the same language. If we say in that song, we rap in English, that's when maybe I'll use only English. If we sing in our language, *kasie* language, I combine all languages that I know. That's why I'm saying, to me language, it doesn't matter... As long as a person can understand what I'm saying.”

B., male, 25 years old

The value accorded to knowing many languages is often tied to the fact that a White City youth is aware that in South Africa, there are a number of people who don't know more than one or two languages. Since the ultimate purpose of speaking is communication, and since there is no communication without comprehension, it is an individual responsibility to understand and speak as many languages as possible. The issue of establishing a respectful and equal relationship is also at stake, as valued behaviour:

“As a person, I need to learn more of these languages, because the Ndebele language for instance, you can't use it in the township. Nobody can speak, unless you learn Zulu or Sotho. [...] South Africa has eleven official languages, plus a twelfth which is *tsotsital*. As a South African, you have to speak wherever you go. If I go to KwaNdebele26, I have to speak with them in their language; I mustn't impose my language to them. As a sign of respect, you have to speak their language. By speaking your language, it shows how much I honour and respect you. [...] A language it's a power. When you speak a language you have a power. A language can break barriers.”

L., male, 32 years old

“[At work I accommodate] other people, by speaking English so that everybody can understand. Because, if I was being selfish, I wouldn't speak English with White people. I would say: “why doesn't he learn my language. Why do I have to speak his language?” So I think us black people, we are most fortunate, because we can understand them and they can't understand us. [...] I used to have a friend from Mafikeng, and the other is from Bloemfontein. She speaks typical Tswana, and the other speaks typical Sotho. So I'm the only one who can maybe

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26 Can be translated as Ndebeleland.
understand both languages, Sotho and Zulu, so I try to speak Sotho with them. They don't know Zulu at all.”

N., female, 26 years old

The awareness towards other languages has not always been absolute in Soweto, where there used to be discrimination. And it is obviously not perceived by White City youth as being a value shared by all South Africans, hence making the informants feel even more pride to be Sowetans:

“Each and every language is equal, because they are being spoken by human beings. Because there used to be that thing with Shangane people or Venda. They used to say, Venda it sounds strange... or even when they were mocking, they would say: “you sound like a Shangane”, or “you look like a Shangane”. They looked down on Shangane people. But now that I've grown up, I see things differently, because I would really like to learn those languages. But at first, we used to look down on them. [...]”

N., female, 26 years old

“[Languages] they are equal in the law. In the books, they are equal, but in reality they are not. I cannot go to a meeting and speak Sotho. I cannot go to a corporate, to a company, and start speaking Sotho. Even if can go in town, to one of the government offices [...] I have to bite my tongue, so that he or she can understand me. That's why it works only in the books. [...] And it was supposed to be compulsory, each and every language... But it should be compulsory, in each and every company, to learn at least one of the languages, one of the main that we communicate with, Zulu or Sotho”.

L., male, 32 years old

The experiences, perceptions, and values of White City youth towards multilingualism lead them to adopt certain behaviours when it comes to express themselves, or exchange within the larger South African society. It also gives them a critical awareness towards the use and promotion of languages in the urban environment and in the media.
II. Actual use and perceptions about the use of languages in the outside world

White City youth have a particular perspective on languages. This perspective is not a guarantee to practice multilingualism as one would like: for matters of proficiency, especially in the written form; because the Sowetan perspective is not shared by everyone in South Africa; and because the use and promotion of multilingualism in the media doesn't always reflect the experience of these youth.

Within Soweto, one can feel free to try and use different languages. In all public places, as long as the language is no offense, like Iscamtho can be, one can try any language:

“Most of the people who are [at the police station] they speak Sotho, or Shangane. So when you arrive there, you don't know what kind of language the person who works there, he talks, you know? [...] When you arrive you will approach with you're language: “Sovubona, Sanibonani?”” So I know that you are talking Zulu. But when he greet you back, he'll say “Dumela, Dumelang”,” you'll say ok, this person it's a Sotho. So you'll use a Sotho language, or sometimes he understands your language”.

N., male 28 years old

Once the interlocutor's language is known, a person can adjust to it, or keep his/her own language. However, considering the levels of proficiency, the possibility to choose freely a language to write is not as important. The law prescribes that administrative parperworks should be available in all the official languages. But the youth usually find themselves more at ease to write English.

Writing is more comfortable in English

From the age of ten, children are educated in English. Although some can continue Zulu or Sotho classes up to matric, most stop writing African languages regularly from that age, as they don't have the opportunity to do it. After a number of years, although they still can read and write their language, it is not a natural thing to them, and it takes them much more time than reading or writing in English. Those who feel less proficient in English continue to favour their home language, but they are a minority. However, in any case, the decisive factor in the choice of the language to read will be comprehension, as one doesn't wish to misunderstand:

“[If I have to fill a form] I'll take it in English.[...] Because you can't tell me something in English which I won't understand.”

L., male, 25 years old

“Obvious... I would like it in Zulu, because they will give me simple things. I know that here and here I must do this... It's not like when I read it, it's like everything it's blanket on your mind. It took you too long for you to understand... Ok, I now what's the meaning of this, and that. But in Zulu, then it's easy to understand it.”

N., male 28 years old

27 Zulu greetings, in the singular and plural forms.
28 Sotho greetings, in the singular and plural forms.
“For me it's English, because I find it easier and faster. Even reading, I read in English, because in Zulu, the sentences are longer, so it takes longer. And it's difficult. So I find English easier when it comes to reading. [...] I can read and write Zulu, because I've done it at school. But other languages, I'm not that perfect.”

N., female, 26 years old

A good example of the phenomenon was also provided by D.: he has in his yard a shack dedicated to music, in which he has a computer and a sound system. Since he aims at promoting the music which he composes, D. wants to develop a web site. Thus, he needs to connect to the internet, which he does from a cellphone plugged to the computer. When he needs to make a Google research, D. would never think of using Google in Zulu, although it is available. Instead, he only uses English, and the reason is first an economic one: reading English is faster to him, and connecting to the Internet through a cellphone can quickly get expensive. Indeed, most written messages to which the youth can be exposed are in English only, as shown by a study of written advertisement in Soweto.

Written Advertisement in Soweto

The study consisted in shooting photographs of visual advertisement containing writings in Soweto. Over a total of 103 adverts observed, only 4 were using an African language, and 2 were using Iscamtho. None of those ones actually were in White City (see pictures n°6,7,8).

It is obviously the very diversity of languages in Soweto which explains the use of English: a commercial message has to reach the most people possible without hurting any susceptibility. Hence, only English seems appropriate. It is the same logic which had lead to use English in the Black South African media since the first part of the 20th century, and in the liberation movement, especially in the ANC. In that case, not only had the organisations to reach to all Blacks, but also to Whites, among whom the liberals were in majority English speakers. Today, advertisement on placards and paintings, but also in the audiovisual and printed media is expected to be in English. And it is also preferred so by many youth, who consider as an effort to read a whole advert in Zulu, Sotho, or any other African language. However, the customers who might appreciate reading in African languages are also taken into account: the example of the user's manual of cellphone chips (starter packs) from companies such as Vodacom or Cell-C contain usually three versions: English, Zulu, and Sotho. And these documents use lots of modern forms from SMS writings. Thus, Zulu or Sotho demonstrate their capacity to be efficient in a technical and commercial purpose, as well as their ability to undergo modernization. Yet, English in a commercial message seems in accordance with the idea that English is the business language, inside and outside South Africa. It is efficient and prestigious for this reason. But, the omnipresence of English to reach to the township residents is not appreciated by everyone:

“South Africa, it's no longer for South Africans. South Africa, it's for those who live in it. They won't write in Sesotho here, because we're mixed. So the language that they will use is English, because the system taught them that if you know English you are better. That's why
you see that most of the written things it's English. But me, I don't like it.”

L., male, 32 years old

Multilingualism in the written media

Local advertisement is not the only support to which the linguistic awareness shown by White City youth fails to extend. White City youth are only occasional consumers of written press, but they pay attention to news from the written media, as the two main newspapers read in Soweto, the Daily Sun and the Sowetan, compete to placard their headnews (in English) on each and every streetlight of the main roads of Soweto and White City, so that taxi commuters might be willing to buy their papers. The written press is to be divided between national papers and local papers, which are free local information papers.

Among the national papers read by White City youth, the Daily Sun is a daily paper, as its name reveals, which mixes news about politics and social issues (a bit) and about celebrities and entertainment (a lot) in English only; the Sowetan is a daily paper which has an editorial line close to the one of the Daily Sun, but it is based in Soweto, and it is the first South African paper in sales numbers. It is in English only, although it sometimes deals with very local issues, such as obituaries or community events announcement; the Sunday Times is an information paper of better quality, which is not very popular among the youth because few are really interested in political or financial news, and also because it is a more expensive paper. Other important national quality newspapers in English, such as the Mail & Guardian or the Star, are not popular at all in White City and hardly available in Soweto. Among the local free information papers, one finds City Vision and Jabavu, which both deal with very local information such as the activity of the Municipality Council in the township, or the results of local sport competitions. They are both in English only, once again, whereas they are strictly directed at a local readership.

One single newspaper is written in an African language: Ilanga, which is edited in KwaZulu-Natal, and is in Zulu only. It is not very popular because few youth appreciate to read its deep Zulu, and also because it is seen as a Zulu traditionalist paper close to Inkhata Freedom Party, the pro-Zulu political party of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. Neither Zulu conservatism nor Inhata are positively judged by White City youth, since they reflect to them a certain backwardness.

The reasons for the predominance of English in the written press are the same as for advertisement, and they are clearly understood and accepted by the youth. If the written media has to favour English for a number of reasons, this is not exclusively the case for television and the radio, where one can find much more effective expressions of multilingualism.

Multilingualism on the air: television and radio

Multilingualism is promoted in the broadcasting industry by the 1999 Broadcasting Act, which was mentioned previously in chapter 1. For the past fifteen years, there has been a constant movement to more multilingualism on television: after the reorganisation of SABC and the repartition of the airtime between Zulu, Xhosa, English, Sotho, Tswana and Afrikaans, the public broadcaster introduced news, entertainment and cultural programs in the less represented languages which are Pedi, Ndebele, Swati, Venda
and Tsonga. Tsonga and Venda have now their news program of ten minutes twice a day on SABC, and three minutes in the morning on eTV, the private broadcaster, as during half an hour, ten of the national languages are given three minutes, the rest of the programs being all in English.

But more importantly, Iscamtho and language-mix have strongly developed in entertainment shows, series, and dramas. The rise of Iscamtho in the media will be analyzed more closely in chapter 9, but the perceptions of White City youth on the representation of multilingualism and language-mix on television need to be described here. Firstly, one should note that the development of African languages on television is warmly considered by the youth, has they see it a kind of normalisation.

It is interesting to see that most of them don't make any difference between watching a program such as the news in English or in one or several African languages, as English is understood and neutrally considered by the majority of people. However, it is not given preference, as there isn't usually one single language in which the youth would watch the news. The notions of comprehension and integration of all the viewers and hearers are again at the core of the preferences of the informants:

“English, Sotho, Tsonga, Zulu, it's the same... It's just that if I may say, some languages they come only for five minutes...”

D., male, 28 years old

“If it's not English, then it's Zulu. If I find them in Tswana, I will watch it, because Tswana it's my home language. But I don't speak it a lot. Even here at home we don't usually speak it. It's only if we have another relative who visits us, then I'll have to speak Tswana.”

L., male, 25 years old

“I prefer to watch it in English. And Zulu, and Sotho, and Xhosa. But I would like to learn other languages, like Venda.”

N., female, 26 years old

The recent development of Iscamtho and more largely tsotsitaal on television and the radio is warmly appreciated by the youth (see chapter 9). YFM is the main radio which uses Iscamtho: being based in Soweto, all the languages in its programs are the local variants, and they're mixed together and with English. It is not exactly the street language, as it is more formalized and must be understood by non-Sowetan listeners, but it does expose the Sowetan attitude towards languages to other South Africans, and some typically Iscamtho items appear regularly. Other national radios based in Johannesburg, such as Jozi FM or Kaya FM, adopt the same position of speaking in a mixed way, but “lighter” than the township way to be understood outside Soweto. It makes these radio stations more familiar to the youth. If the musical style which dominates the frequency is loved by the youth, then they will also listen to English speaking radios, such as Highveld or 5FM. Television, more than radio, appears as a means to entertain one's taste for languages and develop skills in difficult or attracting languages, such as Venda or Tsonga. However, this requires the programs to be subtitled, and this is why the radio doesn't serve the same purpose when it uses non-translated rural standards:
“I watch a drama in Venda called *Muvhango*, because even though I don't understand it, I do understand some words. Because between each and every language, there is a similarity. They only change maybe the alphabet. Even in Venda, there's a little bit of Xhosa, a little bit of Sotho. So I would like to learn those languages. Especially Venda, and Shangane, I find them interesting. [...] But only if they light those words down there. [...] Or I won't understand. I hear some words, but...”

N., female, 26 years old

However, one element can be missing from television and the media, even when diverse languages are present: culture. Some youth expressed their disapproval at situations in which local culture is not enough or not fairly represented:

“Radio sucks... I'll tell you why: as South Africans, they were supposed to play maybe 90% of our own languages... besides the languages, 90% of our own music. No matter if it was Boers, or what. But what they're doing is, they're playing 90% of American and European music, to 10% of our own music. [...] There is a Venda radio, a Zulu, a Sotho... But mostly, they don't play the indigenous song on the Venda station. They play the Beyonces... you know!”

B., male, 25 years old

In the same way the informants often express disapproval, or at least not recognize themselves in the picturing of language-mix, a cherished feature of multilingualism to White City youth. On television, mixed-speech seems unnatural, forced, or not realistically played:

“Because now, most of the dramas, they mix them in English, I don't know why. Even in *Generation*, they speak Zulu, Sotho, and English, but mainly it's English. I don't know why, maybe they're catering for other people, like White people who won't understand African languages.”

L., male, 25 years old

“No... maybe when I'm at work I mix like them, but here you just speak proper Zulu, well... not *proper*, Soweto Zulu. Because sometimes if you address a Black person in English, they think you are a snob, or a Model C... They think you're too educated, so you want to speak to them in English. [...] They do like that for White people, so that they can understand”

N., female, 25 years old

Indeed, language-mix on television is meant to educate more South Africans to multilingualism, and at the same time allow them to follow the dialogues. As such, it is not the mixed-code used by multilingual speakers of White City. It is only juxtaposition of languages, as one could do when addressing at the same time speakers of different languages. By switching languages orally and introducing an English subtitle over African languages speech in television can at the same time attract viewers of all backgrounds, and participate in the learning of more languages by all South Africans, exactly as it is the case with *Muvhango*.

Despite it is not always realistic, White City youth in general have a positive perception of the
multilingual character of their television. It echoes a number of values of diversity, good communication, and respect of everyone's language and culture, which they cherish and practice in their everyday life. One can recognize in the development of these values as guidelines of language distribution on television, a prolonging of the process of enforcement of the liberation movement's ideology to the South African society: toleration, diversity, and mixing are promoted and largely received around and among White City youth, as it is in the media.

The media in general are still criticized by the youth in their approach of multilingualism. However, they integrate more and more African languages, as well as Iscamtho, which is positively welcome by the youth. Part 2 of the thesis will confirm the place of social and political values in the development of multilingualism and Iscamtho. But for now, it is necessary to analyse Iscamtho more closely, and to understand what is considered Iscamtho and how Iscamtho is considered.
Chapter 3:

What Iscamtho is: a social approach

So far in this thesis, Iscamtho was only described as a tsotsitaal, or as the street language and youth language of Soweto. It is difficult at this stage to be specific on the nature of Iscamtho, since the very purpose of this thesis is to assert its functions and the mechanisms which shape and develop it. However, we can already approach an understanding of the substance of Iscamtho through two perspectives: on the one hand, the socio-historical approach developed by Dumisani K. Ntshangase shall be presented (I), to introduce the origins of Iscamtho, and explain the spread of the variety in Soweto and its formerly negative status; then Iscamtho will be compared to three other varieties present in Soweto and associated, in one way or another, to Iscamtho: Tsotsitaal, Soweto Zulu, and Shalambombo (II).

These two perspectives are fundamentally different, as they focus on very distinct periods in the history of Iscamtho, past and present, between which the functions of Iscamtho and the values which it conveys have gone through profound change. The first perspective is focused on the development of Iscamtho and its status and functions until the mid-1990's; whereas the second one takes account of the present situation in sociological and anthropological terms.

I. The socio-historical origins of Iscamtho: criminal and rebellion prestige functions

The main work which explored the nature of Iscamtho was produced by Ntshangase, first in his masters’ thesis (1993) which was followed by a doctorate thesis and a number of articles (1995, 2002). Ntshangase adopted a historical and sociolinguistic perspective to differentiate Iscamtho from the more famous Tsotsitaal. According to him, the name Iscamtho [is│amt‘o] is derived from Zulu ukuqamunda [uk’u!amunda], meaning “talk volubly” (Ntshangase 1995, p. 407). The lingo has its own lexical corpus, derived from Zulu and Sotho most of the times, but it lacks a grammatical structure of its own: Iscamtho operates through another language providing grammar, in which terms are replaced with Iscamtho terms, or with terms from another language included in Iscamtho speech. Thus, speakers consider to be speaking Iscamtho in Zulu or in Sotho. Actually, for a speaker who would know Iscamtho features, the lingo can virtually be spoken in any matrix language, that is that any grammatical structure which the receivers of the speech know would be suitable as a matrix for Iscamtho. In Soweto, one can hear Iscamtho in Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, or even Tsonga and Venda in Chiawelo. Yet, speakers of Sotho-based Iscamtho and Zulu-based Iscamtho, to elaborate on the two dominant varieties, understand each other: firstly because the two
languages are urban variants and might include the same features typical of Soweto, especially borrowings from English or Afrikaans; secondly because a great majority of the youth in Soweto and White City understands both Sotho and Zulu, although not always both fluently. But even an incomplete understanding of Sotho is no obstacle for a Zulu speaker, since he knows the Iscamtho features, and can thus understand all the lexicon of the Sotho-based variety; finally, if mutual comprehension is not completely possible, one can still mix the Zulu-based and Sotho-based varieties in order to facilitate communication, and perform a language-switch between sentences. Although the matrix of Iscamtho can change, the lingo is identified as being the same code, the same “language”: what defines Iscamtho is not grammar, but lexicon and attitude. There is a complete identity between speakers of any variety, as Iscamtho plays its role as lingua franca among speakers of different languages. In addition, Iscamtho is a marker of Sowetan identity, which includes urbanity, city-slickness, and the specific history and multicultural setting of Soweto. As such, it is a unificating marker, which creates a common belonging to the place and a common social identity to the speakers of all variants. At the end, although it is diverse, and although it can change any time, there is only one Iscamtho.

Criminal Argots

Concerning the criminal origins of Iscamtho, and its different development from Tsotsitaal, Ntshangase (1993, 1995, 2002) showed that Iscamtho originates with the criminal argot Shalambombo, developed by the amaLaita gang network under their leader Nongoloza in the early twentieth century. It appeared in the slums that were to become Soweto, in Orlando, Pimville, and later Jabavu and Moroka. Tsotsitaal on the other hand, was typical of the freehold townships of the so-called Western Areas of Johannesburg: Sophiatown, Martindale, and Newclare. It was a mix of Afrikaans and items from African languages, at first Tswana. Therefore, it is not exactly known if this argot, first known as Flaaitaal, was first created in Johannesburg or in the rural farms of the North-West, where Afrikaans speaking farmers and Tswana workers were in contact before the 1940's economic crisis led many poor people to Johannesburg.

AmaLaita were Nguni speakers, but they were associated with another gang, amaRussia, who were based in Newclare first, then the Moroka Emergency camps after the 1950's forced removals and the end of the Western Areas. Criminal argot had a wider function than mere crime, as they conveyed a sense of urbanity. For Ntshangase, “Flaai means 'citywise' and tsotsi means 'city-wise and slick'.” (1995, p. 407). From the position of criminal argot, Tsotsitaal and Shalambombo became the codes used in South African prisons by the 26, 27, and 28 gangs. The original Shalambombo was modified in the 1940's and 1950's, and transmitted widely to the youth in the 1960's, when it was given the name of Iscamtho (Ntshangase 1993).

One informant, L., was a member of the 26 gang. He described how the new prison inmate is initiated to the mythology of the gang, at the same time as he learns Shalambombo:

“They usually talk about this one guy, or maybe this three guys, who started this thing. Coloureds, they say there is this guy who's named Gray, who started these things. And there is

29 Places where Black people had long-term bails (until 99 years at first), and a secure tenure of their housing.
this guy who's named Ngelegejana. That is a Xhosa word. Which means it's a Coloured and a Xhosa, or a Boer and a Xhosa, I don't know. Which means, you see, that those guys they were friends. [...] If you want to join, they won't tell you the lingo, they don't tell you how to talk. They're like telling you a novel. What happened, before it was like this. When they were crossing the Mooi River, and whatwhat. You see? They're telling you what happened to Gray and Ngelegejana. Ho, and there is this guy, Nongoloza, he's for the 28 guys. These three guys they were friends, before they turned their back on each other. So you must know that, you must put it in your head. He will tell you. Because when they come, that guy won't ask you any question. He will send another guy, he will tell: “no, that guy, he's in the team, now. And so this guy will come and say Woosh. And when he says Woosh, you must say Woosh back.”

L., male, 25 years old

It is interesting to note that Iscamtho is a tsotsitaal, and as such, it is tied to the imaginary of South Africa's legendary tsotsis. But the legendary gangsters of the 1940's and 1950's would actually have been based in Sophiatown and spoken Tsotsitaal, not Iscamtho. The ambiance and the environment in which Tsotsitaal developed has remained in the imaginary of Black South Africans as a Golden Age: the pictures of Drum magazine; the beautiful suits, dresses, and hats; Dolly Rathebe or Miriam Makeba singing in Jazz club on music by Dollar Brands or Hugh Masekela; and gangsters in their shiny cars... The first monologue of the theatre play Sophiatown is enlightening on the myth of the place. Jakes speaks in 1955, a few weeks before the removals:

“JAKES: Sophiatown, Softown, Koffi, Kasbah, Sophia... Place of Freedom Square, and the Back of the Moon. Place of Can Themba's House of Truth. Place of the G-men and Father Huddleston’s Mission. Place of Balansky's and the Odin Cinema. And let’s never forget Kort boy and Jazz Boy and the Manhattan Brothers, and Dolly Rathebe singing her heart out – here in Sophia...

The Americans, the Berliners, the Gestapo, the Vultures – they fought here and blood ran in the streets of Sophia.

Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane wrote their best, here in Sophiatown. Tambo and Mandela walked here.

Luthuli stood and a city’s people walked past, here in Sophia. [...]"

However, the reality of everyday life in Sophiatown, Martindale, and Newclare was not that shiny. The status of freehold townships of the three locations, participated in drawing thousand to this place in the 1930's, when the government and the municipality of Johannesburg enforced a wave of removals in

30 According to Ntshangase (1993), Nongoloza is the first leader of amalaita, and the source of Shalambombombo.
31 Play by the Junction Avenue Theater Malcom Purkey & Pippa Stein, first played at Market Theater, Johannesburg, in February 1986. It experienced since a world success. It was published in 1993, but the play would actually be submitted to the actor's improvisations in every performance. Editor unknown.
32 Government men: the police.
33 Famous Jazz artists.
34 Famous gangs from the time.
35 Prominent Black South African writers.
36 The two historical leaders of the African National Congress. Tambo became its president in 1958, and Mandela was head of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military branch.
37 Also president of the ANC between 1951 and 1958, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960.
accordance to the 1923 Urban Area Act, which designated strict areas of residence according to race. In addition, South Africa went through a profound economic crisis in the 1930's and 1940's, and a massive exodus occurred from the countryside to Johannesburg, participating to the racial mixing of the Western Areas, since many of the migrants were poor Afrikaners and Coloured people, who could not afford to rent a place in their own designated areas (Beavon 2004).

As a result, houses where overcrowded, and yards were full of shacks. High wages, unemployment, and permanent risks of harassment by the police were as many factors making a precarious life. In this context, gangsters were acknowledged a number of qualities: the police were their enemies; they could achieve quick financial gains; and they were in a way free from the colonial laws, since they didn't respect them. Tsotsitaal was an embodiment of this freedom, as it could allow its speakers to keep talking in presence of anyone, even the police or their informants, as only them would understand the lingo. Together with Charles Van Onselen (1982) and Clive Glaser (2000), Ntshangase explains the transfer of the argots from criminals to normal youth by the prestige that gangsters then had on the youth, and the attraction of the gangsters’ life. This must have occurred between the 1940's and the 1960's. The occuring of the transfer also involves a high degree of criminality in certain areas, resulting in large numbers of youths being members of a gang at a time in their life, and many experiencing prison. The attraction power of Tsotsitaal was at first maybe stronger than the one of Iscamtho, since Sophiatown was seen as the place of music, arts, and political leadership. But this would be fixed in the second half of the 1970's: Tsotsitaal was suddenly abandoned by the young generations, to the benefit of Iscamtho, which retained the very same symbolic value, but did not contain Afrikaans.

**The reject of Afrikaans**

Iscamtho had spread first in Soweto, before Tsotsitaal was imported through the liquidation of the Western Areas and the forced removal of people from Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare to different townships of Soweto: Diepkloof, Meadowlands, Dube, and Rockville. The story of the removals is told by Keith Beavon (2004, p.131):

“As both the number and population of the south-western townships were growing between 1948 and 1954, so the pressure to clear the Western Areas of African people, as first proposed in the era of segregation, continued to mount. In late 1949 and early 1950, a series of violent incidents occurred between the African and white people in and on the margins of the Western Areas. [...] In early 1949 a petition signed by 7000 White residents demanded that the Western Areas be cleared of Black people. [...] In March 1951 the government announced the clearance of the Western Areas and that their African inhabitants would be transferred to the new townships of Meadowland (adjacent to Orlando West) and Diepkloof (east of Orlando East). [...] At the crack of dawn on 9 February 1955, the 150 Sophiatown families scheduled for the first wave woke to find an armada of 86 military trucks
and a detachment of some 2000 police waiting for them.”

From 1955 to the early seventies, a competition existed between the two criminal varieties in Soweto. However, the trauma of the mass evictions and the permanent harassment of the police over the pass laws already made Afrikaans to be a suspicious language for some, especially the younger ones. Iscamtho then took a definitive advantage over Tsotsitaal in the 1970’s, especially after the 1976 Soweto Uprising:

“Soweto students rose up against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. The anti-Afrikaans protest had two important effects on language practices in Soweto: Firstly, after 1976 there was a sudden shift from the use of Tsotsitaal to Iscamtho in communities which were traditionally Tsotsitaal-speaking. Tsotsitaal lost most of its domains and speakers to Iscamtho. […] Secondly, after 1976 there was a decline in the use of Afrikaans lexicon items within Iscamtho and an increase in English lexical terms.”

Indeed, if some Afrikaans lexicon items are still in use in Iscamtho, they can be counted easily. The most common are niks, vandag, or daai ding. They are short, and occur in phrases which have nothing common with Afrikaans. An inexpert ear would maybe not pay attention that it is hearing Afrikaans.

Social status and stigmas

In past history as well as at the times when he was writing, Ntshangase associates with Iscamtho a number of social norms and values, which he however describes as changing:

“Not everyone in Soweto speaks or identifies with Iscamtho. Generally, the language is spoken by young males who were born in Soweto or have resided long enough to acquire its habits. Females, adults, new arrivals and hostel dwellers are not typical speakers of this language. […] Even when Iscamtho ceased to be a specifically criminal language, females who used this language were still looked down upon. Most females who use Iscamtho patronize shebeens and stokvels and speak the language to their peers and boyfriend. […] The overall impression one has of female participation in Iscamtho speech networks is that a sexist division exists. However there is growing evidence to suggest that more females are becoming accepted users of Iscamtho. […] Attitudinal studies towards Iscamtho show that most people within Soweto, speakers and non-speakers, regard Iscamtho as a low variety. […] There is also an increasing number of families who use Iscamtho as a first language. […] Today, there are many electronic and print adverts which use Iscamtho as an image of urban culture

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38 Beavon 2004
39 Ntshangase 1995
40 See appendix
41 A shebeen is a formerly clandestine bar which would be organized within a house. A stokvel is an association in which members save money, to organize collective activities, but especially parties. It is somewhat of what is called tontine in West Africa.
and as a means of communication. [...] There are also many theater plays which use Iscamtho. Brenda Fassie, Stimela, and Senyaka use Iscamtho in their songs.”

In his masters' thesis, Ntshangase had further developed the historical status of women towards Iscamtho:

“Females are not active participants in the transmission and the development of the variety. Females, from their childhood, are discouraged to speak the variety both by speakers and non-speakers of the variety. As the variety is associated with criminality, females who use this variety are also associated with criminality. Thus, a “good girl” does not speak Iscamtho and a “bad one” does. Females who speak the variety are usually given a number of derogatory labels such as: Isfebe (a woman who sleeps around), Isigendane (a woman who sleeps around), I-outie (a young male, implying a woman without feminine qualities)”

Social evolution since the 1990’s

Ntshangase’s work is a founding one for the understanding of Iscamtho. But as he was forecasting, Iscamtho has experienced a strong social transformation in the past 15 years, together with the South African society. Especially, it is the functions of Iscamtho and from them the values tied to it which have evolved. At the time when Ntshangase made his observations, there were actually already native speakers of Iscamtho in White City. They were then young teenagers, and had become young adults by 2007. An attempt to understand how some youth came to learn Iscamtho as a native language, and many more as the main language they now speak, will be made in the following chapter.

The main difference between this thesis and Ntshangase’s work lies in the moment of the observation. The dichotomy between Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal established by Ntshangase is not only a historical fact, it is also a useful distinction. But anthropological observation shows that today among White City youth, but also more largely in Soweto, tsotsitaal is a term used to refer to the present lingo, since the definition of a tsotsitaal applies well to Iscamtho. Yet among White City youth, it is more often referred to as Ringas and other terms are sometimes used, such as Scamthotaal, Sekasie, Kasietaal, Itaal, Setsotsi or isiTsotsi...

Evolutions in the social status of Iscamtho will be developed in the following chapter, but already, the reader should be aware of some of the most important observations made in 2007, which come in contradiction with the situation in the mid-1990’s as described above in the quotation of Ntshangase:

i. Iscamtho in no more a male only language. Although it still has a majority of male speakers, and although the stigma cast on female Iscamtho speakers has not completely disappeared, many females speak it as a main language, sometimes as native speakers.

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42 Ntshangase 1995, p. 409
43 Ntshangase 1993
ii. The generation of native speakers does not consider Iscamtho as a low variety, but would rather like to see it promoted in more domains.

iii. The presence of Iscamtho in the media has strongly increased, since the language is used in television series and in shows on public television, and since kwaito has become the one post-apartheid culture in the country, with Iscamtho as a vector.

2. The anthropological definition of Iscamtho:

From the definition proposed by Ntshangase, and with a little update of his conclusions, one has already a good picture of what the social nature of Iscamtho is. To fully understand the position and the strength of the lingo and to fully measure its influence on individuals and on other languages, the perceptions of the research informants towards Iscamtho are most revealing. Three aspects of these perceptions are especially important: how Iscamtho is differentiated from or associated to Tsotsitaal by the youth, which reveals the common imaginary towards street lingos in Soweto; how Iscamtho is positioned towards Soweto Zulu, which shows the actual and psychological intertwining of the two varieties; and finally, how Iscamtho is positioned towards its ancestor and prison kin Shalambombo.

Iscamtho towards Tsotsitaal

Tsotsitaal was at a time strongly present in Rockville, which neighbours White City. Many White City youths have a grandmother, or maybe uncles or ants, who were removed to Soweto after living in the Western Areas. Thus, it happens that some youth get exposed to Tsotsitaal from times to times. But if some of them make a distinction between Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal, it is not always clear whether the varieties are fundamentally two different ones. A comparison between the two following testimonies will cast light on this point:

“Tsotsitaal it's another language on its own... I speak Iscamtho. [...] Tsotsitaal, it's mainly based on Afrikaans. They use Tsotsitaal mostly in Afrikaans. Because most of the people, that's where they take it wrong. The language that you hear here in the locations, the language that we speak here in the townships, people think that it's Tsotsitaal. Tsotsitaal was used by our grandfathers in Sophiatown. [...] You can even hear it's Afrikaans. But not like Afrikaans from the Boers. It's Afrikaans, it's... it has flair in it. With hands... it's like they're dancing, but they're speaking. [...] In Iscamtho, actually, you use all the languages you will find. Even Spanish: “Hola!” that's not Afrikaans, baba. Any language, Chinese, or what we'll find, we'll put in. Not only Afrikaans.”

B., male, 25 years old

“Tsotsitaal is a bit more complex. You have other languages in the language Tsotsitaal: you have Afrikaans terms; you have English terms, Zulu terms, Sotho terms... So basically it is like a melting-pot for these other languages. And then Iscamtho it's more African languages, from my perspective. It is more Zulu-orientated, and a bit of Sotho. [...] Iscamtho could be a new

44 The same approach could be made on Iscamtho towards Soweto Sotho, but White City is a mainly Zulu-speaking area.
language, a language that is always changing and progressing. Tsotsitaal, as a background, […] is something that I found there. And so, I cannot change daai ding\textsuperscript{45}. It's daai ding, my friend!… But with Iscamtho, I can come with my own perceptions of what daai ding means for me. So I guess we can say Tsotsitaal is something that's there, that has been unchanged for about fifty years. And Iscamtho is something that's new, and something that's progressing all the time. So I would say that Iscamtho is born from Tsotsitaal.”

F., female, 22 years old

There is a difference between Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal, but few perceive it as radically as Ntshangase demonstrated it. And the essence of Iscamtho towards Tsotsitaal is not clearly explainable by its speakers. Indeed, it makes obvious sense to perceive Iscamtho as descending from Tsotsitaal: although it is not historically and linguistically an ancestor to Iscamtho, Tsotsitaal as an attitude to mix, transform, and create language has profoundly influenced the speakers of Iscamtho until today. Tsotsitaal has a kind of moral fatherhood on the language-mixing and language-transforming nature of Iscamtho. Another reason why the two varieties can be mistaken by those informants is the fact that Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal conveyed the same values and the same functions, which they inherited from their criminal roots: city-slickness, youth, and also secrecy, or at least the ability to exclude some hearers from understanding what is being spoken. Ntshangase (1993) mentions the idea of accommodation as “divergence, in which a speaker chooses a language or language variety that will alienate the person being spoken to.” One should as well say: “alienate the person who is not being spoken to”. This function was capital under the time of gangsters and police activities, and it is still popular among the youth:

“According to my personal opinion, tsotsitaal, it's a language of hiding things. […] If I wanna hide from you that maybe, I smoke dagga, if maybe I speak with Ndobe, I'll say: “hey Mandobise, ngulungu itai”. Most people they know itai as a tie, you know, but here we are using this tie as another object.”

D., male, 28 years old

Actually, apart from its geographical and historical location, Tsotsitaal is recognizable by the grammar from which it operates: Afrikaans. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 8, Afrikaans is neither well known nor appreciated by a majority of White City youth. Considering the similarity of the two codes in their nature and in their functions until the 1970’s, with then an advantage in terms of prestige to Tsotsitaal, one can consider Tsotsitaal as a version of Iscamtho which would be spoken in Afrikaans. In the past, Afrikaans was prestigious, as the state's language, and so was Tsotsitaal. Yet, the strong generational gap between the users of each variety, and the lack of interest of the youth to speak Afrikaans and to use it as a matrix to Iscamtho, reinforce the validity of the distinction of the two varieties. Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal are different varieties, which sound different. Each generation of speakers seems to claim the difference of its variety towards the other. My own experience actually allowed me to meet only three confirmed speakers of Tsotsitaal. All three friends were above 70 years old. And from the testimony of one of them\textsuperscript{46}, the original

\textsuperscript{45} That thing, in non-standard Afrikaans (roughly, Coloured Afrikaans).
\textsuperscript{46} I met David, a 71 year old jazz musician, while he was asking for a lift on the side of the road between Orlando West and Orlando East, his car having a breakdown. He happened to reside in the same street as me in Orlando East, and I took the opportunity to meet him and his friends in an informal discussion.
Tsotsitaal speakers don't appreciate the youth's language, in which they don't see the magic of their own lingo.

**Iscamtho towards Soweto Zulu**

To still push forward the understanding of what Iscamtho is, it must now be compared to Soweto Zulu. For most informants, although there is a difference, especially in the status, between Iscamtho and Soweto Zulu, all of them acknowledge that the limit is thin. Many confess that they can’t help using Iscamtho features when trying to speak Zulu:

“I guess, we could say Soweto Zulu is *tsotsitaal*. From that perspective, I could say: of course, I have always spoken *tsotsitaal*.”

F., female, 22 years old

“Yes, it's different... but no! You see, Soweto Zulu, it's full of Ringas words. But if you're talking Zulu, like fluently talking Zulu, I can make a difference. When I talk *tsotsitaal*, I'm using Zulu, you see, combining with some other words. So if you can take a guy from Natal, maybe from Durban and you can place him there and say: “come on, let's talk!” When he speaks I can hear that he's speaking Zulu but not the same as me. I do talk Zulu, but I can't talk the way they talk Zulu. My Zulu is a *kasie* language, it's a *kasie* lingo.”

L., male, 25 years old

“I can't [stop speaking it]. We grew up speaking like that. And you know *tsotsitaal* I like it very much, because when I'm in KwaZulu-Natal, when I start talking *tsotsitaal*, they will say: “Wow!” and they will ask: “What is that language?” Then I will say it's Zulu, because I'm not aware of what they're hearing, and they will say: “No, this not Zulu!”

M., male, 29 years old

Iscamtho was created, from Shalambombo, on a Zulu matrix, with a Sotho variant developing at the same time. And since it still works on this matrix, Iscamtho is of course so to say a Zulu-like variety. If one considers that Soweto Zulu – already a mixed variant compared to Standard Zulu, containing English, Afrikaans, or other African languages – tends to draw on Iscamtho because its speakers are more and more Iscamtho speakers, one can imagine that the border between Zulu in its Sowetan form and Iscamtho is thin, if not artificial sometimes. It is still possible to differentiate Soweto Zulu from Iscamtho, but considering the social and geographical spread of Iscamtho, maybe the differentiation of the varieties will become more difficult in the future. Actually, some words and features remain characterized as Zulu, and not Iscamtho, although they don't belong to “proper” – or standard – Zulu. But there is a need to keep some distinction between Soweto Zulu and Iscamtho, since some speakers consider the use of Iscamtho as improper to them:

“[Addressing an old woman] it won't be very different. But her Zulu is straight! [...]She would speak straight Zulu. Soweto Zulu... but she's on old lady, she can't be talking *tsotsitaal* in the street, you see?”

L., male, 25 years old

Iscamtho and Soweto Zulu are close to each other, so much that the border is sometimes not
clear. For some speakers, Zulu will be Iscamtho, as it won't be formalised at all. For others, who may have a better knowledge of standard Zulu, and who will benefit of a larger lexicon corpus to enrich their speech and make it undoubtedly recognizable as Zulu, the distinction will be clearer. A good way to describe the relationship between Soweto Zulu and Iscamtho is, instead of taking Iscamtho as originally derived from Zulu, to consider the influence of Iscamtho over Soweto Zulu. More than influential, Iscamtho is actually a driving force in the evolution of the urban variant which is Soweto Zulu, a kind of guideline to its progressively growing distance from Standard Zulu. Indeed, it is accurate, although not sufficient, to see Soweto Zulu as a proper version of Iscamtho, that is a slightly different code which will be acceptable to people who should be respected, or adapted to settings requiring a more formal behaviour. In this perspective, Soweto Zulu is derived from Iscamtho, as much as Iscamtho is derived from Zulu in a historical perspective. It is the need to reach a more formal level of speech which maintains the distinction between Zulu and Iscamtho on the streets of White City. However, as more youth have a very incomplete knowledge of standard Zulu and tend to speak Iscamtho in intergenerational speech (see chapter 5 and 8), it is not clear if the functional distinction will remain in the future.

**Iscamtho towards Shalambombo**

Finally, Iscamtho must also be understood in the light of its prison kin and predecessor, Shalambombo. For Ntshangase, Shalambombo is spoken by the 27 and 28 gangs, whereas the Big Five, and Air Force gangs use Tsotsitaal. This was confirmed by at least two informants. The 26 language is called Tsotsitaal as well as Shalambombo, and it seems that it can be used on a Zulu grammar as well as an Afrikaans grammar. In any case, prison life works in such a way that after a term of several years served inside, an inmate is likely to speak both Tsotsitaal and Shalambombo. Then, the preference for one or the other is only a matter of choice, according to gang identity and to the interlocutor, as Black, Coloured, and even White members of all gangs can meet each other in jail. As a matter of fact, it is clear that if one speaks strictly Shalambombo, an Iscamtho-speaker can't understand him. L. gives a good account of what prison language is:

“Even myself when I'm drunk. I find myself using [Shalambombo]. [...] I'm talking, like they won't even understand me. Or also when I meet the other 26. [...] We're talking, even if I'm going with my friend, I'm calling him names, but he won't realize that I'm calling him names. Because he's not a 26. [...] It's like speaking Afrikaans using the 26 words, it's like speaking Zulu using the 26 words. [...] We do understand each other, because some of the words are similar. [...] Shalambombo I know it from prison. When you are talking, maybe Tswana or Zulu, you're talking the way [of] 26 you see... When I'm talking to you in 26 language, then we are speaking Zulu. But we'll say *nee*, you're speaking Shalambombo [...] They use it in prison, but they're speaking differently.”

L., male, 25 years old

Among White City youths, not all are fully aware that there are prison languages, but they know that prison speech is somehow different:
“I’ve got friends who did some bad things and… with the jail experience of course, they come out speaking… a bit differently! Like there’s signs which don’t exist here outside, there’s terms which do not exist, but they get aware of these terms by chilling with such people. […] So I can believe that there are prison languages.”

F., female, 22 years old

“Ja, they have their own language in Kleksdorp… their own tsotsitaal. […] I do understand it, because most of the lingos that they are using, are the lingos that they are using in jail, you know? And I do understand that lingo. Here in Soweto, we have a lingo sikhuluma la elokishin⁴⁸, and the lingo that they use in jail. […] Someway somehow it's the same, but someway someway it's not the same. Because there's this deep tsotsitaal from jail, and there is this tsotsitaal here at the location.”

E., female, 22 years old

In the 1920's, AmaLaita were arrested, but as their power on other criminals was strong, they took control of gangs organisations in most of South African prisons, and spread their language, as well as did the Tsotsitaal speaking gangs, especially in the Coloured communities. One obvious advantage of prison languages is that all street lingos descend from them, so that one tsotsitaal can be similar to another one far away. But although Shalambombo is close to Iscamtho, just “a bit different”, Iscamtho can’t easily be associated with it outside prison, for a matter of social meaning; and some speakers of Shalambombo refuse to use it publicly:

“I can know the language, so when they come I can speak to them. But I’m here, not [...] in prison, I’m not in any gang, I don’t belong to any gangster… But they can understand. Those who are here they have an advantage when they know the language, so that they can be able to protect themselves. [...] First I’ll be angry. Why do you speak this language to me? Mfethu, I’m not in this anymore…”

L., male, 32 years old

Non-speakers of Shalambombo might still be very attracted to this variety, because of the attraction of the mythical gangsters' life, but also for a simpler reason:

“Because it's fun. When I'm speaking, it's like: “what did he say?” It's a totally different type of language.”

L., male, 25 years old

An important consequence of this interest is that Shalambombo still has a modest but direct influence on Iscamtho, despite reactions of reject towards this language outside prison. It is usual that one knows another person who spent some times in jail. This can be in the family, or some youth friend, or some neighbour. When one comes back from jail, he speaks differently, and his speech creates an interest among others. Thus, a transmission of Shalambombo items to Iscamtho can occur among small groups of people, but if the new item is pleasant and successful, it can enter the normal field of Iscamtho and spread among a larger population:

“Some of them they are saying that, no man, you're no more in prison now, you're outside, so

⁴⁸ …that we speak in the location…
stop talking prison language... But I've spoken these words for a long time, so I can't just leave it... [...] And they do try to use those words! Some of them they're using this word, and some of them they're using it but they don't know what it means, which means that they're using it in the wrong place. So I correct them. [...] For instance, foolish [...] What he’s trying to say is: “Males, I want to go and eat”. But this word we don't use it about eating. Foolish I use it when I want to smoke. That word it's usually used by the Coloured boys, you see. So it’s Coloured tsotsitaal. But even the Couloreds, most of the times when they speak tsotsitaal, they use Zulu tsotsitaal. But that word it comes from the Couloreds. Not exactly the Couloreds, it's [...] a 26 word. When they want to smoke they say foolish. So that's what they usually use here when they want to eat. So I try to... 'No, come on, you don't use it like this...' [...] I think they did hear it from me. But there are these boys who like to talk and whatwhat. So, maybe they even heard it from someone else. And that someone told them a wrong thing, so they took it like that. And when I arrived here from prison, I found them speaking it. But they've never been to prison.”

L., male, 25 years old

Thus, Shalambombo is an entry door for new words in Iscamtho. As pointed at by Ntshangase (1993) about prison languages and their speakers, it “is not exactly the same as Iscamtho, though very similar. They could understand both Shalambombo and Iscamtho, but they could also exclude an Iscamtho speaker if they opted to use Shalambombo.” But as Shalambombo conveys even more secrecy, newness, and city-slickness feeling than Iscamtho, it is obviously logical that lexicon from this argot should be adopted by White City youths and others around Soweto in their Iscamtho.

To conclude this chapter, the contrast between Ntshangase's historical analysis of the nature of Iscamtho and an anthropological analysis should be stressed once more: firstly, it is not clear for all Iscamtho speakers that their lingo does not originate in Tsotsitaal, and many acknowledge a difference between them but consider that the varieties are related, and indeed Tsotsitaal looks very much like an Iscamtho spoken in Afrikaans: first, it started from the same functions and the same attitudes. Secondly, if it is true that Zulu was transformed into Shalambombo, which then became Iscamtho, it is as true to see Soweto Zulu as a product of Iscamtho. Indeed, standard Zulu suffered from being used by speakers of many other languages, which resulted in a first evolution to an urban Zulu variant, and then Iscamtho became the most influential neighbouring variety for the further transformation of Zulu in Soweto. And today, Soweto Zulu, or at least what Sowetans commonly name Zulu, is more and more similar to Iscamtho. Finally, Shalambombo has a certain influence on Iscamtho and Zulu in White City, although the existence of Shalambombo remains a relatively unknown fact.

The next step in the anthropological understanding of Iscamtho will be to analyse the social context which gave Iscamtho the status of native language. The history of White City will be an example of the crime phenomenon in Soweto.
Chapter 4:

How Iscamtho became the youth's first language:

the case study of White City

Iscamtho was first transmitted to the youth as Shalambombo. The lingo received the name of Iscamtho, probably in the 1960's (Ntshangase 1995) but it became the favoured youth language in the second half of the 1970's (Ntshangase 1993; 1995). However, for the criminal argot to become a youth language, the social environment of the youth has to contain enough speakers of Shalambombo, that is enough criminals. Gang members and former prison inmates are the source of the lingo for non criminal youth. It is the gang culture which developed in the entire Witwatersrand in the early 20th century which is the source of the adoption by the youth of several tsotsitaals, but also several dress codes, “styles”, and criminal behaviours which developed successively in Johannesburg and Soweto (Van Onselen, 1984; Glaser 2000).

This chapter aims at giving the reader a taste of the social developments, the conditions of life and the political context through which the township of White City, experienced the spread of Iscamtho, and the coming of generations of first and native speakers of the lingo, but the analysis would be valid for most large townships present and past on the Witwatersrand. It will present the place, White City – Jabavu, as well as the people. Only through a description of history as experienced in the everyday life can one cast light on the causes of the rise of Iscamtho in the life of White City's residents, through the presence of gang members in most households.

From the premises of White City to 1976 (I), the local history will show how Jabavu was populated and how the conditions of living, especially poverty, overcrowding, and the lack of opportunities opened doors for gangsters. The original Nguni linguistic setting of White City was largely modified by its criminal history. The 1980’s and 1990’s (II), the time during which the informants grew up, saw the development of younger and more brutal gangs involved in conflicts with students and political activists, and the continuation of gang activities even after the democratization process. This is tied to familial, social, and political conditions which most kids in White City experienced, and which are the source of the early and almost permanent influence of Iscamtho on the informants.

I. White City until 1976: from a temporary camp to a township submerged by violence

The Jabavu temporary camp

The township of Jabavu was created in 1946, to respond to the increase of informal settlements in
the areas of Orlando. Under the leadership of James Sofasonke Mpanza, the Sofasonke Party managed to impose the establishment of a camp near what would become Orlando West, by moving with hundreds of families to a settlement known as Shantytown or Masakeng. The Sofasonke Party organized fees to service and patrol the settlement. The camp had at its peak more than 4000 shacks and shelters registered. As a response to the move by the Sofasonke Party, the Johannesburg City Council “hastily devised a plan to provide temporary accommodation, and rows of breeze block shelters of ash, sand and cement were established in the new area of Jabavu” (Bonner & Segal 1998). This provided of course very poor conditions of living:

“Roofed with corrugated asbestos and with no fireplace, chimneys or windows, these structures were nine square meters and stood 2.5 meters high at the back and 2 meters high at the front. In return for a bare minimum of services (bucket sanitation, and water and refuse removal) a monthly fee of 5 shillings (50 cents) was charged.”

Despite an attempt by Mpanza to keep the squatters in his camp, the City Council’s fees being half of Shantytown's fees, about two hundred families settled in Jabavu, each of them in one single room. In the following years, squatters from Pimville and the west of Orlando were allocated land plots in Moroka. By 1947, the Moroka Emergency Camp was known as the worst slum in South Africa, counting 58,500 residents by 1955, and was juxtaposed to the Jabavu Camp, which had 31,000.

From Jabavu to White City

In 1948, the National Party came to power, and instituted the regime of apartheid. No progress was made in the development of Black housing around Johannesburg until the early 1950’s, despite an agreement between the government, the City Council, and the industries to solve the African housing problem. In 1952, a breakthrough was to be made, which would allow the building of thousands of houses in the next years: the design of a very cheap four-roomed house of 40-square metres which came to be known as the matchbox house after it mushroomed all over the Witwatersrand.

It’s only by 1955 however, that Jabavu benefited from the City Council’s housing program. The lack of budget allocated to this program by the government, and the lack of financial participation by the industries to accommodate their workers forced the Council to look for the cheapest houses. The formal construction of Jabavu came one year before the 6-million rand donation made by Ernest Oppenheimer to the Johannesburg City Council, and the loan by the mine industries which Oppenheimer organised to accelerate the development of housing. Thus, Jabavu didn't even benefit from the standard matchbox houses, which were too expensive, but instead houses were given a very specific design, from which they were nicknamed

49 Masakeng recalls the grain sacks used to cover the precarious shelters (Bonner & Segal 1998) and means “the place of sacks” (Beavon 2004).
50 Bonner & Segal 1998
51 Bonner & Segal 1998
elephant houses (see picture n°5). It consists in a rectangle of 15 metres long, covered with a round concrete roof. Each house is divided in three “apartments”: on each side, one family was given two rooms and a kitchen; in the centre, one family was given three rooms and a kitchen. One tap of water comes in the kitchen, while another is placed outside, in the back yard; the toilet is outside too, in a separate construction. Each division has a yard, of which the size can change but never exceeds 80 square meters. Since the houses where originally completely painted white, the place came to be known as White City. In fact, one other township, in Orlando West, was given the same houses, although divided in two instead of three: its name is Mzimhlope, which in Zulu means white city.

This concrete-roofed construction pattern was not meant to serve for family housing when it was first designed: actually, it is nothing but a military barrack, normally organised into one single dormitory, in which walls were included to separate each family. However, these walls would at first fail to reach the roof by about one meter: as a consequence, there was no intimacy between neighbour families. When they were delivered, these concrete houses were not plastered, the separation walls inside were raw bricks, the ground was raw cement and one could see the neighbour’s head just by tiptoeing. In addition, rocks that might have lied in the yard would not have been removed, making sometimes a yard quite a dangerous place. Housing in White City is still considered as one of the poorest in Soweto. It was built to respond to an emergency situation – the government having problems to contain the discontent of the residents of the camp – and at the cheapest cost.

Ethnic zoning

It is also in 1955 that the government, through its minister of native affairs, the designer of Great apartheid and future Prime Minister Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, enforced a division of African locations according to ethnicity. This was the prolonging of the 1923 Urban Areas Act and the 1950 Group Areas Act, which organised the geographic segregation in the urban centres first, as a colonial policy, and in the entire country, as the enforcing of the apartheid policies. Ethnic zoning was the transcription within the townships and within the Black communities of apartheid’s divide and rule strategy.

On the ground that the “same people” would naturally be keen to live together, three groups of townships were delimited in the administrative Soweto. According to Bonner & Segal (1998):

“the ruling meant that houses were allocated accordingly to ethnic groups, that traders could only purchase shops within their own ethnic area, and that children were forced to attend a school of their ethnic origin. Naledi, Mapetla, Tladi, Moletsane and Phiri were set aside for the Sotho- and Tswana- speaking people. Chiawelo was for the Tsonga- and Venda- speaking people and Dlamini, Senaoane, Zola, Zondi, Jabulani, Emdeni and White City were for the Zulu and Xhosa Nguni-speakers.

52 This was the case for all types of houses in Soweto, as well as none of them has a shower. Residents explain that the toilet was placed outside, so that occupants would have to go out everyday and could be counted. It was a mean of control under the Pass Laws.
[...] One newspaper concluded that, 'the advantages of ethnic grouping are both psychological and factual and preserve for the Bantu that which we prize for ourselves in our own community: firm tradition, respect for natural leaders, preservation of mother tongue, and mutual loyalties'.

The consequence of ethnic zoning on language distribution in White City was at first the presence of only Zulu- and Xhosa-speaking families. However, this must not hide a real linguistic diversity: under the name of Zulu and Xhosa, one will find different dialects. Especially, Bhaca is well represented in White City. In addition, a family could be classified as Zulu if the father was a Zulu, which meant that the mother could have a different language, which she would speak with her children. Swati, Tswana and Tsonga have been represented for decades in White City. Yet, the main impact of ethnic zoning is that Zulu became the lingua franca in the neighbourhood. However it already was some kind of urban Zulu in the 1950's, mixed with other Nguni languages and Afrikaans.

The attempt to divide the Black communities through zoning failed, since stronger social factors prevented the division of the population: blackness was a much more powerful vector of identity than ethnicity when it came to facing the apartheid state. The mid-1950’s are the time of the rise of the African National Congress, which was especially trying to challenge the evictions of Black freeholders from the Western Areas, through boycotts, demonstrations, and strikes. The most emblematic feature of apartheid, the Pass Laws, also was a reason why ethnic zoning was not enough to divide the population of Soweto: people living in the townships were workers, who had to travel for hours way and back everyday to go to work. On the way, they could be stopped between five and ten times for Pass control, which resulted in many being late and fearing to lose their jobs. The harassment by the police was felt by anyone from any ethnic background, which allowed a common political identity as Blacks.

Moreover, Black people in Johannesburg had lived for decades in ethnically mixed zones: in illegal squatter camps as well as in the freehold townships of Sophiatown, Newclare, Martindale or Alexandra, there had never been major divisions on ethnic lines, and the common situation was rather to disregard ethnicity. The phenomenon of tsotsitaal is an example of how people can build up a common identity – through a language and its values of city-slickness and urbanity – relying on the place and the everyday experience, more than on origins. In White City, Shalambombo, and then Iscamtho, was a reality from the beginning of the Emergency Camp. The lingo must have served as a powerful identity marker of Black urbanity. However, one must also consider that Iscamtho is a marker of common identity with other Sowetans for instance, but also a marker of difference between people from different townships in Soweto, through the different variants of Iscamtho.

The rise of gangs and Iscamtho until 1976

In addition to the Nguni languages and the other languages which could be found within households in White City, Shalambombo certainly was used in the place in early times. The Moroka Emergency camp was home to the AmaRussia gang, whose members were Sotho speakers of Shalambombo
This argot was probably spoken also in Jabavu in the late 1940’s. However, Jabavu was soon to become a strictly Nguni area, and it is likely that Shalambombo there was not based on Sotho like the Moroka one, but rather on Zulu, as it is the case today with Iscamtho. It is known also that Orlando East and its slums were home to a number of Nguni criminals which developed in the 1920's this new argot (Ntshangase 1993, 1995; Glaser 2000). It is likely that some of the people, who moved from Orlando to Shantytown, and then Jabavu, spread the crime language with them.

It must be stressed here that gangs themselves as a social institution represent an ambiguous element in the attempts by the government to strengthen ethnic identities. Ethnic zoning could result in ethnic gangs, since gangs were tied to territory, but there had been in Sophiatown or Pimville non ethnic gangs reflecting non ethnic settlements. A gang is first a community of interest and needs. In spite of an ethnic distinction between AmaLaita and AmaRussia, these two gangs were associated and adopted the same argot. It is more realistic to consider that gangs' conflicts and partnerships would be based on issues of territory control or financial gain, more than ethnic identity.

However, it seems that the 28 gang, known to practice murder, especially with blades, and to speak a deep Shalambombo, has long been almost exclusively composed of men from rural Zulu origin. Thus, they are usually geographically localised in Soweto, since they would mainly be found in the migrant workers hostels, where mostly Zulu permanent residents have replaced mostly Zulu temporary migrant workers. The Zulu hostels are known to be “hot places”, in which illegal business can only be made in Standard Zulu, which indicates a strong ethnic identity. This fact is in complete accordance with the division which has existed from the creation of single-sex workers hotels in Soweto: while the township residents were living in their urban environment, the hostel dwellers originated from the rural areas and especially the Bantustans; they where accommodated in ethnic dormitories; they would not be allowed to leave the hostels except to go to work; finally, they would go back to their families after six months. As a result of the hostels life, temporary migrants were not integrated in the township community, and gang conflicts were superposed to ethnic, linguistic, and political conflicts, as most hostel dwellers in Soweto were traditional Zulus and supporters of Inkatha, the cultural and political organisation of the Zulu royal court.

Within the township society, many factors explain the rise of gang culture, but can be tied to the conditions of life for Black urban males in a segregated Witwatersrand. Clive Glaser (2000, P. 12) analyses the main ones:

“In the city, parents lost control of their children, particularly their sons. In the city there was an absence of older generation kinship supervision, and children had access to money and resources beyond the control of their parents. Perhaps more importantly, sons had no incentive to conform, because they could see no viable inheritance; there seemed to be little prestige, power, or dignity associated with eldership in the city, where social mobility was blunted by poverty and racial

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53 To give an idea of the risks in a Zulu hostels, an event which occurred a few days before the end of the field research in Soweto is meaningful: the week before Christmas, six residents of the Nancefield hostel, between Pimville and White City, were found dead in the morning, all in their beds with one bullet in their heads.
discrimination, and where older residents had little real leverage over the next generation of youth.

The *tsotsi* gangs of the 1940’s and 1950’s as well as the Soweto gangs of the 1960’s and 1970’s, were expression of young urban masculinity. [...] The distinctive subcultural clothing style was for males only, and women were excluded from the prestige spheres of ganglife such as fighting. The masculine identity of the gang hinged around fighting skill, independence, street wisdom, feats of daring, law-breaking, clothing style, proficiency in *tsotsitaal* argot, and success with women. [...] Young township women, as objects of subcultural prestige, as trophies of masculinity, were submitted to astonishing levels of sexual violence. Male power and control in the gang subculture were underpinned by rape and the threat of rape.”

During the 1960's and 1970's, White City was the centre of several gang wars. Several gangs are recorded in the 1960's, such as the *Pirates* in Central Jabavu and Mofolo South, the *Black Swines* in Central Western Jabavu and Mofolo Central, the *Ganda Eleven* in Central Western Jabavu, and the *Green Berets*, between Central Western Jabavu, Jabulani and Zondi. Especially, the *Black Swines* and the *Pirates* were gangs with several dozens of members each and they fought bitterly until about 1968 (Glaser 2000). The purpose of gang wars was the control of a territory, in which residents, and especially young women, were considered as being at the disposal of the gangs in control and were the victims of assaults, robberies and rapes. From 1968 to 1976, the whole of White City was shared between the *Bunsen* and the *Bandidos*, whose stronghold was Mofolo. A new war opposed the *Bandidos* and the *Dirty Dozens*, who were based in other deep Soweto townships (Glaser 2000).

Just before the 1976 upheavals that would transform the political consciousness of the youth and the entire Soweto population, gang violence was an everyday experience for the inhabitants of White City, might it be on the streets, in the trains and taxis, or even in their own houses. This extremely violent environment as well as the no less violent political environment of the country would set the stage for the 1980’s and 1990’s violence in which the research informants grew up. Those were a mix of gang violence and political violence, and aimed especially at other youths, provoking even more violence in response. And in the background of this violence lies Iscamtho, which spread in more households as more youth entered gangs or defence groups.

II. The 1980’s and 1990’s: from permanent violence to appeasement

Youth political activism against gangsters

June 16, 1976 remains the day which made Soweto famous in the whole world. But within Soweto, the consequences of this day, and of the months of riots which followed it, were tremendous. In the months before the uprising, a whole generation of school students got educated to political issues, through the opposition to the implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of education. At the time, some youth had come in contact with the Black Consciousness ideology of Steve Biko; the South African Student's Organisation,
meant to promote it among Black university students, had been created in 1969, and had an influence on Soweto school students. Most of all, it is from the feeling that the generations of their parents and grandparents had tolerated oppression for too long, that the youth radicalised during and after the uprising. They also bitterly discovered the reality of police repression, as the death of Hector Peterson was followed by three months of violence in which more than 1000 people were killed.

If the first wave of 1976 student leaders mostly fled the country to join the ranks of the African National Congress (ANC), its military branch Umkhonto We Sizwe, or the Pan-Africanist Congress, they had given the entire oppressed people of Soweto and South Africa an example of resistance like no one had ever dared since the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. And the hope they created did not weaken: many of their parents, which had abandoned the idea of fighting for about 15 years, decided to join the struggle when they saw their children dying for them. From 1980, the unions and civics movement would lead to the rise of the United Democratic Front and the permanent insurrection state of the 1980’s.

But the more radical followers of the 1976 “young lions” were the youngest generations of school students. If the unification of the school student protest movements was not always a success, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) was born in 1979 in the wake of the uprising, and was successful to spread the Black Consciousness ideology and to develop the involvement in the struggle of younger Soweto school students.

The rise of political activism in the township was not a good thing for gangsters, as confirmed by former Bandido Oupa Ndala, quoted by Glaser:

“1976 stopped all our fun. These school kids started terrorizing us as gangs. They started burning our houses. When the students turned against us, I started realizing that gangsterism was a bad thing. 1976 gave the students the power to do anything they wanted to. Students used to hunt us, and if they do not get you, they burn your family house.”

The combination of the actual training to political activism that young Sowetans received at the time from the numerous UDF affiliated associations, the spread of the Black Consciousness ideology, and the violence shown by the police to repress the movement (one could be shot without warning for shouting a slogan or wearing a T-shirt), led to a radicalization of the comrades, as they were named.

A stronger and better organized capacity of reaction to violence from gangsters was a need strongly felt by all residents. Gangsterism was then a permanent risk for all train commuters, but also for pupils going and coming back from school, or for old people or single women in their homes. To measure the plague which gangsterism was in the 1980's and 1990's, a crime committed in Orlando West in 1990 and analysed by Steve Mokwena (1991, p.3) needs to be mentioned here:

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54 The spear of the nation.
55 Glaser 2000, p.178
“At 2.10am on Christmas day 1990, a gang of approximately twenty to twenty-five boys broke into the Salvation Army girls home in Killarney, Soweto. After attacking the nightwatchman they broke the doors of the home and proceeded to make their way to the girl's dormitories. Brandishing an assortment of dangerous weapons, the boys threatened to kill the matron who they then stabbed with a sharp instrument. Amidst the turmoil and the panic, the boys selected their victims, who were then taken to various venues where they were raped.”

This event reflects a new kind of crime which especially forced the youth to protect themselves: jackrolling. Here is the definition by Steve Mokwena (1991, p.4):

“the word was coined to refer to the forceful abduction of women in the township by a specific gang called the ‘Jackrollers’. […] The most notable practices of the Jackrollers were rape and abduction, car theft and bank robbery. But as the abduction of women became fashionable, anyone who did it could be a jackroller, and jackroll became a commonly used verb in the township vocabulary.”

White City was a centre of gangster activities in Soweto, but it is also where the June 16 students march started from: Morris Isaacson High School remained one of the most politicized schools in Soweto during the entire 1980’s. Those students had grown up in a place hit strongly by violence, and their everyday life required skills to avoid the dangers of the township, but rapes and abductions in the purpose of rape (which could last a day or a week) spread dramatically all over Soweto during the 1980’s. Monique Marks (1993) reports how Morris Isaacson students organized after a series of rapes which hit female students and had been committed by local gangsters: squadrons were formed several times a week; students would go out in band, wearing their uniforms, and hunt down gangsters whom they had identified as terrorizing the pupils. Several gangsters were beaten to death in the late 1980’s. The students even used the so-called necklace: a tyre would be placed around the shoulders and the neck of the victim, filled with petrol, and set alight.

In fact, White City residents considered the students as the most brutal and incontrollable source of violence in the township, since students themselves considered their role of protectors of other youth as their part in the struggle, and would feel legitimate to undertake extremely violent repressive actions.

The appearance of Com-tsotsis

A new kind of violent youth emerged in the 1980’s, in the context of the permanent insurrection of the townships, and the control of social life by the civic associations. After the tsotsis and the comrades, these youth were called com-tsotsis. They would formally be part of a struggle organisation, or claim to support it. But in fact, com-tsotsis only used the pretext of the struggle to fulfil the same expectations as the tsotsis: quick money, girls, and self-respect earned from an anti-social position. The complete disorganisation of families and social life in the township are important factors to explain the rise of com-
*tsotsis*, as well as the complete lack of perspective which Black youth had in the 1980's. By then, unemployment was higher than ever, and no future seemed available for poorly qualified youth. But the struggle movement itself has a responsibility in this phenomenon: one of the UDF’s main slogans was: *Freedom now, Education later*. Youngsters were expected to boycott school and engage in the struggle, even in its violent forms.

Thus, many youth found a way to be part of the resistance to apartheid by involving in crime. Especially, crime could be judged positively within the community if it respected two conditions: if it was committed in the White suburbs or in town, since stealing from the White oppressor was an act of resistance; and if a share of the gain was given to a struggle organisation, most of the time the Umkhonto we Sizwe, but also the local civics.

The ambiguous status of this new kind of criminal youth went on during the 1990’s, even with the beginning of the transition process. There was then a real need for some cash, since the economic situation in South Africa, but especially in the townships, had worsened. And as long as crime became an occupation out of necessity and when it was turned against the Whites and not the township residents, the community would cover the criminals, by not denouncing them. The factor of fear among local residents also explains how criminal activities could go on until the late 1990’s.

**Violence, Family, and Iscamtho**

Childhood in the violent environment of White City was a challenge and a risky experience. Ruth Bhengu (2004) wrote:

> “Growing up in Soweto can best be described as a valuable experience. Well, if you don’t want to use grim words like 'tough' and 'extremely trying' or downright 'life-threatening'. [...] On summer days, the kids of the neighbourhood would form a group, pool their meagre resources and go and spend the day at the swimming pool. There were only two swimming pools in the whole of Soweto. The nearest one was in White City Jabavu, a high crime area populated mostly with pensioners and their grandchildren. The children of White City were fierce. They would pummel you just because your face didn’t look familiar.”

Testimonies from the research informants are also most interesting:

> “There are these kids, when we grew up, they were not even allowed to go out and play. Everything outside was so dangerous. Leaving your child to go out and play, it was something. 'Eish, maybe my son won't come back...' such things...”

B., male, 25 years old

> “Here in White City, many people have been in jail. And jail, it changed lots of things. You

56 The suspicion towards the Whites was as strong in the early 1990’s as the hopes given by the negotiation process. Soweto was on the edge of insurrection in 1993, after the murder of Umkhonto we Sizwe leader Chris Hani.
came back from jail as a gangster, part of a gang from jail. We grew up rough. It was very rough, here in White City. But now it's cool.”

T., male, 22 years old

The 1990’s especially saw the fall of the apartheid structures, and the situation become almost incontrollable, as explained by Mabena (1996):

“The Afrikaner section of the police force became apathetic. They loosened their grip on criminal control, and 'left it to Mandela' […]. Many Afrikaner police also began accepting bribes as a means of enriching themselves. […] The apartheid township structure that has consigned the gangster youths to marginality, overcrowded conditions, poor education, violence, etc, has given rise to criminal solutions and strategies.”

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the tight control of the apartheid state, all the conditions worsened, with the employment rate going down and more people migrating to Soweto from the rural areas, filling up new and vast squatter camps. In addition, many youths had known nothing but violence since they were teenagers: the school boycotts had left them with a poor education and no qualifications; the economic situation was worsening; and crime remained a sure way to feed a family, from the grandparents to the youngest cousins.

Thus, many youths didn’t leave gangs when democracy was instituted in 1994, and many actually kept entering gangs in the second half of the 1990’s. Considering the context of White City, most households by the end of the 1980’s already had had a gangster or more. Most of the time, the children were raised up by their mothers and grandmothers mainly, since many fathers were not living permanently or at all with them, had been killed, or were in jail. One must picture a situation in which young kids know and see gangsters; sometimes their own fathers, uncles, or brothers, present permanently or occasionally, are themselves gangsters. As a result, Iscamtho is not only a language spoken by “bad people” from whom one must protect, not even a language of bad street boys: it is spoken at home, possibly between the father and the mother, and certainly from the father and uncles to the children. The children use it between themselves and with their friends, at home, on the streets, or even at school.

One informant, B., reported during an informal interview how, when he was seven years old, he used to clean his father’s and uncles’ guns on Saturday afternoons, and how already at the time he was speaking Iscamtho with them (which he still does). When several following generations counted so many gangsters as in White City, it is not surprising to see the crime language become an important feature of everyday life within families.

Among teenagers who convert to crime until the very late 1990’s, most had spoken Iscamtho since they were kids, and did not necessarily associate it with crime at first. But when they turned to crime, Iscamtho then acquired the function of secrecy that it always had for gangsters. This led many youths to start individualising their Iscamtho, and to make it understandable only to their gang.
Finally, when several brothers from the same households become involved in gangsterism, more especially if they come after their father, the lingo becomes such a permanent feature of their lives that they will soon speak it naturally, having maybe problems to distinguish it from the lingua franca Zulu. Thus, all their private exchanges will be made in Iscamtho. When the mother married a gangster, she knew that Iscamtho would be a language used at home, and in this case as well as in the case where she saw her kids become gangsters, she would not oppose the use of a language which is anyway part of the environment in which she raises them. Kids who grew up in such a familial and social environment usually speak Iscamtho since as long as they can remember, and they speak it as well and as often, if not better and more often, than their home language. When the lingo is spoken in the house between brothers and sisters, and/or between them and the parents, it ceases to be a crime language, and it becomes everyone’s language.

The rise of kwaito: Iscamtho starts changing positions

The last stage in the history of White City before the research informants became the adults whom they are today has to do with the emergence of a completely new urban subculture: kwaito.

kwaito is first a musical genre, born at the turn of the 1990’s in the townships of Soweto and Khayelitsha in Cape-Town. It started in parties like there are hundreds in Soweto every week: youth would play discs from a table, and sing over the music. The result is hip-hop-like culture which relies heavily on pre-existing local genres, including sometimes traditional music, which they mixed with house music and hip-hop, the two main new influences hitting South Africa in the early 1990’s. Kwaito got popular quickly in the whole of deep Soweto, and became a national phenomenon around 1993 (see chapter 9). As the genre was becoming more and more popular, a radio station was created in 1997, YFM, which plays kwaito and other genres popular with the youth.

The main characteristic of kwaito was of course that it was being sung in the language of those who created it, these youth of Soweto impregnated with decades of gang culture, and who were speaking Iscamtho. Thus, Iscamtho, which had remained until then a rather low-status speech, became the language of the most popular songs of the time.

One must bear in mind that in the early 1990’s, Black South Africans were eager for more than political freedom: it was about being acknowledged as human beings able to equal White people in all domains. Thus, the rise of a culture which was undoubtedly a Black South African one, moreover associated with Soweto, ekasie la makasie57, could only become the unifying culture of the youth that were to construct the “new South Africa”. For White City youth specifically, a movement that was made in deep Soweto, and used their language was being admired by the whole country: this was far enough to embrace the movement and become kwaito fans, or even artists themselves.

In the 1990’s, kwaito was an occasion for all young Sowetans to feel proud of their place and its culture, and proud of their language. It was also a way to assert an element of their urban culture of which White City youth are especially proud: multilingualism and a certain linguistic fantasy. Iscamtho requires

57 The township of all townships
mixing, transforming, inventing languages, and White City associates these elements with their own personal and social values: openness, interest in the others, permanent change, and creativity.

To conclude this chapter, it should be mentioned that the end of apartheid also equals the end of obstacles to people moving in and out of their townships. In White City, the 1990’s saw a number of people moving out to leave this violent place, or moving in, especially for financial reasons. As a result, more Tswana, Sotho, or Tsonga speakers settled in White City. The original Nguni zoning still insures a Nguni majority among White City’s residents, but they have become more diverse. As a result, the number of languages often spoken in White City has also increased, and one can say that all the languages present in Soweto are being spoken today in White City. The present situation is one of linguistic diversity, with a domination of Iscamtho for most exchanges, including between the youth and older generations. But although most White City youth speak Iscamtho in Zulu, some prefer to use it in Sotho or Tswana.
Part 2: Present social and linguistic perceptions of first language Iscamtho-speakers

Chapter 5:

Perceptions, attitudes and values of White City youth in the 'new' South Africa

From even before the 1994 and 1996 constitutions, the South African society has been in a period of transition from the most extreme colonial and racist regime to a liberal and multicultural democracy. The regime change represented a change in the philosophy of the human society which was to be built in South Africa. Since the Anglican archbishop and Nobel peace prize Desmond Tutu coined the term “Rainbow Nation”, the myth of a shiny and multicolour South Africa that would be freed of the past has been promoted, and from the media to the politicians and to the scholars, the terms “new South Africa” have been widely used. Especially, a campaign of promotion of South African-made products has existed for about ten years on the South African television, to incite people to buy “Proudly South African” products in order to be themselves “Proudly South African”.

However, if their was a dramatic change of settings, all of the “old” South Africa has not been erased: the economic and social situation of the majority remains tied to poverty and exclusion; the new social divisions are largely superposed to the former racial divisions, in terms of geographic location, of access to education and employment, or of social improvement opportunities. There has been a development of an important Black middle class, but its members have so far tended to leave the townships as soon as their financial possibilities allowed them to do so. Soweto and White City remain largely undeveloped, with few shops and facilities, little public transports apart from the minibus taxis, and almost no economic activity compared to what can be found in Johannesburg or in Sandton.

Most of the informants became adults by the beginning of the 21st century: they were strongly influenced by the political transition which they witnessed and experienced as teenagers; and they did not live nor see by themselves the worst of apartheid, as they were children who hardly moved from the township. However, they experienced the violent society that apartheid had produced there, some as victims, some also as perpetrators. Their social position is rarely better than the one of their parents, as most of them are unemployed and did not receive any superior education. Among the twelve informants quoted in this...
thesis, only one works in a corporate in Johannesburg; two are drummers in a dance company; one is a freelance tour guide and cloths designer; two work informally on car-wash stands; the others are currently unemployed, and have been so for several years.

It is essential to understand how the youth perceive the “new” South African society, how they place themselves in it, and what values they promote to face this society and succeed in it. Their identities are complex, and they often combine antagonist elements. The youth observe change, but that this change deceives them, as it is unequal and unattainable (I). This results in defiance towards the political elites who have driven the transition without providing the promised freedoms, and regrets about the spread of new individualist values against the old collective values. But the complexity of the South African society echoes the complexity of the youth's identities (II): as Black urban youth, they face a permanent dilemma between the modern life and their origins, which they solve by combining traditional and modern values in their judgements and in their behaviours.

I. There is some novelty in this South Africa, but it deceives the youth

Seen from White City, the main changes obtained from the new regime are tarred-roads and electricity. For those who managed to get some success, South Africa is an open field to explore. For others, improvements are slow, and not always at their benefit. The reactions to the very use of the terms “new South Africa” are contrasted. However, the youth recognize improvement, but some only symbolically. N., who is employed at ABSA Bank, one of South Africa's biggest corporates, and F., whose freelance activity as a tour guide is successful, are the most supportive of the new system. They also are the most successful in their professional lives:

“[That new South Africa stuff] does work on me! I like that change very much. [...] Things have really changed now. It's not like in the 1970's, where [...] there were lots of killings... So it has changed with those things. We're doing it for our children... [...] Now at work I am able to work with other people in the same position. Before, White people where perceived as your boss, not as your colleague. So now I can be their colleague, I can even be friend with them.”

N., female, 26 years old

“Hey, knowing my history as well as I do... [the new South Africa it's] opportunity, opportunity, and more opportunity. There is nothing I can't do. [...] Looking at what people have gone through for me to have what I have today, means that I am amongst the chosen ones, the privileged. I see South Africa as a country where anything is possible. [...] We have an economy that's rising. We have a Black middle class, which is something of a new phenomenon, people are making it out there. Black people especially. They're coming to positions of power which is something you've never heard of before. For people it's a challenge. There's two ways of looking at it. The positive aspects is that finally Black people are making it. And the second one is, as a sign of success, Black people buy expensive cars. That's what everybody wants, you know, to drive a German car...”

F., female, 22 years old

For others, change is to be found in strong symbols such as freedom of movement, equality
between cultures and languages, or the possibility to meet and exchange equally with White people. This point was important to the informant, since they were discussing with a White student who came to them to lead a research about them. Change is also to be seen in the ambience of the township and practical facilities which people have acquired. But the acknowledgement of changes can also be somewhat of a conventional reaction, and are not an occasion to elaborate as in the two previous testimonies:

“To be quite honest with you, a new South Africa, I would say... a new freedom. A new change of life. I'm living Martin Luther King's dream. Being a White man's friend, such as you, that's a new South Africa. In the old regime, if we were seen together, we couldn't stay as we are staying now. We should be working... Bullshit!”

B., male, 25 years old

“When you say it's a new South Africa, many things changed, like the streets, the lights. Now we can have cellphones, a TV, many things... And before it was apartheid, [but] since Mandela is free, things are... cool. [...] A new South Africa means that we can go where we never went before. We can share the same jobs with the Whites, buy the same cars... And we can do things together and equally, that's why you call it a democracy.”

M., male, 29 years old

For many youth though, and especially those who were once criminals, as they haven't been able to push their education up to or after matric, the new South Africa is either a mystification, or only a small and distant evolution, where positive points can be pointed at but with no or hardly any global consequence nor individual consequence that might concern them:

“This new South Africa... all right, it is new South Africa for some other people, you see... But for me, ok, maybe it is a new South Africa because Blacks are in power. And the president is Black, first Nelson Mandela, and now it's Mbeki. But for me, it hasn't done much, this new South Africa. I'm still living in the old South Africa. It did open up some opportunities for some other people, but for me you see...”

L., male, 25 years old

The promoted change is not the experienced change
Most White City youths haven't really felt much improvement in their everyday life, and in the environment in which they live. Especially, poverty is still the norm in the township, which causes much disappointment after fifteen years of democracy:

“Something that is not new: the way of life! People are still poor... The lack of jobs...”

B., male, 25 years old

“In the old South Africa, I know I do this, and that. But now, I'm fighting for many things. I'm fighting for my life, my health, my family... Everything you must fight for it. Even to live on the street you must fight for it.”

N., male 28 years old

“Many people have gone from the poor to poorer... that's what is happening. It's a new South Africa ya gale, which means a new South Africa which is old. Nothing has changed, it's only the
attitude of the people. And people enriching themselves. But I don't blame them.”

L., male, 32 years old

The youth perceive a disequilibrium in the way Black and White people are treated, but also in the way they behave: practicing the “new” South Africa should be acting with mind-openness, but township residents often feel as if their White fellow citizens were not enough confident to freely accept and develop the new society. The behaviours pointed at are mainly the result of the fear that many White people have of a Black society which they still don't understand, and of which they are afraid. Incomprehension between cultures is mutual and still banal in South Africa:

“Here in Soweto there are cops everywhere, harassing us. In the suburbs, those boys they smoke weed in the streets, they drink in the streets. But here we can't because we don't have their money.”

B., male, 25 years old

“One day I went to get some money to the bank. There was this White woman, she couldn't use her car to Johannesburg CBD, because she was afraid of the traffic... She was born in South Africa, she works in a bank, but sho, she's not free. So my question is: why?... I mean why, because the Whites from Europe when they come, they go free.”

G., male, 26 years old

“As a White person, we can be born the same day, at the same place, and live in the same street, and not know each other, until we meet in Europe [...] and we find out. [...] For the Whites, it's hard for them to mingle, as White people.”

L., male, 32 years old

In fact, White City youth often oppose themselves to other racial groups in the South African society, and racism is still a concern in their experience. However, the general opinion is that relations with the Whites are continuously improving. This is certainly not the case with the Indians, as many consider that they treat Black people in a racist way. An informant expressed during an informal interview his idea that “what happened to the Whites” when gangs used to commit crimes in their suburbs “could well happened to the Indians if they don't change”. Although the Indian township of Lenasia is only about 10 kilometres from Soweto and there are many Indian shops in Kliptown, the youth see the Indians as a distant, privileged, and even oppressing community:

“In fact the people who are the most racist and oppressing are the Indians. And moreover, they are greedy people. Because they are using our colour in politics, but at the same time they are the ones who are humiliating such persons... [...] Because the Indians are those who are controlling the wealth in South Africa”...”

L., male, 32 years old

Considering the remaining inequalities and racism, White City youth feel frustrated with the democratic society. To them, the transition was mislead, and promises were not kept; changes have been

58 Under apartheid, Indian people were entitled to own shop. At the end of apartheid, many of them developed their trades in the White CBDs and in sometimes in the Black and Coloured townships. They are today the richest racial group in South Africa, compared to their number.
largely negative, especially in terms of moral values in society. The new South Africa has been felt as developing against the Black townships majority. From the informant's point of view, the main responsibility of their disappointment lies with the politicians of the ANC who have ruled South Africa.

Politicians have perverted freedom

Especially, the entire Mbeki government is perceived as far from the people, and more interested in their own success than in the improvement of people's lives. This must be put in contrast with the fact that most major historical political leaders once lived in Soweto, and that it is to Soweto that Nelson Mandela or Walter Sisulu went home after they were released from jail. Policies such as police presence or identity controls, are easily compared to apartheid policies, and the politicians who are responsible for these policies are considered to have betrayed their cause. They can even be compared to the Afrikaner nationalist rulers. Finally, the trust shown towards the government is almost equal to zero. Especially, the two measures which make the youth angry at the government are the ban on alcohol consumption and drunkenness on the street, and the project of forcing people to carry an identity card, which easily reminds the youth of apartheid's Pass Laws. The ruling politicians are taken as liars, as the youth don't see the point of the present policies, when the most basic needs are not satisfied for everyone in the townships. They are suspected of turning their back on the Black majority which put them in office:

“The government is far from us now. I don't listen because they're telling us lies. They're promising lies. When Mandela came to power, you know what he said to us? Free electricity, free houses, and another thing, free schools... Actually basic needs would be for free... But now we are paying for it! [...] Now they are in power, it's like they are... the Boers now. Actually to me there is no difference. Day by day they are playing back the laws. Now they want us to carry our IDs... I don't know if that thing will pass. Our own government, they're just lying to us. Somewhere there's a big conspiracy that says, some of our heroes are still looking for whiteness. Even our own president, it's a puppet.”

B., male, 25 years old

“The way I see it, it's like when you want to get some lady. You are proposing a lie thing. Most of the time they are doing like... to lie to the people. Cause they say it's for all the people, but it's not for the whole country. It's for few people.”

N., male 28 years old

But the biggest source of frustration of the youth towards the democratic society is the lost of traditional and collective values, to the benefit of liberal individual values, which are sometimes impossible to justify from their perspective.

The change from new to old values is not appreciated

In the past, social and political problems used to be discussed collectively in the township. Solidarity was also the basis of survival. Those values of unity have decreased, and especially, the lost of *ubuntu*\(^\text{59}\) is bitterly resented. Youth who had a violent trajectory in the 1990's remember that in the past, there

\(^{59}\) See introduction.
was no questioning about someone who was hiding from the police. They also remember the solidarity that existed when no one in the township had more than the others. But in a liberal capitalist society, those who succeed owe it to themselves, and are not supposed to share it. This is a rupture from the traditional perspective:

“Just picture this: you live in a society of “I'm depending on him, he's depending on me, that one is depending...”, you know? To make a change, we combine. And now, we are liberated, so we cut... Everyone for himself... He goes alone, I go alone, we no longer go to the same church. There's no longer peace meetings in the townships... They're pulling us away. [...] That was Mandela's word: a black man for himself. [...] And by that time our brothers were taught to steal. And when they got to power, they reinforced the police.”

B., male, 25 years old

“At first, on Christmas night, I would knock at this door, to get some cake. Next door, I'll get some sweets, next door, I'll get some food... But now it's no longer happening. This democracy has made people to be reserved to themselves. There's no longer ubuntu, amongst the people. It's all about: everybody for himself, God for us all.”

L., male, 32 years old

However, the youth still seem to believe that a better South Africa is possible. Its achievement depends on the implication of every one. This means that each individual should strive for a better society, and involve in changing their behaviours to make it work. Being a good South African especially translates into an active learning of others' languages. And although luck is the factor of individual success, nothing is possible without a complete involvement in the ideal of a better South African society:

“You have to learn those nine languages, to be a good South African. [...] Yes, because it's growing each and every time. I like that. [...] It can do a better South African. It's those nine languages, one of them you have to learn to be a good South African.”

M., male, 29 years old

“As a South African, I would give you the benefit of the doubt, when you where raised, you were raised by the Afrikaans language in your family, and at school in English. You were told that other languages are not good for you, but you have to make sure that you try to learn at least one of the languages that make South Africa.”

L., male, 32 years old

Finally, L. provides a good example of the reactions that a few people of all ages in Soweto express: South Africa is experiencing a moral decay, and apartheid should be reinstaured to fix that. L. usually expresses conservative views, and her position might seem shocking for outsiders. However, from the perspective of someone who hardly benefited of any improvement from democracy, for whom life might be financially more difficult today than it was in the past, and who was shocked by some of the most liberal policies of the government, it is not an unusual position:

“To me, there is one thing that I'm angry with. Because our government, now, from the age of 12, they allow to do abortion. So that's one thing I hate about my country. Because they're pushing girls to... and there's a cost, with teenage pregnancy... So that's why I don't say it's a
new South Africa for me, huhu! Because, a girl she's 12, got involved with her father. So the father impregnated her⁶⁰... So it's not a new South Africa, it's so rotten. Some they do it out of poverties. So that's why they get involved when they're underage. They sell their bodies in Hillbrow⁶¹. [...] For me, I wish they can bring up this apartheid... and the Boers, they come in control of South Africa. Because things are not going right. The things they do, our President, Thabo Mbeki, he's not doing right. And I don't want a female President. At least a male, not a female...⁶²

L., female, 21 years old

II. Complex, multiple, and broken identities of the youth

The issue of White City youth's identities is one which entails many different perspectives. Confusion can be a reaction for some youth when asked to explain who they are. The main difficulty seems to be the identification of the heritage which matters to them. Indeed, the ethnic culture to which one considers to belong to is most of the time mentioned as the identity which matters first. But it is quickly balanced by the attachment to the original experience of the township:

“"My nation, it's Bhaca. [...] But I grew up here, where you have these guys they can speak ten, twelve languages. All of them are here. Like, you can walk maybe twenty blocks, and you'll find them, all of them.”

N., male 28 years old

“I'm a Bataung, a lion, linked to the Sotho and the Tswana, which was raised by a Xhosa woman. [But] I come from Soweto; raised in the township, born and brewed there; been in and out of prison; been part of the system, fought against the system... Now I'm living in a new South Africa where I'm struggling to get ends meet.”

L., male, 32 years old

The two previous quotations illustrate the interest of White City youth in promoting their own individual identity, while at the same time the collective traditional identity cannot be ignored. But individual chaotic origins can complicate the identification with one “culture”, thus undermining the ethnic qualification of a person. When a traditional identity is not clear, it is the identity from the place, Soweto, that becomes the main source of pride:

“"Mina⁶³... [...] my father, I don't really know where he comes from. Because we don't speak of this, we don't normally practice anything about that... [...] It's from the mother's side and the father's side, but for me, it's too complicated. I'm a Sowetan, 101%... [...] I spent my whole life in Soweto, and I'm not intending to move. I lived in White City from 1981 [...]. My heart was always in White City. I love White City, because even if you're sleeping, there's noise on the street, you're friends will always call you like: “hey, ngwanzi”... I like that. [...] At the granny's

⁶⁰ L. is referring to the case, which was much discussed in 2007, of a 12-years old girl who had been raped by her father, and whom a judge allowed to undergo an abortion against the will of the family.
⁶¹ One of the centres of crime and prostitution in downtown Johannesburg.
⁶² At the time of the interview with L., it was still envisaged that Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcua, the Deputy-president, could take the place of Thabo Mbeki as President. Since, Jacob Zuma defeated Mbeki at the ANC conference in Polokwane in December 2007, and the possibility of a female president is no more likely in a short term.
⁶³ Myself
place there was me, my cousin, my sister... I had something like ten cousins here.”

G., male, 26 years old

It is common that the lineages are broken or not completely known. One can detect here the impact of forty years of gangsterism and rape: these two factors both explain why a father can be dead or unknown, and why a mother would be reluctant to tell her child about his/her father. However, in the African tradition, it is a fundamental matter to know and worship your ancestors.

**Origins, traditions, ancestors**

Although the youth are all Christian, they also believe that their elders still live around them in spirit. Thus, even if it is rarely the young ones who perform the rituals, one is expected to talk to them. It implies to know the culture of the ancestors, including their language, and before performing the rituals, one must learn every aspect of them. Being able to know the ancestors is a source of pride, as it reminds of the glorious origin of an individual, and as it is a proof of knowledge of one's roots:

“What I can say, I practice something that I believe in. [...] It is important, because as a person, you were born, coming from other worlds that you don't know. ”

D., male, 28 years old

“My grandfather, his father told him that they had a king's blood in them. When they praise them, they call them Zulu.”

B., male, 25 years old

Traditions are not the same according to one's ethnic belonging. Thus, if cows are part of some rituals of all cultures, like weddings or burials, when it comes to the ancestors, some nations would slaughter a goat, others a sheep. It is important to respect this kind of distinctions, otherwise contact with the ancestors would be impossible. However, ancestors are not deconnected from the youth reality, and they should be treated as persons that one wants to please. The ingredients of satisfaction are sometimes the same as many youth would appreciate:

“Because maybe my ancestor was a thug... Maybe he was drinking. There is this thing when we do a ceremony that we put in... m'sam m'seme! And in that m'seme there must be traditional beer. If maybe you are doing a ceremony for someone who loved to smoke drugs, like *dagga*, you must put that *dagga* there. If he was drinking, you must put that *Smirnov* that he is... addicted to! Everything that he was doing you must put it there. So that he will be happy.”

E., female, 18 years old

The ancestors are sacred, ethnic identity is not

Ancestors' worshiping is an imporant part of the youth heritage, and they respect it. However, especially when one's ethnicity is not clear or mixed, a certain distance is kept towards these inherited identities, as one can hide them or promote them at will. Ethnicity is rarely identitifiable with any other element than language in everyday life. Language thus constitutes a priviliedged medium of mastership of one's ethnicity, and an ability to play with it or suprise people about it:

64 People can be called by their names and surnames, but also by their praise names: each surname has its praise name.
“There's one reason why I like Shangane, it's because of my skin, my complexion. Shanganes have a very Black complexion, so when people see me, they don't expect me to speak Shangane, they expect me to speak Afrikaans, like the Coloureds. So I love Shangane because people can gossip about me, and they're not aware that I can hear them, until they're finished speaking. And it's when they're finished that I'll speak Shangane. I'll say: “Are you finished?” I've got a friend [...]. She's a Shangane, but she doesn't look like one. So whenever we're together, we speak Shangane, and people think: “look, I've never seen beautiful Shanganes like that.””

G., male, 26 years old

Traditional or ethnic identities are a particular feature of Black people in South Africa, since none of the other racial groups has any similar cultural background – although some Afrikaners historically defined themselves as a White tribe. In the democratic society however, the youth sometimes have doubts about who should be included in or excluded from identity categories denominated with terms such as Blackness or Africanness, on which some youth claim a monopoly. The concept of South Africanness is the source of more problems of delimitation.

Black, African, South African: convergence and contradictions in concepts

The youth of course define themselves as Blacks: their skin complexion; the fact that they live in a Black (or African) township, with only other Black people; and the history of racial categorization which their community went through, are as many factors to underline blackness. The superposition of racial and social divisions in South Africa is another factor. In the 1970's and 1980's, the ideology of Black Consciousness associated the word Black to the oppressed. Thus, Indian or Coloured people, as well as Whites who would fight the system fully, could be termed Black (Biko 1978). But for the present youth, blackness is their exclusive characteristic: it is always a source of pride, despite the discriminations from which Blacks can suffer. An association between the terms Black and African allows the youth to exclude from Africanness the non-Blacks; and to include in it all Blacks, wherever they live. Thus, the concept of blackness, synonymous to Africanness, is defined in a strict acceptation, far from the Black Consciousness views. As the term Black has become exclusive again, the term South African has become the inclusive concept. But south-africanness cannot be synonymous to Africanness which is for most youth a genetic characteristic. This perception especially expresses the resent of some youth towards the White society:

“Being black is being an African. If you're not Black, if you don't have the same hair as mine, if you don't have the same nose... [...] You are an African when you have the same genes as me. Besides Americans, every person that looks like me, he's an African.”

B., male, 25 years old

“The government says: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it”, not to those who where born in South Africa. If you live in South Africa, that says South Africa belongs to you. But [the Whites] will not say that they are proudly Africans. [...] They can claim to be part of the country, not part of the continent.”

L., male, 32 years old

If identity conflicts in racial terms provoke the exclusion of other racial groups from a common
identity with White City youth, it is also the case for social identities, as township life has very little to do
with the wealthy suburban life:

“Diepkloof Extension\textsuperscript{65}? We call it Diepkloof Expensive... Those are the \textit{Bourgeois}. [...] But
it's not that I have a problem with those kids, life is good for them. But sometimes they should
rest from depending on their parents that much... I was raised in the township, and in the life
where I come from, I was taught life is difficult... I'm not saying that I'm jealous, I'm just saying:
why can't they live for themselves?”

L., male, 32 years old

Finally, within the complexity of identities to which White City youth might feel attached, there
is a real pride to be South African, not only for what South Africa is as such, but in comparison to the
representations of what other African countries are:

“You must be proud, of your country. There is problem in South Africa, but I'm still proud
I'm a South African. They say “Proudly South African” or “Buy Proudly South African”, that
should I say... [...] I'm proud that I'm a South African, because, living there in Zambia... People
are suffering there.”

L., female, 21 years old

“South Africa, in the whole of Africa, it's the only country that is good, with towns, you
know. Other countries they are still suffering, like Rwanda. Look at Rwanda: they are still
fighting.”.

M., male, 29 years old

\textbf{Inseparable opposites: tradition and modernity}

Soweto is a place where one can come across herds of cattle or goats, which are grazed on the
many empty lands of the township and sold to be slaughtered at weddings or funerals. Followers of African
churches walk the streets on week-ends, dressed in an \textit{ibeshu}\textsuperscript{66} or another traditional wearing. On week-ends
also, many \textit{nyangas}\textsuperscript{67} and their young apprentices walk the streets of White City on their way to and from
their gatherings. All around Soweto, one can consult \textit{sangomas}\textsuperscript{68}, and recurent problems in life often lead to
consult them. Herbalists sale traditional medicines, and some are appreciated by the youth. They believe
strongly in these traditions, although they consider most of Soweto's nyangas and sangomas as crooks.

However, as Sowetan youth, they don't want to be associated with traditionalism or
conservatism, which are related to the rural areas and backwardness. But there is no antinomy nor paradox to
mix identities: one must know his/her origins, but is proud to be a modern and urban individual. Knowing
one's heritage is a \textit{sine qua non} condition for a youth to be balanced and achieve a good modern life:

“People say: “I'm from Jo'burg”, but something you should know: nobody comes from
Jo'burg originally. Everybody is a migrant to Jo'burg. [...] If you want to know, you go to older

\footnotesize{65} A suburb for wealthy Black people created in the 1980's at the edge of Diepkloof. One can find there the homes of
some soccer stars, media figures, or famous businessmen.
\footnotesize{66} A men's skirt made of skin.
\footnotesize{67} \textit{Inyanga} is a herbalist, doctor and diviner in Nguni languages.
\footnotesize{68} \textit{Isangoma} is a witch-doctor, and the maker of \textit{umuthi} or magics.
persons, like your grandmother or grandfather for instance, and you go and ask some questions: where do I come from? Where did you meet this guy? [...] If I know about my ancestors, I'll want to stand for [my family], and who they are. [...] That's our history. [...] As much as we're becoming part of the world now, it's very important to take back into who we are: [...] you don't know where you're going until you know where you come from.”

F., female, 22 years old

“If your child doesn't know where he belongs, if he doesn't know his roots, his culture, then he is lost in South Africa. [...] As long as he understands the values of his culture, of his customs, that's the most important.”

L., male, 32 years old

A good example of the importance of not forgetting about one's origins and culture is given by the Umkhonto Dance Company69, which is based in Phiri, Soweto, and to which belong two of the informants. The show consists of dances and songs, accompanied by drums. The idea is to perform one song and dance from each of the nine indigenous culture of South Africa. In addition, township culture is sometimes added in the show through Gumboots dance, which originate from the mines, and Pantsula dance, a style created by and under the influence of gangsters in the 1980's. So each artist in the show, apart from their talents as dancers or drummers, can sing the nine official African languages; all of them understand everything they sing, even if it doesn't mean that they speak the nine languages. M., who plays the drums in the show, describes its cultural and social importance:

“ We are proud of our cultures, and then we are proud of our languages. [We want to show other people] how we live in South Africa. [...] And this show, it's good because, it also teaches the young ones. Because you know, here in Soweto we are living in a modern style. So we don't do the things that they use to do before. [...] It's important to know your culture, to know where you come from. So that you can know yourself.”

M., male, 29 years old

Soweto and urban Identity

Despite the importance given to traditions, White City youth are undoubtedly and proudly urban youth. They are proud of the history which made them to be born in Soweto, and their link to the place is sometimes explained in terms of spiritual ties, similar to one's ties with the ancestors or their heritage. But most of all, the youth are proud of what the township and Johannesburg are to them: a huge metropolis, modern, mysterious and attractive to the outsiders. And as urbanity is revered, rurality becomes a backward value, and rhymes with ignorance of modern life:

“When a baby is born, you know that thing, the cord, [...] in African traditions, at the clinic they give it back to you, so you do your ritual things, you know? My thing it's here in Soweto, not in the rural areas. And most of the people that I know, whom I grew up with, my peers, are here. I'm used to a quick life, you know. A life that is fast, a life on the edge. [...] Any

69 Umkhonto artists, about twenty in total, young men and women, took part in the research as they were the subject of participant observation a dozen of times. They performed their show many times and exchanged in unformal and formal interviews about why it mattered to them. Many are not quoted in this thesis, but need to be mentionned and thanked here.
given moment, let's say, he was gunned that side or mugged or what, there's no easy thing you know...”

B., male, 25 years old

“For me, our culture was like... a city. Because people who live like in deep culture, like Zulu culture or Xhosa culture, he was living in the bush, like Natal, inside deep Natal... Running after the cattle, doing whatwhat to get some milk, and in the morning you must carry some water on your head, in a bucket, you must go to the river... But as we grew up here, there's street, cars, there is water next to us... That's why my culture it's like a city.”

N., male 28 years old

Soweto: history, values, identity

At the core of the Sowetan identity, although it is not always concretely achieved, lies a traditional value: ubuntu, or the value of living together. Ubuntu is in Nguni languages a traditional concept, which cannot be really translated in English70, but also exists in Sotho languages, in which it is called motho. It is explained as a spirit of togetherness, a state of mind and a way of life which human beings must adopt because they live together. It is reflected in the Nguni words umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu, which can roughly be translated as “a person is a person through other persons”71: ubuntu remains a strong value for the youth, as it translates in the very same behaviours of solidarity which were imperative to stand life in White City under apartheid. As such, it was part of the experience which makes the township so emotional for the informants. Openness to other and the taste of meeting people are tied to ubuntu, and they are strongly promoted in the speech of many Sowetans. Ubuntu also corresponds to the need of solidarity among township residents in conditions of extreme poverty, overcrowding, and police repression. Thus, the traditional concept became tied to the way of life of an urban Black population under Apartheid. But other factors, such as the social and political history of Soweto or the loss of Sophiatown are also included in the values of a proud Sowetan. However, Soweto is not well perceived by everyone. Tourists are often presented the image of a violent and dangerous place, as it was in the past, and this is the vision of many White South Africans about it. As a consequence, White City youth care to present the best of their township:

“I don't show [that I'm from Soweto]. Because, another thing, Soweto is seen as a violent place, with a lot of crime. [...] I don't promote it, that I'm from a place of violence, and crime and stuff like that. So I try to show it in a positive way, not with crime or gangsters' things. [...] Maybe I'll tell them about our history, and if they want to know... because I used to go to church in Regina Mundi. So there is a lot of history in that place. So I try to show that something there can be a good thing coming out of Soweto. Maybe they think most people in Soweto they are drop-outs, they are not educated, they can't find better jobs. But me I finished school. So I think I am a positive example of Soweto.”

N., female, 26 years old

70 In kinyarwanda, the word exists in the same form, ubuntu, and means pity.
71 An equivalent in English could be: “no man is an island”. 

80
White City youth have to negotiate their place in a society which is said to be free and democratic, but in which they struggle to improve their situation. Their vision of other South African racial and social groups is not always positive, and it leads them to build their own identity as a reaction to others. Especially their association of blackness with africanness, and their opposition of africanness to south-africanness, marks the difference between White City youth and the Whites, the Indians, but also more generally the rich, as those racial categories are tied to wealth in the youth's imaginary.

But the development of traditional values of solidarity, equality, and sharing, such as *ubuntu*, is envisaged as the means to improve again the South African society, and to make change available for the townships' youth. It is thus the conjunction of the modern democratic principles and of some traditional social rules which allows the youth to identify with the present society in which they live. However, some youth reject the new regime, and rather call for a return to apartheid. But for most, all resent towards the other South African communities has not disappeared.

Those multiple perceptions explain largely the linguistic attitudes and behaviours of the youth towards African languages, English, and Afrikaans, as it will now be developed.
Chapter 6: White City youth between African languages and English

In the context of the democratic South Africa, Black people, and especially the youth, are sandwiched between two social aspirations. On the one hand, success at school or in the professional sphere requires more than a vague knowledge of English: a fluent proficiency is a sign of education and knowledge, and it is a decisive asset in terms of employment. On the other hand, the larger Black community expects a respect and knowledge for culture and traditions. This doesn't exclude an adaptation to the requirements of modernity, nor the use of English; but it implies the knowledge and the practice as main language of one or more African languages, or to put it more correctly, of one or more Black languages, since the concept of African languages usually refers to the official ones.

A first part will present the awareness of the youth about African languages and English, and how they are represented, as well as factors that make at the same time English and the languages equal material that should be known and used by Black South Africans (I). The second part, will present the perceptions, reactions, and strategies of the youth towards the actual situation (II). They observe the importance of English with fear and anger sometimes, but also with indifference, consent, or even clear approbation. And none of them really has a completely positive or negative view, as the conflict between English or African languages is overcome by multilingual strategies and the acceptance of different roles to play for English on the one hand, and African languages on the other hand.

I. English and African Languages: awareness about two equally compulsory practises

Mention was made in previous chapters of the central role of English in the South African society: it is the business language, the main media languages, or the language of politics. It is also the language of education for all children from the age of 10. If the dominance of English outside Soweto is perceived, as well as its progression inside Soweto, one should note that it is not necessarily proper English per se which is spreading, but also English as part of local codes. English is a lingua franca which can't be avoided, and it is largely accepted as the prestigious and necessary transcultural language of the country:

“English here in South Africa has grown. Because here in ekasie, our culture it's tsotsitaal. But this young generation, now they are changing. Maybe it's new vibes or what. They like to use English.[...] They still know tsotsitaal, it's just that now they love to talk English. [...] They can speak English, then put a little bit of Ringas, then again English, here and there Ringas.”

L., male, 25 years old
“Maybe old people, our ancestors, they are the ones who are allowed to say that [English is a settler language]. But with us, we grew up with English, so... [...] It will be difficult, if you say, we don't speak any more English. Because we're gonna have to know all the languages to speak with everyone. [...] It is important, because it's a medium of communication in South Africa. I don't know if there is a lot, but in some places, like organizations that I was in, ne?, we were not allowed to speak our own African languages in presence of other races. Because it would be like talking behind their backs, so they feel offended. That when we are together, you must speak English, to accommodate everyone. But I do prefer English than Afrikaans. [...] So in public, you should use English, and in private matters, you can use whatever language you want.”

N., female, 26 years old

As a transcultural code, English is the language of politics and the media, which the youth seem to find normal and appropriate to the South African situation:

“English is good to be the language of politics. [...] As long as he's got my views, I don't mind the language that he's using. As long as I understand the language...”

L., male, 32 years old

“I don't have a problem with English or Afrikaans. But English, they call it the universal language. Here in South Africa, we have people who know Zulu and English only. In Natal, in KwaZulu, they know Zulu and English only. But when it comes to Johannesburg, if there is this guy from KwaZulu, and a guy from Venda who can speak Venda and English only, which language will they choose? English. That's why when you watch TV there is so much English. And you can see the South African soapsies. For instance, there are words which I don't know in Sotho. But they'll use them in English.”

G., male, 26 years old

In addition, English remains the language of modernity, and especially technology, which makes it inevitable for youth who are willing to be modern:

“And there are things in English, they're not there in Zulu, they're not there in Sotho, so you have to say it in English. For instance IT, you cannot say IT in Zulu, the IT programs. Me and my friends we're more into computers, so you have to use English for computer words.”

G., male, 26 years old

**English as a prestigious object**

Not only is English useful, it is also prestigious. It is associated with success, education, or knowledge. Along their school curriculum, White City youth have used it to learn and discuss topics in an elaborate way. For some, it was even forbidden to use African languages in the school environment. And English remains the key to professional success and of the improvement of one's situation:

“English, maybe it's the way, to people to know. But some of our people they don't understand English. They've never been to school to get educated, to know English. But most of the guys they know English, because on our street you have to know English, must know to read, know to write. And also it's important to know English because sometimes you want to get a job and you find out that, that English person doesn't talk Zulu. And then you must go down to explain, and to understand, and for him to understand you.”

N., male 28 years old
“The reason [for parents to send their children to multiracial schools] is, they want them to have better futures, you see... which is true, which is right. I'm not saying they shouldn't go to those schools. I'm just saying they should not loose their language... Because there's no vernacular their. There's no African languages in multiracial schools and whatwhat. But the reason is that they want better future for their children, and those schools they provide a better future.”

L., male, 25 years old

“My favorite language is English. I love English, very very much. Cause I grew up speaking English in a boarding school. They were strict there. Every time you are in school, you must speak English. If they find you speaking a vernacular language, you have to go to the principal. I love English very much.”

T., male, 22 years old

However, the knowledge of English is not sufficient. In fact, apart from the identity issues which were previously dealt with, there is one reason why the youth are expected and willing to master their family language, in its “deep” version: the ancestors.

**Knowing the ancestor's language**

Indeed, worshiping the ancestors is an important value to White City youth, and it remains the traditional rite which they practice most often, although they never lead the ceremony. And this requires to know the ancestor's language: since it is about talking to them, one must speak in their language, otherwise their could not be any comprehension from their side, and the callings and prayers would remain without effect. Telling the story of the ancestors must also be done in their language. In addition, addressing the ancestor's in the language of their enemies and conquerors could be insulting to them:

“It's important to us, it's our tradition. [...] I must speak Swati, cause our ancestors, they can't understand that language we grew up into. They were used to Swati. So that's why you must speak siSwati when you want to introduce some ceremony. They would not understand. And it would be insulting to them.”

T., male, 22 years old

“We are giving this thing, not a poem but... a call. You are giving a call, and you must give the ancestors' words, yabon? Everyone must say it. But me I know only a bit of it. It's like it's our old people who know deep deep of it... But us and our kids, we can say on top of it, but not deep. [...] So I must call you with the words which you can understand when I'm talking to you. [...] Your father telling you about your ancestors, he can't say it in English, because you can't understand it. And it wouldn't sound to the children.”

N., male 28 years old

“I do have ancestors, and some of these ancestors they never spoke English. [...] So why should I speak in English, whereas I'm still praying to the ancestors? [...] I do believe, and when I do these... ancestors' calling, you see... they're with me, I know that, though I can't see them... [...] But if I speak English to them, they won't understand! They don't know it... no, they won't understand. They were not English speaking people. When they died [...] English was apart from them. So how can I speak to them, knowing that they don't know English?”

L., male, 25 years old
“In terms of culture, I have to speak my language, because if I want to practice, or if I want to slaughter a goat for instance, I cannot use English. It would be in Shangane, because I've never seen practicing on my father's side, it's only on my mother's side.”

L., female, 21 years old

**The ancestors are also tolerant**

Although there is no questioning of the principle which sets that the ancestors must be addressed to in their own language, the youth are in practice not fully able to speak those old and rural languages. As a result, many allow themselves to speak in their own language: Iscamtho. Different justifications are advanced to assert that the ancestors do understand anyway, but these explanations have a common result: a number of youth feel free to use their lingo during the traditional rituals:

“There you have to speak the language that the ancestors speak. But even if I can speak tšotsitaal, the only thing that matters, is... in a part of you. [...] You can talk with your mouth, but it happens spiritually. [...] I won't say I speak proper Zulu, or if you're doing a ritual thing you have to speak proper Zulu. No... Because it's my language, even if I speak Zulu during the ceremony, I will be stuck somewhere, and automatically I'll use my language. But the soul understands better what I was saying than the words.”

D., male, 29 years old

“Ja... my ancestors, maybe they were gangsters. This was their language, because we inherited this language from them. They are the ones who came up with this language. So I don't think that there's a problem, because they were speaking it.”

E., female, 22 years old

Despite the importance of traditions in Soweto's society, and even more in rural Black communities, not all youth practice the ancestors rituals:

“I don't speak to ancestors. I pray to god. [...] In English, because I find it easier, and the words are more simpler. And they come fast to my mind. But sometimes I do pray in Zulu.”

N., female, 26 years old

“I used to go to church, but now business is calling me. But I still pray. [...] In English. I always pray in English. I love English. If I could have a friend that I could speak English everytime I'd be glad. [...] But I used to pray in siSwati.”

T., male, 22 years old

**Whites are now also interested in African languages**

Finally, African languages are not only, in the eyes of White City youth, a cultural and traditional item. It is also a source of pride as more White South Africans become interested in them. However, their involvement in learning them is not always seen as sufficient. And if their interest is welcome and can be a tool to breach cultural boundaries, it is also suspected to be motivated by other reasons than sharing their fellow South African citizens' culture:
“In the suburban schools, the multiracial ones, the White kids they're learning Zulu, Sotho... [...] It's good for the kids, because when their older, it will be good if they're around with Blacks. Because not every Black person can speak English.”

B., male, 25 years old

“The Whites, now, they want to learn our languages. Most of them. I don't know why. But some of them they want to learn Zulu or Sotho. Most of them they want to learn Zulu. [...] That's what I think: you just want to prove yourself that, yes, you're a South African.”

M., male, 29 years old

Thus, if English can represent a risk of regression for the African languages, a new interest from outside the Black communities might actually help developing the use of African languages. This illustrates the different approaches of individuals towards languages. And different approaches are necessary to White City youth, since they have to deal with opposite expectations and interests.

II. Conflict, shared interest, and balanced strategies

As their social environment requires them to integrate and respect their family language as well as English, White City youth are faced to an identity conflict. To make their way through the complex expectations of their world, the youth develop strategies which reflect their identities and values. At the end, the interest they have in mastering both their family language or other African languages and English is resolved by the same ways as the difficulties of linguistic multiplicity: integration of all languages and culture with openness and tolerance. In this perspective, the purpose of accommodation of everyone is served by English.

English to accommodate

In public situations, English is a transcultural language. This takes a bigger importance when one examines the issue of the State addressing the people. Public positions are expected to be neutral, and as such they are a good example of the necessity to reach to everyone. The informants were asked to reflect on a double-event which illustrates the conflict between English and African languages in the public sphere: in South Africa, after his election, the President is inaugurated in a very formal ceremony in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. When Thabo Mbeki was first elected President of the Republic in 1999, he made his inauguration speech\(^{72}\) in English. For his second inauguration in 2004, Mbeki spoke in his native language, Xhosa. This is absolutely allowed by the Constitution, since all official languages are equal. However, certain youth don't judge positively this switch, as it can be seen as a source of incomprehension and a mark of discard to those who don't understand Xhosa:

“I think it was ok if there was an interpreter. But if there wasn't an interpreter, then I don't think it was fair. Unless he was in a place where there's only Xhosa people.[...] He had to reach to everyone, so that everybody can understand. Because, everybody is interested in him, because

\(^{72}\) Which is a standard official speech, always the same, in which the President pledges to respect the Constitution.
he's the President. They want to hear what he has to say. So if he's only addressing people in his language... That was not fair. [...] Because he is the President for the whole country, for everyone.”

N., female, 26 years old

“It's good but to us who don't understand Xhosa, it's not good. He should not do it, because us we can't understand Xhosa. Everytime the President speaks a speech, he should put it in English. So others can understand”

T., male, 22 years old

In fact, English can be considered the most legitimate language to discuss politics and policies, as these are matters of interest for all South Africans, and English is the only language that can claim to reach to all communities. This is actually the reason why from the first part of the 20th century, liberation movements used English:

“They use English a lot. It's normal for me, so that everyone can understand. No one questions, unless of course he didn't understand the phrase. [...] You know in Parliament, you are allowed to use any language. But I would prefer if they use only English, so that you can understand what people are saying, or why people are fighting. [...] My way... I know that our grannys they don't know English much. But when talking to the public, I think you should use English. In parliament, they have their phones, so people they can translate. But at home, you cannot have that thing to translate. So a little bit of English would make people understand.”

G., male, 26 years old

English is taking away the youth's knowledge of themselves

For other youth on the contrary, the predominance of English in the South African society is a risk for their languages or culture. Especially, the growing number of English speaking Black families in the South African suburbs is condemned, as the children of these families won't be in phase with their origins. The fear of deculturation is real, as well as the feeling that the colonial prejudices are not over:

“There is this... umfana swa se goli... it's a boy from the suburbs. The boy from the suburbs can't speak like us. He speaks too much English, the proper one. If he speaks Zulu, if his name or her name is Mantwa... [he can't say it with a proper accent], because he's not used to being black. If you're a young boy or a young girl who grow with Whites, you will even want to see yourself being White. You even often forget that you are black. Unless maybe there is that racism, they're telling you that “You are black, man, don't forget it”. [...] You even want to speak as if you are White. [...] To me it's not a problem, but to the generation that is coming, it is a huge one. Because we were raised with this attitude towards English: if you know English, you are better. Along the way, our language, and customs, and heritage, you even forget them. And the young ones, they won't know our language. They won't know our roots.”

B., male, 25 years old

Coconuts, Model Cs, and other creatures

The criticism against the domination of English extends to the people who participate in this domination, by speaking English too much, or too well. Especially, imposing English in the township is taken as an offense, or an expression of superiority over the others. A perfect mastership of English can lead someone to be judged as loosing his/her Black identities. The names given to these imaginary decultured
monsters are, among others, *Coconut*, meaning brown outside and white inside, and *Model C*, from the former name of multiracial schools, or Model C schools. The following testimonies assert the strength of the condemnation of these people's linguistic behaviour:

“I call them *Model-Cs*, *Cheeseboys*... *pff*... I don't like those, because they've always lived here, they've been here for... Then they move to the suburbs, and all a of a sudden they've become English-speaking... Ho, come on! [...] When they come back here in the location, you must think of them as the new big thing, these suburban girls, you see? You must speak English when you are with English people [...] but when you arrive at *etakie*, why speak English now? [...] I don't like that. [...] They can speak Zulu, and the location language, but now they live in the suburbs... so they switched to English. They don't want to speak Zulu, or Xhosa, or Sotho... I'm not saying that they must speak *tsotsitaal*, they must switch back to their language! [...] Not English, I'm not a... an Englishman, or whatwhat. [Those who live here] they are worse. Those who go to English schools, multiracial schools, [...] everything they learn it's in English. But, you can go by bus from the location to the suburbs, or where that school is, and speak English or whatwhat. [...] Is that girl different, because maybe he's at the school at *Fugani*, and this other child she's in a multiracial school? They're playing them down because that one her schoolfees it's 100 rands, and that other one her schoolfees it's 1.000...”

L., male, 25 years old

“It's a lazy person... He can't say... he's lived in Soweto for twenty years, [...] he stays in the suburbs for five years, he can't say: “*Wha*... I don't know about Zulu.” This thing it's a culture, it's part of you, since you are a child. Even your mother; he was drinking from the mother. It's like a blood, and a heart that pumps you to go, and a mind that keeps you straight. Most people they know that. [...] They come from here. They attended school in Soweto. And they still think of that moment. [...] So I'll call this person a stupid guy and a stupid lady. You live thirty years, you speak one language, Zulu. And then you get a house, you go live somewhere [...] and after five years you're talking only English, strictly English. For me you are... *ha!*...”

N., male 28 years old

“There even are some who try to speak like White people. They even speak worst than White people. It's the pronunciation. And they try to speak through their noses. I think those ones they are being snobbish, in a way.”

N., female, 26 years old

“Because you are a Zulu, why must you speak English? Because we are only Blacks, we can understand Zulu. So why must I speak English? When I must speak English for instance, is when I'm with you, right now, but when I'm with these guys, I must speak Zulu.”

M., male, 29 years old

**Maintaining the children in their right heritage**

The main reason why most White City youth are suspicious about the use of English as main language by Black people is the risk to produce children who wouldn't master their heritage, and especially their language. Television is condemned, as a number of dramas or advert show children speaking some Zulu or Sotho, or even pronouncing their African names with an English accent. Speaking an African language with the right accent is necessary, as it is shameful for the parents to teach a “White accent” to their children. Thus, parents have a responsibility to transmit the languages to their children, and must keep sure that they speak them proficiently and in the right way:
“[These TV programs], it is directed to the black youth, so that they can change their lives and become like that... So that they can live a plastic life... Forget about the culture, forget about the language. [...] They're englishizing our languages... [...] The kids are those who are going to suffer, cause unfortunately, they believe what they see on television, they want to do what they do and to speak how they speak on television.[...] My daughter is the best example. One day she will go [wrong with her own name], and it's gonna be like I'm the one who's teaching that. She won't get influence from the family when it goes like that on the street... [...] Whenever they say something in an African language, they should do it right.”

L., male, 32 years old

“There are some in Soweto [who speak only English]... Not in White City, but especially the ones, in new houses. And those who go to multiracial schools [...] and in the suburbs. There even are those who pretend that they don't understand an African language, while they do. [...] I think they want attention. And then they forget who they are, and where they come from. They're denying their culture. [...] Like with me, ne? I have a child, she will start school next year. But I won't take her to a school where she will learn English as first language. I will take her to a school where she will learn her home language. I want to take her where she can learn to speak Zulu, and write it and read it. I won't take her to a school where she will have English as her first language. Then she's going to forget about her own language. These children, that's how they grew up, and now they speak English in the family, like when they are at home.”

N., female, 26 years old

“If you don't have a language, then you don't have a culture. As a person, individually, you won't have a culture. If I didn't take the time out to learn my Zulu, I won't know where my Zulu culture comes from. [...] Let alone practicing culture in terms of ancestors, slaughtering a goat once in a while. But language, it's an important part of it. Because some Black people don't practice culture at all.”

F., female, 26 years old

Speaking English doesn't make you soulless

Despite the general reprobation towards the use of English as first language in Black families, not all youth condemn it. Some see it as something which can be explained by typical trajectories, others just feel attracted by the model and find it advantageous. If it is still more positive to make sure to learn one's traditional language, there is no real reprobation:

“No, I won't blame them. You have some who left the country and who got used to speak English. I cannot blame those who went overseas, because maybe they never spoke Zulu at all. But those who were in South Africa, they should take the initiative.”

G., male, 26 years old

“It's a nice thing. Because, I love English, I'm serious! [...] But it's not ok to teach only English to your children. They have to learn more languages. It would be good, for me. Because I know only three languages. I want them to know more languages.”

T., male, 22 years old

F. is an example of someone who went to a multiracial school. Her experience however, and the fact that she is preferably an Iscamtho speaker – much more than most young women in White City – demonstrate that one can maintain his/her identity even when English is a big part of life. She sees her experience as a positive one, although it hasn't always been the case:
Then came 1994. Everybody was fit and whatever. So there were many problems in the previous school, so I got involved in a multiracial school. Not so multiracial, since you had many 20 or 25 White people. Majority of Black people. Not many Coloureds. Few Indians, fewer than the Whites. So I learned English, and was encouraged from home to speak it, so that I could learn a thing or two. Started speaking it so much that I spoke it to my peers back home. You know, my peers who were going to the local schools, and I was in the multiracial school. So we interacted during the week-end and so forth. And... people saw me as a coconut! You know, Black on the outside and White on the inside... And for me as a kid, influenced by our history... In our history, you know, Black people had that thing of wanting to be Whites. [...] Growing up, by so it was something negative. But now, it has helped me evolve as a person. It has helped me create links with people... other than my own kind of course. And that was the major challenge in learning English. Because you're learning English, automatically people conclude that you want to be White. [...] As a kid you know, you just shag it off. Although it stays and creates this negative mindset, where you don't wanna learn anymore. [But I proved them wrong] by learning Zulu... By learning how to speak Zulu, you know, by reading books that I found at home.”

F., female, 22 years old

In fact, mastering English is not only to open to others outside the Black community. It can also be a source of style and prestige, and participate in the improvement of one's Iscamtho. Also, some White City youth cherish it as a romantic language in intimity. To them, English gets it's highest prestige from its romantic dimension:

“English is not my mother tongue, and I'm not afraid to speak English to people. Because I know if I say something wrong, some will laugh at me, and some will correct me, which means I'll learn something. Because, you learn English everyday. You watch TV, there's a different word that you'll hear. It's like I did history at school. History it's English you know. Each and every paragraph, you will find a term, what we call in Soweto bomber stick words. And we would use them against the others who were doing maybe physics. For instance, I'll never say “I'm surprised”, I will say “I'm astonished”... Because I've seen it from the history book! [...] And when I speak to my girlfriend, I'm not gonna lie to you... when I speak to my girlfriend, it's 80% English. That's how we express our feelings. I can't express my feelings in Zulu or Pedi. You see if I say “I love you, I want to make love to you...” it sounds much romantic. And even if we do it, we communicate it in English.”

G., male, 26 years old

“With my girlfriend I speak in English. [...] I don't speak Iscamtho to her, it's not romantic. Me I think when you're with your girlfriend, I must speak English. It's romantic to me.”

T., male, 22 years old

**English won't prevent the transmission of culture**

Finally, despite the need to teach English to one's child (as it is a guarantee for the future), it appears that English should not prevent children from learning and practicing both their culture and language. The youth know what education principles and behaviours within the family should guarantee that their children will be able to deal with a modern world in English, but won't loose sight on “who they are”:

“I'll speak English and Sotho to them. In my home, there'll be my language, and maybe their
mother's language, and a little bit of English. [...] They'll do their homeworks in English, so we have to practice English, but not other languages. They'll learn languages from the streets, man, that's what I did... [...] I'll never stop to use my language if I go to the suburbs, ntwana... My language will always be used, even if I speak English a bit. [...] And even with my kids, even if I live in the suburbs, from grade 0 to Standard 5, my principle is, they'll attend school in Soweto. They will stay with my mother. They will get all the things that my mother gave to me. They will get a slap on their hands when they do something wrong. They will eat what we call mdogo, which is soft porridge, they will eat bread with peanut butter and jam... I believe my kids will stay with my mother... but I will take them during the week-ends!"

G., male, 26 years old

"You can talk to your children in English, but don't forget to tell them where they're coming from. Who they are. Where it starts. Because these old people were there for you. [...] Because it's like building, you can't build from top. So if it's like this I'm a Zulu, I have to talk in Zulu. Even if I've got money, I can get my children to talk English if I put them in a multiracial school. It's nice to get them a better education. But they must not forget where they come from. Where I come from, who I am, because of what."

M., male, 29 years old

White City youth deal with the different but equally important needs to master English as well as African languages. Their attitudes towards English translate some fears, but English is necessary. It is also well and largely spoken, and all the interviews necessary to this research were conducted in English, without encountering any important communication failure.

The complex social and linguistic environment of White City youth is managed through multilingualism and cultural openness. The same openness leads to an acceptance of English, although parents must be vigilant to teach their own languages to their children. The importance of knowing African languages has to do with tradition, and it should never be threatened by English. The beliefs in the ancestors constitute a field which is inaccessible to English, since a switch to English would make the rituals inoperant. However, the position of some youth who consider that Iscamtho can be used to address the ancestors questions the status awarded to the ancestor's languages. On the long term, maybe English could enter the field of the languages proper to the rituals, since, as D. puts it, "the soul understands better than the words".
Chapter 7:

The relations of White City youth to Afrikaans

During apartheid, Afrikaans was promoted to the status of the regime’s main language, ahead of the second official language English. Today, Afrikaans is spoken as a first language in South Africa by about 2.6 millions of Whites, and 3 millions of Coloureds. It is represented on television, especially as the main language of the SABC 2 channel, together with Sotho and Tswana. Close to Soweto and White City, there are important Coloured townships in Eldorado Park, Riverlea, or Noordgesig. Afrikaans is also common in the cities of Booyens and Roodepoort, which neighbour Soweto. Finally, a number of Coloured people can be seen in Kliptown, almost next to White City, since the place has many shops (mainly Indian-owned) which attract people from Eldorado Park and Eldorado Suburbs, a new suburb on the edge of Soweto which attracts Black and Coloured middle-class people.

Afrikaans is present in the linguistic environment of White City youth through Iscamtho. However, prejudices and attitudes of White City youth are not the same towards pieces of Afrikaans which might be found in the lingo, and Afrikaans as an autonomous language. The perceptions about it are ambiguous, with some youth being extremely resentful towards what is a symbol of apartheid oppression (I), and others having a neutral approach of the language, who are even willing sometimes to learn it, and who consider it equally with any other South African language (II). The first position is especially the one adopted by youth who experienced the most violent trajectories in the 1990’s, whereas the second is rather shown by youth who had a more peaceful teenage life. However, none really has a strictly cut position, as those who are interested in Afrikaans don’t forget what it used to be, and as those who are opposed to it also recognize that it shouldn’t be discriminated against in the present for actions committed in the past by some of its speakers.

I. Afrikaans carries the burden of History...

The apartheid taal

Among White City youth, some have very negative perceptions about Afrikaans, and this reflects in the way they behave towards this language. Afrikaans is still perceived, especially by those who endured a life of violence and crime during their teenage years, as the language of apartheid, and the vector of Afrikaner oppression towards Black people. It is never thought of as the native language of Coloured South Africans. One should bear in mind that the June 16, 1976 uprising of the Soweto school students started up on the ground that Afrikaans was to become the language of teaching for all scientific topics in
highschool. The school students revolted against the perspective to be forced to learn a second “foreign” language (after English) if they ever wanted to achieve a correct curriculum. The demonstration during which gunshots from a panicked police force would kill Hector Peterson and light up the uprising started from Morris Isaacson High School, in White City. The students walked kilometres around the township to join other schools and finally reach the meeting point near Phefeni Junior Secondary School in Orlando West. Today, a memorial stands in front of Morris Isaacson High School, to remind today’s youth of those dramatic events and why they occurred.

Although most of present youth haven't experienced the worst of apartheid – the oldest of the informants was 19 years old in 1994 – and rather grew up in Soweto at a time when the government couldn't claim to really have control over the township, they went through years of crime, violent political activism, and self-justice. Their memories have kept images of the White police touring the street on their hippos\(^\text{73}\) and shooting freely at bystanders.

For some of the informants, apartheid is also considered as the cause of the sufferance that themselves experienced in their teenage years: poverty of course, but especially its most brutal consequence, which is crime. Apartheid is tied to the Afrikaners, whom Sowetans most often call the “Boers”, a far less neutral term, and to their language Afrikaans. The resentment towards the “Boers” and their taal shows open wounds:

“To me it's apartheid taal... It's a language of the apartheid regime. I don't like it. [...] You know why I hate Afrikaners? Even the English they oppressed us, but I don't hate them. It's because they are the ones who were doing things, horrible things to us. The hatred is still there with me...”

B., male, 25 years old

However, not only those who were involved in violent activities have some reluctance towards Afrikaans. Thus, N. was a quiet and serious teenager. She now works for ABSA Bank, one of South Africa's biggest corporate, and has a number of White friends. She says:

“You know, Afrikaans it's perceived to be a language of apartheid and oppression. [...] So, most people they don't like Afrikaans. [...] I think it's important to speak all the languages. But Afrikaans, man, it comes with a lot of things. Many things happened a long time ago, that's why we no longer consider Afrikaans. I'd rather learn how to speak French\(^\text{74}\) than Afrikaans.”

N., female, 26 years old

It is hardly possible for present youth not to consider the oppression experienced by their parents and grand-parents. If none of them directly experienced the Pass Laws nor the forced removals, they were raised by their grandmothers, at least partly, and the oppression suffered by their elders means something to them. Especially, past political conflicts have remained in the form of identity conflicts: one is a South African, but also a Black South African, a Sowetan, or a youth. Many feel little in common with the Afrikaners, and little interest for their language. This translates first through the affirmation of identities

\(^{73}\) Hippo is the nickname given to the apartheid police's anti-riot trucks.

\(^{74}\) The author and interviewer is French.
which is sometimes an obstacle to the use or even the toleration of Afrikaans, and a tendency to use the present freedom to affirm their indifference, in the better case, or their disdain, in the worse case, towards Afrikaans and the Afrikaners.

Identity conflicts

Among others, a number of identity matters which count for White City youth place them in direct opposition to the Afrikaners and the Afrikaans language. Thus, the “Boers” are not considered as legitimately African by all youth:

“No ways [that the Boers can be Africans]!... Only their abandoned kids... Take this word, abandoned kids... Abandoned kids of the Boers? Only them they are South Africans, because they have their own blood. They are still our kids. [...] No matter the language, they are our kids.”

B., male, 25 years old

Thus, Afrikaners and Afrikaans, despite their names, are not acknowledged the quality of being African. And although Coloured people are considered as Africans, it doesn't seem to matter in anyway that Afrikaans is also their language. It remains the taal of the “Boers”, and Coloured people could as well speak any other language. Very few things seem to be able to bring some cultural identity between the informants to their fellow South African citizens when it comes to “Boers”:

“[What I share with them], it's pap 'n wors, that's all. Nothing else, because we hate each other, I tell you. We can pretend, that we go together or what... But even with me, to know that he's Afrikaner, man!”

B., male, 25 years old

In spite of a shared status of South African citizens, some youth consider the White Afrikaans speaking person not only as “the other” but as an enemy. Although his/her crimes are past, they imply a certain type of reactions towards the one who is suspected to have been among the perpetrators. Therefore, there is no duty to behave towards him/her with the same openness and interest as would be shown towards a representative of another South African culture or language. Whereas it is commonly accepted and promoted to accommodate your interlocutor by speaking a language that he/she understands, those informants would not show such behaviour towards Afrikaans within Soweto. Indeed, being a South African doesn't make an Afrikaner to be an African, and Soweto is, according to the former official denomination, an “African location”. There is a need to express a form of racial pride, which translates in particular in some disdainful behaviour towards Afrikaans.

75 The Coloureds, who are roughly pictured as half-Afrikaners and half-Blacks.
76 Maize meal porridge and Boerewors sausage. This is a cultural meal for Afrikaners as much as for township residents.
Symbolic revenges

Virtually every Afrikaans-speaking White person that these informants could meet in White City would have to be police staff. This is due to the fact that White South Africans in general don't come to the townships, partly because most have nothing to do there, and partly because most are afraid of the townships. Former gangsters are not naturally sympathetic towards the police, but they usually behave respectfully with them, at least to avoid any problem. This does not apply to a police staff who would address them in Afrikaans:

“He knows that I won't reply. I'll just look at him. Even an Afrikaner, if he speaks Afrikaans to me and he's a cop, I won't reply.”

B. Male, 25 years old

This disdainful reaction echoes an example given by L., about how he reacts if he switches on television on an Afrikaans program:

“If I watch SABC 2 and I hear “Ja, die nieuws...” pff!... Changed!”

L., male, 32 years old

In fact, Afrikaner policemen in Soweto would naturally address people in English. They are conscious that their taal would be a source of conflict. The attitude that some White City youth show relies first on past grievances which they perpetuate. Their fathers or uncles first, then themselves involved in criminal activities partly because misery forced them to find means of survival, partly because in their community it was judged positively to commit crimes in the White suburbs when the community could receive some of the benefits. Thus, by robbing and even killing Whites, and by giving a share of their ill-gotten gains to the military branch of the ANC, Umkhonto We Sizwe, many gangsters would almost appear to their neighbours as heroes of the struggle. And this perception went on for a number of years after the democratic transition. Today, what remains is the pride to humiliate, or at least to place in a position of inferiority, the “Boer” and his/her Afrikaans language: it is always appreciable to be for once the dominant in a linguistic exchange with an Afrikaner.

Yet, this behaviour also has to do with a contestation of the present superior social status that Afrikaans-speaking Whites have kept over them, despite the formal end of apartheid. This is obvious when one compares the conditions of living in White City, for instance, and in the White suburbs. But other aspects of everyday life provoke the perception of an unfair position benefiting the “White's languages”, and especially Afrikaans, over the African languages:

“Why when we have 11 official languages, I'll be writing only in English. Even in court, the statements are in English. The things that we buy, most are written in English and Afrikaans... It still shows you that the Afrikaners, they are still in power, even today. Even using English law. [...] It's their time now to learn, because, how long have they been here? Why it's only us, trying to learn their languages?”

B., male, 25 years old
These perceptions excuse and legitimate an attitude towards Afrikaans. In a way, this attitude is a form of resistance, a kind of continuation of the struggle for some disillusioned youth. This finally translates by a clear preference given to fellow Black people, as illustrated by two reactions to questions about Thabo Mbeki's 2004 inauguration speech:

“Afrikaner?... A Boer?... It's not my problem if you didn't understand!... It's not my problem... As long as my people have understood, then I'm ok. Because they are the people, who are suffering, more than...”

L., male, 32 years old

“It's no problem. Because he's a Boer, and they are the ones who started all that thing. Because they don't care if you understand or what. They just speak their language. Either you understand or not, that's not their problem. That is why they wanted us to learn Afrikaans. Their own language. They didn't care about our own languages.”

M., male, 29 years old

However, if some youth show open negative perceptions and behaviours towards Afrikaans, this is not the case for other White City youth. Actually, some even show a peculiar interest in that specific language and most are willing to actively include Afrikaans into the languages of all South Africans.

II. ... But Afrikaans should not be blamed for the crimes of the Afrikaners

Apart from the particular case of youth who strongly resent the violence which they experienced in their lives and associate it with Afrikaans, this language is rather neutrally considered, equal to any other. Even those who can be reluctant to use or learn the language also express opinions of consideration, and have convictions about what the Afrikaans language is entitled to:

“I was programmed to have an attitude towards Afrikaans... [...] But I don't have an attitude towards the Afrikaans language. It's a must; you should learn all the languages... It's just that I was programmed.”

L., male, 32 years old

Three main reasons justify toleration, or interest, towards Afrikaans for White City youth: the will to be actively part of the “new” South Africa, despite the doubts about it, and to integrate also the Afrikaners; the advantage that Afrikaans can confer in terms of developing a nice, stylish, and individualised Iscamtho; and finally, a double form of sympathy: towards the Afrikaners, with a conscience that their crimes also made them victims, and towards the language, praised as nice and rich, although difficult.

“Proudly South African” equals Afrikaans toleration

Although every youth in White city is in a way critical of the present situation in the democratic South Africa, as well as critical of the political actors of the Black majority rule, most are sensitive to

77 A speech given in Mbeki's native language Xhosa.
government and commercial campaigns calling for “proudly South African” behaviours. The idea that change in South Africa, and especially in Soweto, will result from the personal involvement of everyone, is largely promoted. The message of forgiveness promoted by the ANC's historical leaders in the 1990's seems to have reached the present youth, and there is some concrete consequence to the principle by which “South Africa belongs to all who live in it”: Afrikaners should be integrated in the South African community. Thus, the contestation of Afrikaans as being African is also not an evident position for all youth:

“It is also an African language. But I'm not exposed, maybe to Afrikaners, so that it's so easy to learn the language.”

D., male, 28 years old

“You should be opened to everything. All that South Africa represents. Because we are a diverse country, with nine beautiful indigenous languages. You could say ten, with Afrikaans. I guess Afrikaans is coming to the indigenous structure...”

F., female, 22 years old

White City youth are certainly not the only ones in South Africa to feel committed to the success of their democratic society. Indeed, even young Afrikaners are considered to be active in the process. They should then be equally treated, since they also commit in the ideal of “South Africa for all”. The position is expressed by one of the youth who were the most virulent against the “Boers” and their language:

“What I like, young Afrikaners, they use Afrikaans, but they are changing. In fact, they've never been rotten... Those are the ones who are striving hard to make democracy work. And hence I'm saying, we should learn Afrikaans, so that we can communicate half-way... So that when I'm in their Afrikaans community, definitely I'll say: “Ja, ek ken Afrikaans. Wat sê jy? Praai... ek luister, ek kan Afrikaans praei...”. To them it will be: “ha, at least, a kaffir can know Afrikaans...”

L., male, 32 years old

Afrikaans as a matrix for Iscamtho

Several youth showed a great interest in Afrikaans, not for itself, but as part of the kasie lingo. Since the 1950's and the forced removals of people from Sophiatown to Soweto – especially to Rockville, next to White City – Afrikaans has been a basis for Soweto's lingos. In the Western areas, transforming Afrikaans into Tsotsitaal can be analysed as taking over the oppression language to turn it into an object which belongs to the speakers, and which even provide the advantage of secrecy to fight the oppressor. Iscamtho does not respond to the same need of overcoming colonial domination, but rather to a need to include the diversity of Soweto into one youth identity and to epitomize this youth openness ideology. Tsotsitaal transmitted many of its features to modern Iscamtho, and especially the importance it accorded to “style”:

“Tsotsitaal is the language of our grandfathers. You can even hear it's Afrikaans. But not like Afrikaans from the Boers. It's Afrikaans, it's... it has flair in it. With hands... it's like they're dancing.”

B, male, 25 years old
The influence of Afrikaans over Iscamtho is still obvious, and it makes die taal more popular, even among youth who never had the opportunity to learn it in a formal setting. The taste for Iscamtho creates a curiosity and an excitement towards Afrikaans words, which goes further than a formal consideration, or even a formal learning, as it could be offered at school:

“I try, because in tsotsitaal, most of the words they're going with Afrikaans. [...] Afrikaans you must know it if you want to know tsotsitaal. [...] If that person wants to know tsotsitaal... she moet ken Afrikaans... she moet praa Ai Afrikaans... You know Afrikaans, it's a... it's a boost of tsotsitaal. Us we try to increase it, to put our difference... like our language. But the Afrikaans… it starts with tsotsitaal. Tsotsitaal comes from Afrikaans.”

N., male 28 years old

“There are words in Afrikaans, when you learn it at school, words which you never heard before. But when you speak tsotsitaal, you can hear, that, ja, this is an Afrikaner wort... Like, my meisiekind... it sounds like someone is insulting you, but you know what it means? My mother's child, my brother from another mother. So mostly in Soweto, you hear my meisiekind when people are fighting. I never heard about my meisiekind in school.”

G., male, 26 years old

There can even exist a form of competition to be the one coming to others with news Afrikaans words. Thus, one can demonstrate his/her talent in Iscamtho by introducing an Afrikaans feature that the others didn’t know, although success is more uncertain with an Afrikaans feature than with an item from another language. But Iscamtho is actually so much impregnated of Afrikaans, and so intertwined in the lingua franca Soweto Zulu, that an untrained hear may just hear Zulu. Actually, although a word's root can be Afrikaans, it sometimes has been considered as Zulu for a long time:

“Yes, we [use words], but we're not aware. Like here, if you go to the street, you say: “nya estrateni”, and straat, it's an Afrikaans name. So we do use it.”

N., female, 26 years old

Sympathy for the devil

Even among the youth who resent their experience through poverty and violence, there can be an understanding of the “Boers”. There is a conscience that the gap between Blacks and Whites is not everywhere the same, and that each side was victim of a system, even if this system was first initiated by the Whites. Although the “Boers” as a group remain strangers, empathy usually exists towards individuals, for whom exists, if not presumption of innocence, a real presumption that they were victims too:

“A White person who can speak Zulu, even a professor or what, never learned it from school. His grandfather or his father used to own a farm. He used to live with Blacks. Maybe schools were far. If he must play, he must play with Black kids. That's why he knows the language, from since he was a kid, not because he learned it. [...] Even those who learnt the language with Black kids, they had the racism: they had it on them too. The one that he would call as a friend, for him again it's a slave. He will tease him and beat him, doesn't matter if it's his friend, or her friend. That thing, it's in him, that the Black is a slave. It's in him, it won't change. And sometimes he would be beaten up by his father: “why are you so nice to Blacks?”

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But the father himself knows that his son is playing with those kids. If he doesn't play with them he's going to get bored. And maybe he's going to be beaten for that. The Whites, during the apartheid times, they used to be aggressive to their kids. That's why the White kids, they don't just hate us because they want to hate us. They were made to hate us: “I was beaten because I spoke of your name, that's why I hate you”. That's why some of them they went to become police, some of them they became soldiers... But I will tell you about the Afrikaners: most of the Afrikaners, they're not that well educated.”

B., male, 25 years old

The dramatic views expressed by B. are not shared by everyone, but they find a resonance within the neutral views that others express about the Afrikaners:

“I don't have a reason why I should hate White people, whether it's Boer or whether it's English. They've never made me feel... they've never made me hate them. And if ever it's gonna be one, then I'll hate that particular person.”

G., male, 26 years old

Emotional experiences don't wash away a reasonable understanding of Afrikaner people. For some, they even provoke more interest:

“Ho, I like Afrikaans. I don't know why. And I do talk Afrikaans. You learn it in prison, from the Coloured guys, and the guards who are Boers, and the Boers who are in prison. [...] They're talking Afrikaans, but they like to adopt like, those Coloured boys. So they speak Afrikaans, but not like, that Afrikaans.”

L., male 25 years old

“To me, Afrikaans is a great language. I'm a Coloured, but I don't know Afrikaans. But sometimes... Yes, I want to know Afrikaans. [...] Because I'm a Coloured, and I want to know my father's language. Not his mother's language, his father's language. [...] That's my wish.”

L., female, 22 years old

Empathy for individuals who might as well have experienced sufferance from the racist system, or who might have shared the same experiences in crime and prison, is a powerful incitation to more interest to these people’s language. In the case of L.’s grandfather, it is the traditional ethnic belonging rule – one belongs to his/her father’s lineage – which is the motor of her will to know Afrikaans.

There is another obstacle to a more frequent proficiency in Afrikaans among White City: its level of difficulty, considered as high by most informants. They are used to learning lots of languages, but this implies to be immersed in a multilingual environment, and theirs doesn’t formally contain Afrikaans, but only pieces of it. However, there are means of improving one's knowledge of Afrikaans.

Difficulties and strategies with learning Afrikaans

Even for those who were in multiracial schools and who had a compulsory teaching in Afrikaans, there is no guarantee of success in really learning it:

“I did Afrikaans as a subject at school... I passed it. But I don't know how!! I can read Afrikaans, don't get me wrong. But ask me then, what did I read, and I will have a problem. But
I can read it. [...] My first language was English, and the second was Afrikaans. You know you have to do a first and a second language. So I did Afrikaans because I had to, not because I wanted to. So having done Afrikaans and English, I grew up... I had some interest, in doing my own languages, isZulu for instance. But whenever I was at home, they would tell me that since I had not done isiZulu before, I'd fail it. I wanted to keep it until matric. But consulting with people, they tell you: “you've never done it, you'll fail it”. And so I ended up sticking with my Afrikaans, because although I did not speak it, I’ve always done it!”

F., female, 22 years old

When there already exists a prejudice towards Afrikaans – and this prejudice exists, more or less strongly, for every youth in White City – the compulsory teaching of the language doesn’t lead to real efforts to learn it. Yet some are voluntarily willing to learn more Afrikaans. In order to improve their comprehension or proficiency, some among White City youth take advantage of a famous television drama, or soapy as they're called in South Africa: 7de Laan, which takes place in Melville, a cosy suburbs of western Johannesburg where one can enjoy the night in a multitude of restaurants and bars. It is interesting to see that this soapy gets popular among a population which is certainly not its first aim. And the reason for this success is practical: those who are interested in learning Afrikaans have an entertaining program in Afrikaans with English subtitles every evening. The interest for the language can also be tied to other aspects of the White South African culture. Examples of a change of attitude of the younger generations compared to the previous ones can sometimes breach highly symbolic prejudices:

“Talking about the new South Africa, ntwana, you know that there are people here in Soweto who watch 7de Laan. Like Stombile my friend, she watches 7de Laan, and she likes it a lot. [...] It goes with individuals. You see at first, rugby was an Afrikaner sport. Did you see rugby 2007? This is my first time supporting rugby. First time supporting AmaBoko... but before it was “here come die Bokke”, which is an Afrikaans word…”

G., male, 26 years old

However, we should keep in sight that the “usual” way of learning languages remains the favoured one:

“If maybe I can have a friend to teach me, it would be easy.”

D., male, 28 years old

“Someone was teaching me, but he's gone. So I have no one to teach me Afrikaans.”

L., female, 22 years old

The perceptions of White City youth towards Afrikaans are complex. Afrikaans is associated to the Afrikaners only, despite there are more Coloured speakers. But since it was the regime's language and the regime was Afrikaner, Afrikaans is associated with the “Boers” and their oppression. For some, although the rights of the language and its speakers should be respected, there is a huge obstacle due to the emotional
weight that Afrikaans conveys. “It comes with a lot of things”, and thus, the strict use of Afrikaans is not positively judged. Yet, there is a real interest for this language, and a number of youth make efforts to improve their understanding and their proficiency, especially to improve their creative abilities in Iscamtho. And more important, a dichotomy is finally made between the Afrikaner nationalist regime and its crimes on the one hand, and the Afrikaner individual and its language on the other hand. However, there is hardly any consideration to the Coloured Afrikaans-speakers. Especially among those who are resentful towards the Afrikaners, the power of tsotsitaal as a culture of the place, a heritage, and as an instrument of prestige is enough to still be willing to learn more words or features from Afrikaans.
Part 3: The present and future functions and status of Iscamtho

Chapter 8:

The whys and hows of Iscamtho use:

Functions, Values, and Status of the lingo

It was mentioned earlier that the social values tied to Iscamtho by Ntshangase in the 1990's have experienced a strong evolution. This chapter aims at revealing functions and values tied to the use of Iscamtho, by White City youth, and finally the social status that these functions and values give to the lingo. Iscamtho will be analysed as the marker of the social values for which the youth strive, as well as a marker of the values in which they grew up and were raised, which themselves are a product of the environment of the township.

On the one hand, the function of Iscamtho as a marker of identity will be developed (I), both as a product of local, individual and group identities and as the means to convey them: it is a typically Sowetan feature which is acknowledged and promoted as such outside Soweto; it is also a marker of geographic origin within Soweto, and of ethnic, linguistic, or social origin of individual speakers; and also, attitudes and behaviours towards Iscamtho reveal gender identities. Iscamtho finally represents a tool deliberately shaped to respect and transcend the diversity and the multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic, and generational identities in the township. On the other hand, Iscamtho must be understood as a conscious attitude (II), a permanent and active process of language transformation and creation, with the function of expressing a more or less conscient youth ideology, meaning the values which the youth see and wish to reflect in Iscamtho. This process and attitude are the product of positive and negative judgements applied on Iscamtho by its speakers and non-speakers. The lingo is not considered equally proper in the perspectives of the youth and of people such as elderly people and outsiders to Soweto. The deliberate strategies of the speakers to deal with the perceptions they provoke while speaking Iscamtho, result in a number of behaviours in the relations to other individuals, which are meant to comply with or oppose those perceptions, and to strengthen or soften the expression the youth's values. Especially, this reveals in their attitudes towards the elders, but also in formal interactions with the police, in shops and post-offices, or again in the relations to sacred believes, exemplified by churches or by the ancestors’ rituals.
I. Iscamtho as a product and a medium of identity

Iscamtho started with the creation of Shalambombo by Nongoloza and *AmaLaita* (Ntshangase 1993, 1995), but it is also the result of the mixing of numerous languages and cultures in one place. Moreover, it developed within precarious social and economic conditions, which tended to enhance a feeling of identity among all the people who were living in Soweto. Iscamtho, although it originates in crime and violence, bears in itself an embodiment of the ideologies of togetherness and non-discrimination promoted during and after the struggle against apartheid, and necessary until today in a context of extreme precarity.

A product of Soweto

The youth who grew up speaking Iscamtho from an early age, if not a very early age, consider natural to mix and transform their language. Most of them have had several languages at home, and all of them were in contact with different languages from their friends, or at school. Diversity is strongly perceived and valued by the youth, but it also requires to be overcome and unified:

“My first language?... *Eish,* I'm confused... I would say the same scamthotaal, or tsotsitaal, or *kasie* lingo. [...] I grew up in a different society than the rest of the world. There are many languages in [...] a little area. Because here you can find Sothos, Zulus, Pedis, Vendas... you know, different people. So you try to find the shortcuts to understand each other, so that we can engage in a conversation together and follow everything. So, the language grows... [...] It's so easy to follow you know... and to accommodate each other. Even if you can bring someone from the rural areas, within a short period of time, he'll find it easy to catch up with language.

D., male, 28 years old

“Iscamtho, it's a language that comes from... when we combine the languages, you know, to make maybe a simple one.”

B., male, 25 years old

“It's like a nature to them, to just talk any language, *yabon*? You can mix like Zulu and English... Sometimes you go in English, but you're not an English? Like me I can speak Zulu, but I'm not a Zulu, I'm a Bhaca, so something happens like that. He takes something and takes it on that side... [...] In Soweto, we are using our language; but there are many languages. That's why we are using our *tsotsitaal,* it's like a complete language.”

F, male, 28 years old

“With us the black people, especially in the townships, we assume that, we are from different cultures, so when we meet along together, we speak different languages. And when I speak *tsotsitaal,* I'll be able to speak each and every languages from... [...] *Tsotsitaal* is our brand, as Sowetans. Wherever we go, we have to speak it. [...] If I you go to Sebokeng⁷⁹, they have their own *tsotsitaal,* if you go to Alexandra, they have their own *tsotsitaal,* but the best *tsotsitaal* that you can get, you can get it in Soweto.”

L., male, 32 years old

Iscamtho did not only occur because people were mixed. Respecting each other's culture is a

⁷⁹ South of Gauteng
fundamental value of the Sowetan community. If people are to be equal, it is a compromise to mix all languages. Rather than learning everyone's language, a laborious task which is actually also achieved on long term, Iscamtho appears to be “easy” or “simple”. And once the code exists, it is perceived as natural by the young children. When they grow up, Iscamtho becomes part of them. Still, the need to accommodate each other remains in all spoken interactions: thus, each interlocutor makes a step towards the other to make his/her speech understandable, and Iscamtho represents a middle way, where everyone can find a piece of his/her own language.

**A nature to those who grew up in it**

Most White City youth, although more specifically males learned Iscamtho before they can remember it. Everyday of their lives, they have been using it, without much regard to negative reactions which the lingo might result in. This is true even for those who learned it at an older age, between six and ten, when they were allowed to go and play on the street more often with their friends. Even in this case, when Iscamtho became an everyday language, it is often to be considered as a first language, or at least a main language:

> “I speak it, I guess, involuntarily. I don't think about it when I speak it. But when I'm with my peers, it just happens like that. [...] I can't really put up a date [and say that's when I learned it]. Because it was something unconscious. It was like adapting to you're environment. When you grow up, you adapt. At that age you don't think of tsotsi things, it's just something that you do. But I would say, I was going on the street from as young as eight years old.”
>
> F., female, 22 years old

> “Tsotsitaal is like my language. I grew up speaking tsotsitaal. Our parents, our fathers, they were using mostly tsotsitaal. Some of them. So when I'm in KwaZulu-Natal, I will just speak the language that I speak. I will not use tsotsitaal as if I need something, no... I'm just talking my language.”
>
> M., male, 29 years old

> “I was raised in front of Ringas, Ringas has always been in my life, you see... So I can't do as if there's no more Ringas. I'll always talk Ringas. I love Ringas. [...] But me, I speak it more than the others, you see, because me I was in prison you see, for long time.”
>
> L., male, 25 years old

In addition to the intimate ties that White City youth might have with Iscamtho, the variety became a prestigious one through the 1990's. The popularity of Soweto was already strong, but the coming of kwaiito as the youth's cultural and identity movement made the Soweto tsotsitaal known and appreciated in the entire country.

**Iscamtho as a source of prestige over the other South Africans**

Thus Iscamtho speakers are identifiable by all Black South Africans. They will be appreciated for their Sowetan origin, since Soweto is perceived as a myth and a place of newness and modern trends. Iscamtho is specific enough to leave no doubt about the fact that its speaker has to be a Sowetan:
“When the Sowetans speak, everyone wants to listen. Wherever you go, people want to listen... There is that humour in the language. But it's like that: in South Africa, when Sowetans speak, everyone wants to listen.”

B., male, 25 years old

Being a speaker of Iscamtho makes a White City youth to become a source of interest if he/she happens to leave Soweto:

“[Every year during school holidays] I used to go to Pretoria. There, they will love how I speak Sowetan. And I will have more friends, because of how I speak. And they will always greet me, because of how I greet them too. Maybe I'm in Pretoria and there they say: “Heita my Bra” so I will say “Moja gunjani?” [...] So they have their own tsotsitaal there, but it goes more with Tswana. So mine, it's more fascinating, more interesting to them. So they will love to hear me talk. They will ask me questions. They love to hear my language, and to understand my language. [...] And I had a different girlfriend, every time I go. Because of how I speak. I think she would love me because of my language. Not because of who I am, but because of how I speak to her.”

G., male, 26 years old

“I used to go to my father's brother in Mpumalanga. In Mpumanlanga, they speak siSwati. But when I'm there, they speak with me in tsotsitaal. “How do you know that Sowetan thing? - No, we learn them on TV!” So they can't wait when I'm back, because I help them to know tsotsitaal really. They love it, because it's the language that comes from Soweto. When you come from Soweto, that side they love you very much. Even the chicks love you.”

T., male, 22 years old

Iscamtho as part of the mythology of Soweto

The prestige of Iscamtho is strong on outsiders. However, it also has power on insiders. Occasional speakers value it for its Sowetan character and it is even a motivation to some of the most assiduous speakers to speak this language for it is part of the history of Soweto:

“It's a thing that we grew up with. It's in the mind. [...] I understand it, because, you know it's a Sowetan thing! [...] I like it. I think it's a fine language. It defines where you come from. [...] It's a slang, you know. Everywhere you go there is a slang, even overseas. So tsotsitaal, I take it as our Sowetan slang.”

N., female, 26 years old

“Tsotsitaal comes a long way... It has its past; its past was painful... And people who were speaking this taal, they are heroes, man... And other countries, they are interested in these people, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu...”

E., female, 18 years old

“Tsotsitaal, it represents my people, my background, my culture. You know, a culture that was created sixty years ago, during the 50's. In Sophiatown... you know, it really... started up the whole language revolution. Sophiatown where you had a mixture of people residing in the same location: Black, White, Indian, Coloured people. So it represents... street culture, and that's why it's so indigenous to Johannesburg, you know, and areas surrounding Jo’burg. Because Jo’burg, in its own, is a melting pot. [...] It represents youth, and as a youth you wanna be cool. So it represents being cool, as well. To me. But I'm sure that a person coming from the outside and

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80 How is it my brother?
81 Fine, how are you?
who doesn't know tsotsitaal would find it a bit uncool.”

F., female, 22 years old

These comments certainly show admiration for what Iscamtho represents, although there is a historical imprecision in them. In fact, Mandela and Sisulu, like the people of Sophiatown, would have been Tsotsitaal speakers. But Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, as mentioned in chapter 3, have in common an attitude towards languages, speech and words. Their essence is identical, and the main difference is that it would seem improbable to use Iscamtho on an Afrikaans matrix. It is the language-transforming attitude which the youth regard has a historical heritage, as well as the formal Tsotsitaal items which are still contained in Iscamtho. But this attitude and the principles of Tsotsitaal have transmitted also to other townships in South Africa and Gauteng. Identities as well as linguistic skills are in competition when people from different places meet:

“I like to be a Sowetan, because Soweto is the most famous place in South Africa, and it has the most history. And when you go to other places and you tell people that you're from Soweto, they become interested, and want to know a lot of things. […] Even though there is some competition between Soweto and Alexandra. There's also that gangsters' thing... Because I think even in Alex, they do also speak tsotsitaal. So they say those from Soweto they think they're superior. There's a lot of competition.”

N., female, 28 years old

The consideration for Iscamtho as a marker of local identity is such as some youth are very critical of one of the most powerful media of promotion of tsotsitaal, the movie Tsotsi\(^2\). The grievances lie in the fact that the movie depicts Soweto, and was shot in Soweto and Johannesburg, but it doesn't respect nor the local ways neither the local language:

"Tsotsi... I would say it's nicer, more challenging to watch for someone who was not born in Soweto. For kids or guys from the rural areas. But the language, for a tsotsi person, it sucks. The way they made the movie... They made it in Kliptown, but the way they are behaving, it's like they are from Alexandra. It's not a person from Soweto... And the language... […] The language that they took, it's the lead character's language. He drove the movie to go down. The way he speaks... He speaks as if he's from... Pretoria. But he's from Kliptown.”

B., male, 25 years old

In fact, different concordant sources consider the language of the lead character to be tsotsitaal from Mafikeng, in the North West province, which would explain why Tsotsi's language is actually a mix of Tswana and Afrikaans more than anything else.

A marker of geographic origins and identity within Soweto

Iscamtho does not only allow Soweto outsiders to recognize insiders. Within the community of Iscamtho speakers, there is a lot of diversity. It is very rarely an obstacle to comprehension, considering the level of individual multilingualism and the dominance of proper Iscamtho lexicon within different grammars.

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\(^2\) Directed by Gavin Hood, produced by Peter Fudakowski and Paul Raleigh, released in 2005
Actually, differences are rather a means to identify people with their place of residence. Thus, experienced speakers can guess where a person comes from within Soweto on the ground of the language:

“It's diverse. It's so diverse that you have Sesotho Iscamtho, if you go more West of Soweto. There's Setswana type of Iscamtho, isiZulu type of Iscamtho. I'm sure that if you go to Chiavelo, people who can speak Shangane have their own type. So, it's much more diverse than Tsotsitaal. It is more according to the location where you are. Although with my background of Tswana, I can interact with people who speak Sescamtho in Setswana. Because I can speak parts of it, parts of the language. But then with other things, I would not be able to hear them.”

F., female, 22 years old

“We don't all speak a similar one, but we have those street words of tsotsitaal, so you can say with these words, I know this guy went from here. [...] Because most of the times, they use the words from where they stay. For instance if I stay in Zola, I will say “Hola 78”, or “Kau84”. And with these words I'll say: “Ok, this guy is from Zola, this one is from Dube.” And I'll know where he comes from. [...] It happens sometimes that this guy likes the style from Zola or Phiri, so he lives in Rockville, but when he comes he'll say “Hey, Kau, Hola 7!” And he'll go like he's staying in Zola. No, no, the fool, he's staying around... [...] What happens most of the time, if this guy says he's from Zola, you ask: “where do you stay? What street do you stay?” You know I'm gonna say some words and some place that I know. And then he will say: “ha, I'm living...” and then I will know [he's not from Zola], yabon?”

F. male, 28 years old

The way to speak can even becomes an exclusion factor, when a local is not able to speak the local way. Thus, Iscamtho represents an essential criteria for integration into the social identity of White City youth, since it is the marker of social belonging to a disadvantaged Black township community and culture:

“Even here in Soweto, nowadays we're having snobs... [...] Their parents never took them to school here in the township. They took them to the suburbs. When they say “I'm going to my friends”, they'll tell you that they're going to Melville. He's not used to playing with you, and at the adolescence stage, it becomes a problem. [...] When he comes to us, he won't speak the same language that we speak, but he will be quite familiar to it, because he grew up there. But when he comes to us, we'll call him names: cheeseboy, mama's baby... You never did this, you never stole fruits from that tree, do you know the witching mother that side?... You know, such things. When he's with us, we want only money from him, that's what we see. If he doesn't have it... we beat him. If even let's say, the bus doesn't drop him at his place, it drops him from the bus stop; he's in trouble. Because when he comes, we'll mug him, tease him, such things, forgetting that he's our own black brother.”

B., male, 25 years old

**Iscamtho and Gender division**

Identity is also gender identity. Because of the criminal history of Iscamtho, women who speak it would in the past systematically be considered themselves as criminal, prostitutes, or any kind of socially non-acceptable characters (Ntshangase 1993 1995, 2002). Today, few still hold this line, but it doesn't mean that males and females are equal towards the language. Indeed, perceptions from the two groups are not the same among Iscamtho speakers:

83 A way to greet. Originally, this comes from the 28 gang, known as a gang of murderers, and it is actually a threat of death contained in the mention of the number “7”, which symbolizes blood and death for the gang.

84 Man, brother, friend.
“Yes, but their language, it's sophisticated. Because their topics you know... it's about men, cars, movies... With guys it's about how to make money, how to survive, how to impress that girl, you know?”

D., male, 28 years old

“It is very, very different [when you're a girl]. I know girls my age who don't speak tsotsitaal. So because I chill more with guys, their influence to me has been... You know, language, culture, how you carry yourself. But it is still difficult. Because people become sceptical of you as a girl. I chill with guys, I speak tsotsitaal... It's a bit shady for some people. But I guess I've always been doing that. So I don't need to impress people to be myself. I just am myself. But with older people, I'm a different person.”

F., female, 22 years old

“Some of them speak it the same as the boys, but they don't always use it you see, because they are girls. [...] That's how it is here in the location. Girls they can speak tsotsitaal, but they don't use it like... tsotsitaal all the way, yabon? [...] Maybe it's because they are girls, maybe it's because they think they will attract more trouble. Because you see the way it's mentionned, tsotsi-taal... But on the side of girls I can't tell you, because I don't know about girls. They do speak it, but not most of the time. [...] You see, girls who are always talking tsotsitaal are the lesbians.[...] So those who are not lesbians, maybe for them talking tsotsitaal, they think that they'll be judged like boys, or what.”

L., male, 25 years old

Indeed, Iscamtho is an identity marker for the lesbian women of White City. Although the issue was not deeply investigated, there seems to be an identity issue at stake for lesbians in the use of Iscamtho, a historically male language. Generally, speaking in Iscamtho to a girl remains something normal, but it might require some adjustment, since some girls are not proficient speakers:

“When you're speaking to a girl, tsotsitaal will be there. But only the tone changes. It's a tsotsitaal, but a simpler one, one that she can understand.”

L., male, 32 years old

“I try to accommodate. Not to say that I don't use tsotsitaal with girls of my age, I do. But I mix it up with some nice English terms here and there. To suit the environment and to suit them.”

F., female, 22 years old

Negative opinions about female Iscamtho-speakers have not completely disappeared, even among young people. Prejudices about the “bad life” of Iscamtho-speaking women are still entertained, although by a minority:

“It's not good with the girls to speak tsotsitaal. Because they can be pressurised to carry some gun, you know, like we did years ago. [...] I like it, cause it's a kasie taal. But not a girl, a boy. I don't like a girl who speaks tsotsitaal. I don't like it. Because I’m not that person who likes to see a girl let his [sic] life go miserable.”

T., male 22 years old

Only one female informant, however, felt that Iscamtho was too improper to be used. Here are
L.'s answers when she was interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak tsotsitaal?</td>
<td>“Ho, I don't know tsotsitaal!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You never learnt it?</td>
<td>“huhu (no)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You didn't want to?</td>
<td>“huhu”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>“It's... I mean as a lady, speaking a tsotsitaal! Ho, please... It's... should I say... yes, it won't be proper! [...] I don't like it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L.'s position is exceptional, and her radical view is actually to be tempered, since although she doesn’t admit it, she fully understands Iscamtho when her brother and cousin speak together. The improper status of Iscamtho for women remains a factor that counts for others, and Iscamtho, despite the growing number of female first-speakers, remains associated to masculinity:

“I don't know tsotsitaal much. It's mostly guys here, who can speak tsotsitaal. I don't know why. Because guys they hang around every time... But with girls, it's only a few of them. But I have never come across with girls, like my friends, who speak tsotsitaal. Girls, they only speak Sowetan Zulu.”

N., female, 26 years old

Iscamtho also induces a linguistic consequence towards gender: maybe because it was a male-only language, Iscamtho tends to use identical forms for males and females. An example of this is the word mfethu and its plural bafethu: the source of the word is Zulu mfowethu, meaning “my brother”. However in Iscamtho, mfethu can be used to address males as well as females, and it is common that Iscamtho-speaking girl address each other with this term. On the contrary, the Zulu word dadowethu, meaning my sister, is never heard. At best in Soweto Zulu, one will use the more familiar Standard Zulu word sisi when calling a female “my sister”.

II. Iscamtho as a deliberate attitude

After examining what identities are expressed through the use of Iscamtho, it is necessary to analyse the lingo as an attitude, a deliberate choice of linguistic and social behaviour which results in the shaping of the language. This attitude also leads to an evolution in the social perceptions and behaviours towards people or settings for which Iscamtho was before unanimously considered improper. But as the Iscamtho attitude is affirmed by the speakers, reactions and attitudes of the non-speakers evolve.

Iscamtho is a corpus of terms and features of language-mix and language-switch which rely on another language as a vector. Its use is unconscious in a certain measure, as demonstrated previously. However, if one considers at the same time the softness of Iscamtho, illustrated by its many versions depending on the matrix language, there is also an open possibility for creativity and deliberate transformation within the language. Social constraints and expectations by the receivers of a speech represent the limits to this creativity, but they can be overcome.
The motivations of the youth to use and develop Iscamtho

Iscamtho, as a soft code, presents a number of qualities regarding what the youth consider to be their “style”, or a positive and prestigious attitude which undoubtedly makes them Soweto and White City youth. This includes the language, but also a set of elements such as the dress code, the way to walk or move, and the way to “speak”. Speech is not only about language, it is conveyed by gesture or expressions of the face which can help grabbing the sense of what is being spoken:

“You know, the other advantage, is that even hands speak. And so sometimes, you can describe everything as this common word, daai ding. And daai ding it's an Afrikaans word. So if I go to someone, and say [...] daai ding; so if maybe I [...] say: “heita, ncanda daai ding”85, yabon?, he will understand what I'm talking about. The eye-contact, hands position, the expression. So the language, it also goes with your body... tsotsitaal it's a body language.”

D., male, 28 years old

Iscamtho represents all the values that the youth cherish, and this is a reason to strive and work for the improvement of one's skills in Iscamtho. One of these values is independence and self-affirmation, which are part of city-slickness and individual freedom:

“It's positive. Only the elders could say that I've no respect. It's positive. But to them, I'm lying, it's negative... To me it's positive. Because a Sowetan kid doesn't care for what an older person thinks of him. [...] Speak as you want to speak: just be free. Because freedom starts within yourself. When you say: “I'm free” whereas in your own ways you don't appreciate yourself, you're not free.”

B., male, 25 years old

“[Those who don't speak Iscamtho], they don't street-smart... You know, they could have some problems getting around. The more you learn to speak in different ways, tune yourself, tone yourself... [...] If you don't learn different ways of expressing yourself, like for instance tsotsitaal, you will have communication breakdowns.

F., female, 22 years old

Iscamtho is also a language of modernity and newness, in two manners: because new items regularly appear in it; and because it is more flexible and open to new words than the standards, or because the youth wouldn't know such words in the standard language:

“[...] For instance you know when you say Heita! And the guy says Hola!... So now there combining the two, it gets: “Heita-Hola!”[...] For instance, there are words which I don't know in Sotho. But they'll use them in English. And you can't finish a sentence with Sotho, especially in Soweto. It's very rare, that people make a sentence without using English. I don't know in other countries, or in other provinces, but in Soweto, specific, ntwana...”

G., male, 26 years old

“There are some words... like inbox. I don't know what is inbox in Zulu.”

D., male, 28 years old

85 Hey, get me that thing
The mechanisms of permanent change

Being the source or the early users of new items in the language is rewarding in terms of prestige to the Iscamtho speaker. Thus, one will actively participate in the permanent transformation of Iscamtho. This transformation concerns mainly lexicon, but also language switch in the matrix language. There exists a competition spirit between Iscamtho speakers, as one will gain prestige by bringing up new or unexpected items in a discussion:

“We create words all the time. Like there's a term that started up, I don't know from where, but I caught up with it, and the more people that I meet, the more I use that term. And people I transferred the word to are using it now, and I guess they're influencing it to other people as well. [...] There is two that I can think of right now. One is contra borras. When you say somebody has a contra, it means an ass, a backside, and a beautiful one... And there's another term, you might know that this is a vegetable, but we say asparagus. Asparagus means nice, you know: “how are you? -ho, I'm asparagus!” It means nice and... and it's a new thing. It's something that we were using as a crew, like contra, and some new friends actually use the term now.”

F., female, 22 years old

“For instance, I know on that word, you should put Zulu, or Afrikaans, and you put Tswana. And then I'll say: “shit, he beat me this guy...” I thought he was going to say that word, and he said this word... But they are same words, but not the same language.”

N., male 28 years old

The creativity of the speakers has led to the existence in different places in Soweto and at different times a variety of Iscamtho which corresponds to a well-known linguistic phenomenon often termed from its French name, Verlan\(^86\): it consists in the methathesis of syllables, that is reversing the syllables within words, or sometimes reversing phonemes within syllables. Diverse sources in Soweto confirmed that this phenomenon first appeared in Iscamtho in the late 1960's and was popular in the course of the 1970's in Meadowlands. Today, this variety is known as Slista:

“There is this Ringas, Slista, there, they turn words. Like Mama: Amam. Gabanda: Gandaba. They turn words... That's Slista. Eish, they can gossip about you, and you are sitting next to them [...] and you won't hear words. And they're laughing, you're laughing too but, they're speaking about you! [...] Someway somehow I understand, but you know, I don't dig it that much.”

E., female, 18 years old

“Like they reversed words... It would take me ages to figure that one out, so... It's something that was called Slista. I don't know why, but it means they slick words backwards. For instance, zama, which means “try”, becomes maza. They take it backwards.”

F., female, 22 years old

Slista can appear through utterances in a sentence of usual Iscamtho, and it can also form the entire speech. This latter form is spoken in several “pockets” all around Soweto. However, there seems to be as much diversity in the matrix language of Slista as for the usual form of Iscamtho. Using Slista items is a common strategy in Iscamtho speech, and more speakers reverse a few words here and there.

\(^{86}\) From French à l'envers, meaning reversed.
Change is part of the essence of Iscamtho. It is a game and a challenge for kids and teenagers to provoke and spread change, especially for kwaito fans. It is also a sign of openness to diversity. Therefore, conservative behaviours seem useless and undesirable:

“As we grew up, it's something that was here. And it's growing too, because there are different words that are coming for different things. [...] For instance, a shoe, we call it espatholo. Maybe if they're in another language they'll call it seeta, or something else, you know. As you grow up, the words they grow also. And as you grew up maybe you created your own words. [...] They can protect [their language], but even if they don't protect, life is changing. And at the end of the day, now life is moving and is changing faster. I don't think there is a need to say: “I'm protecting my language, I'm preserving whatever...” Maybe if the whole world can be able to speak in one language, maybe something good can come out. Because these languages they're dividing also. If I may say, at the end of the day we're all humans. We think the same.”

D., male, 28 years old

The conception of language that this comment reveals is that of a living phenomenon. A standard is only a moment in the language, as the language will experience evolution and change naturally with time. This can be the result in a spread among speakers of an element or a meaning originally created within a small group of people, or it can directly be spread on a large audience if it originates in the media, especially music.

Hlonipha and the tsotsi language

However, there still are a number of factors which favour conservatism, and can either limit the creativity of the Iscamtho-speaker, or the very use of Iscamtho. Among these factors is the concept of respect, or hlonipha in Zulu, which must translate into a number of behaviours towards older people. Sibusisiwe Dlamini (2005, p. 112) wrote about hlonipha:

“What is referred to here as performative hlonipha relates more to behavioral practices and the manner in which these actions intersect with linguistic performances. This kind of ukuhlonipha87 is best described as avoidance, or to shun confrontation. It often applies to situations where verbal practices may shift from being respectful to confrontational and argumentative; and to practices where a young person has to let an older person know that she is wrong.”

Although hlonipha is a Zulu concept, one finds equivalent concepts of respect in any other Black South African culture when it comes to relations between a younger and an older person: youth are traditionally never to contest or raise their voice in presence of an adult. In traditional society and families, children are taught to never breach hlonipha towards older people. Although the traditional rules have long been loosened in the social context of White City, respecting the elders is still a very positive value for the youth. Thus, using Iscamtho when addressing elders, especially women, can be a problem, and this is particularly true if one happens to be in a rural – and so more traditional – area:

87 To respect
“It is considered more... well, as a younger person addressing an older person, it is disrespectful, I guess. So I would immediately change my tone, and obviously, some terms in the language, when addressing this older lady”

F., female, 22 years old

“When you're going to Natal, [...] they will say “no, no, hey tsotsi!” [...] I don't want a person to call me a tsotsi. Tsotsi it's a bad person.”

M., male, 29 years old

However, a growing number of youth develop another interpretation of hlonipha, which consists in claiming the right not to suffer prejudice or discrimination because of their language. Especially, the youth refute and refuse any association with tsotsis. Respect is then reduced to behaviours or the actual meaning of the speech, not the language:

“Hlonipha... to me, in my own way, it's to respect the elders. Don't do anything that they don't like you to do. If you do this, you are respecting. More than that, I won't say you don't respect if you speak the language that I speak. [...] If maybe I address them not in the right manner, then maybe they can say that. If I call them by names, that's disrespectful. [...] But even when I speak to him, I won't speak as I speak to my friends. The tone will go down. That shows respect. But I can speak my own language, if the tone goes down, that shows that this boy, he has respect. By the way I look at him. I couldn't speak to him and look him in the eyes like that. It's disrespectful.”

B., male, 25 years old

“Yes, some believe that. But there is this guy who made a big example out of Ringas, Zola7. He's not a tsotsi this guy, he's never been a tsotsi in his all life. But when he speaks Zulu, he speaks Ringas, all the time. Because of, he's been raised here in the lokishi. Here at the kasie. So when he speaks he speaks tsotsitaal. Even in his shows. He can even speak with these mothers that he interviews: he does speak tsotsitaal.”

N., male 28 years old

“It's not fair. Because it's my lingo I used to hear in eKasie, I'm not a tsotsi. They must consider me normally, because I'm from Soweto. Here in Soweto, everyone is speaking tsotsitaal, except the elders. Even a five-year old speaks tsotsitaal.”

T., male, 22 years old

Yet, and despite the denegation of these youth, the negative perceptions which older generations and most rural speakers have about Iscamtho impacts its recognition and its social normalisation. G. gave a comment which is quite accurate on this point, although more factors should be considered:

“I think all languages are proper. [...] You know, tsotsitaal, they're now promoting it, if you noticed. In the [television] programs they use it, you know. But why tsotsitaal they couldn't make it official? Because if you say Zulu, you'll find a Zulu nation; Xhosa's nation.; Sotho, there are Sotho tribes... But if you say “Tsotsis?”", eish, there'll only be Sowetans who'll want to go that side...”

G., male, 26 years old

How to comply with the rules of respect?

The constraints of hlonipha cannot be always ignored and not all youth wish to ignore them.
The main strategy to automatically comply with these constraints is the development of an ability to switch languages instantly. However, the strict observation of the respect rules depends much on the relationship which exists with the interlocutor:

“Let's look at the community at large. I'm chatting up in tsotsitaal with a friend of mine. And we meet up with a lady that I know, older than my mother probably. Obviously my mind, when I meet up with her, will... click from speaking tsotsitaal. [...] I know her you know, we chat from times to times. I will change my tone and my language according to the relationship that I have with her. And then, switch to tsotsitaal. It's the relationship that you have with people that brings up this conscious change. [...] If they're older, no [I won't speak to them naturally in Tsotsitaal if I don't know them]. If they're younger, yes. If they're older, I go and flip my mind into Soweto Zulu. Even if it doesn't have the right Zulu accent, it will be... Soweto Zulu.”

F., female, 22 years old

“I change the way I speak when I'm among older people, so that they can understand, so I turn the languages. Our language to them, it's like an insult... “kids without respect”... because Iscamtho, it's a free spoken language. You don't... fear the language, you just speak everything.”

B., male, 25 years old

Although, more and more youth are breaking this rule consciously or unconsciously, the lingo is traditionally not to be spoken in the house. The family home is supposed to be a shrine for the family language:

“Tsotsitaal is a street language... When you go to your home, when you go to your family, you start adjusting yourself”.

L., male, 32 years old

“Tsotsitaal I speak it when I'm with my friends... when I'm not inside this house! It's all the time, I usually use tsotsitaal. [...] Sometimes I do. But I don't like it. But it's in me, you see. [...] There's not much of a problem if I speak it, but I like to show them respect, because you know tsotsitaal... you see? So I try to speak straight, but I usually lose it!”

L., male, 25 years old

“At home, the right way is to maintain your language. It's the right place to maintain you're language. [...] Because some other homes, they don't speak that language that you speak at home. That's why they say, respect you start it at home.

T., male, 22 years old

When they comply with hlonipha rules, the youth are often more motivated by the immediate reaction that their interlocutor might have when feeling insulted, than with respecting a tradition or a class of age because it would be the right thing to do:

“I can speak with those uncles who grew up doing crime, or whatnot. I can speak that tsotsitaal to them. But with older persons like grannies and mkhulus, no... [...] They will say that I'm disrespectful. [...] No they won't say it, but I can see from there eyes that they think: “ho, this guy, he's a bit silly.” So that's why I prefer to talk to them in straight words.”

T., male, 22 years old

“I don't want people [...] to have the perception that I'm a bit out of control. And so hence I consciously reverse my language, my tsotsitaal, and turn it into Soweto Zulu. So that she doesn't
think: “my child is chilling with people that are out of mind.””  

F., female, 22 years old

**Elders have become tolerant with the youth code**

In White City, Iscamtho has been a major characteristic of social life for very long, and older people have most of the time lived there for decades. Hence, they are used to Iscamtho, and most of them tolerate it, especially from youth whom they know. The use of Iscamtho is sometimes perceived as improper to address people from White City youth's grandparents' generation. But addressing their parent's generation in the lingo is no problem. In addition, even the older generations had to become more tolerant with the spread of Iscamtho. Some even occasionally speak it:

“‘Yes, I've grown up speaking it with [my mother]. As sometimes my grandmother. But then it becomes like a joke. It's like: “hey, I can't believe you just said that! It's tsotsitaal no gale... [...] It is the same, but it does not come from a peer of mine. So it's never the same, you know what I mean? It's a totally different perspective and a different experience. But I speak tsotsitaal at home. Unconsciously maybe, again. Because when you're at home, you're with your family, you're used to these people, and so unconsciously you'll say: “sho, magriza,” or whatever, you know what I mean?””  

F., female, 22 years old

“‘Ja, I speak with my mother tsotsi... My mother, her name is Shila. So whenever I speak to her, I call her Mashakes... [...] Even with our grannys we speak tsotsitaal. We call them magriza...””

G., male, 26 years old

“‘You see, let's say you're on the street, with your friends. You see a granny, you greet her, you won't say: “hey granny”, you will say “hey, maolady”... he understand [sic]: “I know my boy, he always call me maolady...””

N., male 28 years old

The notion of respect however is traditionally stronger towards women. Thus, it is easier to refer to an older man in Iscamtho than to an older woman. This equals the gender division previously mentionned:

“When I'm speaking with my mother, then I will speak like you're speaking to a mother. But when I'm speaking to my father, no... I will just speak the way I speak. And he will just respond the very same way. [...] Most mothers, they don't speak tsotsi. So if ever you speak to them tsotsi, they'll say: “no, no, no, use the language that I taught you...” [...] Unless if you are with your father. Then you can speak the way you want.””

M., male, 29 years old

**Iscamtho in formal exchanges**

Apart from private relations with elders, the issue of using or not Iscamtho is involved in more formal exchanges, or exchanges with interlocutors which should be respected. Especially, the behaviours of the youth in settings involving formal institutions, such as an exchange with the police, show that Iscamtho doesn't fit yet all settings, especially because speaking Iscamtho wouldn't be a safe strategy towards the

88 Yes, grandma’.
89 From ou lady, or old lady, in which ou is Afrikaans.
“Just look at the face first! But most of the time, I don't use it. Because if I speak to a policeman in tsotsitaal, eish, I'll be a suspect, mfethu... He'll say: “maybe, she's one of them, let me check...” [...] I'll be a suspect! So when speaking to bapoyish... you know, with bapoyishmen, I just humble myself. [...] I don't like policemen, eish...”

E., female, 18 years old

“It depends. I speak Zulu or Sotho, they'll speak Zulu, Sotho or Shangane. There is one thing: you can speak your language, I can speak my language, we can understand each other. He can hear what I say, and I can hear what he says.”

L., male, 32 years old

However, in settings such as shops or the post-office, although there is a risk that Iscamtho won't be well perceived, the youth won't hesitate to use it:

“In the post offices they use in fact all the languages. They will understand. Maybe I'm gonna say: “Heita!” And he's gonna say “Heita!” Then I'm gonna say: “Sharp, unjani mfethu?” Then I'm gonna know from the response. When he says “ke sharp”, then I'm gonna know he speaks Sotho. Then I can carry on in Sotho. If he responds in Zulu, I can carry on with Sotho, as long as he's gonna respond. Cause the most important is to understand what I say. As long as he's gonna respond to it.”

L., male, 32 years old

“Ja... I mean, there's a line, there's no time to shout at me. [...] Even here when I'm buying, at the shop: tohindra, you know, for two hundred... two klipa, five skuru... Tiger it's ten rands... Twenty rands, tshoko... Two rands, pound, ja, pondo... Shomi, one rands...”

E., female, 18 years old

Iscamtho, although it is not supposed to occur there, is even gaining a place in the most sacred spaces and settings. But as mentioned in several occasions, the use of Iscamtho is often not deliberate, and it is more the risk of provoking negative reactions than a possible “unpurity” of Iscamtho in the sacred setting which is feared. Iscamtho indeed is not considered negative in itself:

“At church I won't speak tsotsitaal... maybe after church. But in the church, man... the church, you know, you must respect! And a church, there are these grandmas... they have these old traditional ways... [...] When you speak tsotsitaal, to them, you don't respect other people. At church, I just forget tsotsitaal... [...] I don't have a problem with tsotsitaal. Even when I pray, sometimes... [...] God loves us all, man, unkulunkulu abumshoza, unkulunkulu amacoconuts94, unkulunkulu so on, yabon? All God's children!

E., female, 18 years old

Iscamtho is so deeply rooted in the mind of some of its speakers, that another language cannot replace it when there is a need to express oneself in the most intensive manner. The experience of L., who used Iscamtho during his trial, is a marker of the wider spread of Iscamtho as a first language; of the moral legitimacy of Iscamtho-speakers to express themselves in their own language in a formal setting; it is also an
example of the problems caused by the distance between Iscamtho and standard languages:

“The last time I was speaking Ringas, it was in court. I was explaining my statement to the magistrate, you see. So I said I'm going to speak in Zulu, so they called the translator... He was busy saying: “come on, I can't understand you there and there...” because I'm talking Ringas all the way. I'm using Iscamtho, all the time, even if the magistrate can say: “he's using tsotsitaal, he's not respecting, because he knows this is a place of law...” He even asked: “but can't you understand the Ringas?” He said some of the words he could understand, but because I'm talking it deeper, you see... [...]I speak it because it's the one language I speak better. When they asked me in what language I want to express myself, I said Zulu. And I spoke tsotsitaal... [The judge] didn't react towards it. He said: “can't you tell this guy to tell us something that you can understand”, in order for him to tell us what I'm saying. So I limited the Ringas. I just limited some other words...”

L., male, 25 years old

Transmitting the lingo

Iscamtho is a heritage that many speakers received from older generations. And as they value it positively, most youth are willing to transmit it to their children, and love talking Iscamtho to young kids:

“It's exciting to speak tsotsitaal to them. I've got a nephew, my sister's son. When I speak to him I speak tsotsitaal....”

G., male, 26 years oold

“When maybe I have a boy child, I will speak to him in tsotsitaal. [...] If it's a girl, I speak to him Zulu. [...] With girls, it's not good, cause when she grows up they'll go up and down with these car boys here. There's too much gangsters in the location, you see.”

T., male, 22 years old

Actually, it is not necessary for parents to actively teach Iscamtho to their children: as the parents speak it, the children learn it; and if the parents don’t speak it, they will learn it anyway from their friends on the street. According to present young adults, Iscamtho remains more than popular among the following generations:

“But this young generation, now they are changing. Maybe it's new vibes or what. They like to use English,[...] They know tsotsitaal, it's just that now they love to talk English. [...] They can speak English, then put a little bit of Ringas, then again English, here and there Ringas... It's just those up and coming kids.”

L., male, 25 years old

“This new generation can understand each and every word we speak! [...] Maybe they grew up where they speak tsotsitaal, at their place. There are places where there's no elder, you see? They speak tsotsitaal.”

T., male, 22 years old

This chapter demonstrated the development of Iscamtho as a code suitable for most exchanges in the township: among the youth; between males and females; between the youth and the older generations;
in the case of an institutional exchange with the police or in shops; and even in the relations to the ancestors. Thus, Iscamtho shows that it evolves in the direction of a *lingua franca* proper in all situations within Soweto. However, there still is some reluctance and conservatism to a normalised use of Iscamtho: some elderly people, as well as conservative youth would refuse that Iscamtho be used at home or by girls. But these positions cannot stop the development of Iscamtho, which is spreading to the rest of South Africa through the media, and seems to benefit of a growing prestige in the new South Africa.
Chapter 9:
The rise of Iscamtho in the media:
how a tsotsitaal accessed the media sphere

It has already been about fifteen years since scholars have noticed the peculiar trajectory of Iscamtho as a street and youth language which crossed a number of social barriers to reach a much higher social position: from the early 1990's, the spread of the lingo as an everyday lingua franca in Soweto and as a cultural vector of youth culture in music and on television has raised questions about its status in the South African society, and its future developments (Ntshangase, 1993, 1995, 2002; Kiessling & Mous 2004). As a matter of fact, the rise of Iscamtho has been continuous and parallel to the rise of kwaiito culture since the beginning of the 1990's.

The term kwaiito was coined from Iscamtho amakwaitosi, meaning “gangsters”, and which is said to originate with the Afrikaans term kwaai, meaning “angry”. In a certain dimension, kwaiito appears to be a prolonging of South African gangster culture, which had already been supported by musical trends such as jazz, reggae, or pantsula music. However in that case, kwaiito rose as gangsterism went down. Kwaiito is also an entire cultural movement, which integrates music, clothing, dance styles, and which is directed at fun and partying, rather than politics and revendication. It first gave rise to an underground music production business in the townships, and later attracted the established music industry. In 1997 was founded YFM, which soon became the number one South African youth radio. It is difficult to associate the larger trend of kwaiito culture with one specific musical variety, since the term kwaiito is a kind of umbrella for a number of music styles, from house to disco or hip-hop. Different styles with different names such as guz, d'gong, isgubhu or swaito are all identified under the same category of kwaiito. Kwaiito can involve singing or slamming over a beat composed and played on a computer, DJ-ing, or more rarely live band performance. Brenda Fassie, who by the mid-1980's was already nicknamed the “Queen of African pop”, converted early to kwaiito, and proved that kwaiito did not come as a rupture towards previous musical and urban trends, but as a continuity. Kwaiito songs deal most of the time with topics such as how to have fun through music, friends, and sex, and are a sign of the new freedom which the youth wanted to enjoy in the 1990's.

This chapter aims at demonstrating how youth languages and linguistic attitudes in general gained access to the media, especially television and radio, through the success of kwaiito; and that although Iscamtho is not the only variety which can be used to picture the youth and their language, it has taken advantage on the others, and dominates the media enough to influence other tsotsitaal speakers and their languages in South Africa. A first part will show that it is not only the language which is used to picture youth culture, but also the linguistic attitude of code-mixing and code-switching (I), which allows more
speakers to identify with the speech, and addresses a larger audience, as it is less typical of the youth or of Soweto. The second part will demonstrate however that Iscamtho, through the success of Zola7 or Soweto TV for instance, has taken advantage and has become the one language mostly conveyed by the media as kwaito language or youth language (II), to the benefit of the Iscamtho-speaking youth of Soweto.

I. Youth languages and linguistic attitudes in the media

In the eighties, Iscamtho was already a wide-spread language in Soweto, and the sign of its culture. The film *Mapantsula*95, released in 1988 at the occasion of the Festival de Cannes in France was filmed in Iscamtho, and showed the world a then unknown side of South Africa, and what society had given birth to such a language. However, this movie was hardly seen in South Africa. At the end of the 1980's, American hip-hop culture already had adepts in the biggest townships of South Africa such as Soweto in Johannesburg, Mamelodi in Pretoria, or Kayelitsha and the Cape Flats in Cape Town. By the beginning of the 1990's, American and British house music entered the repertoire of township parties. In Soweto – and according to the informants more specifically in Zola, Emdeni, Zondi and White City – house beats were reappropriated, and slowed down, to create a typical rhythm on which the youth could perform their own dance styles. Kwaito spread nationally from 1993, with the first hit *Kaffir* by Arthur Mafokate, which openly criticized the White racist society and attitudes, and was a sign of the newfound freedom of expression from which South African youth could benefit. Kwaito is typically a party and dance music, and it rapidly spread among youth of all Black South African townships: by 1994, it was the one musical genre of the liberated youth, as kwaito artists performed in the events celebrating the election of Nelson Mandela to the presidency.

After 1994, the Black majority youth became one of the main aim of television programs, as well as a commercial target for advertisement of all kinds. Thus, the youth language and culture had to be used to reach this specific audience. *Tsotsitaal* was broadcasted first through words or sentences which were part of Zulu or Sotho speeches by entertainment presentors. But as more television series were being produced in South Africa, and especially in Johannesburg, where SABC is based, they also started to use lots of language-mix and Iscamtho, as the Soweto lingo was spoken by a number of Johannesburg actors and as many soapis and dramas where taking place either in Johannesburg or in Soweto. Still today, there regularly are casting sessions in several places in Soweto. The use of youth language and linguistic attitudes was introduced with two different but parallel purposes: on the one hand, language-mix translates the multilingual reality of most South Africans, and it is also a way to keep a program attractive to people from all cultural and linguistic background. Especially, English and the use of English subtitles allows the minority who don't speak any African language to follow the programs. On the other hand, Iscamtho as main vector of speech or part of language-mix fulfils the very same role of making a program attractive to more audience, but with the specific aim of the youth. At first, probably most *tsotsitaal* could eventually appear on television, since the main vector of *tsotsitaal* speech seems to be the actors themselves, as they need to

95 Directed by Oliver Schmitz. With Thomas Mogotlane (1988)
express in a language which they can speak. Thus, if an actor from Cape-town needs to speak tsotsitaal, he will do it in the Cape-Town tsotsitaal. But the location in Johannesburg of most of the South African television industry played in favour of the Johannesburg variety.

Kwaito was evermore present on the radio and on television in the second half of the 1990's. At first, it was mostly sung in Zulu, Xhosa, Iscamtho, and English, but always in urban and mixed forms, as the makers of kwaito are urban artists. As shown in the previous chapter with White City youth, language-mix and language-switch are valuable behaviours for urban youth in general. As more groups emerged all around South Africa, it is any language that would be used for kwaito. The Cape-Town and Mandela-City (Port-Elizabeth) lingos based on Xhosa for instance benefit of a large reservoir of kwaito artists. Of course, Iscamtho and other tsotsitaals are a privileged vector of kwaito songs, as a street language combines all the elements which can open the doors of kwaito: it is the language, sometimes native, of the youth who make kwaito; it is a mixed-code and is usually used together with language-mix and language-switch; it conveys the same values of youth, freedom, and style as kwaito. Considering the wide-range of languages used in kwaito over South Africa, it would be difficult to claim that Iscamtho is the only lingo which reached the waves.

As kwaito culture came to involve not only music, but also the way to dress, to walk, or to speak, its young adepts became identifiable, and their codes were taken as the cultural embodiment of the first generation of “new South Africans”. In all its forms, kwaito was spreading as the number one post-apartheid culture in South Africa, and it appeared on television through musical shows first (Selimathunzi, Jam Alley, Friends like these), then advertisement, and youth entertainment shows. And of course kwaito culture could not be shown without the kwaito language. Today, there is a vast diversity of media programs in which one can hear tsotsitaal and language-mix, especially on the mainly Nguni channel SABC 1. The motto of SABC1 is actually Msanzi Fo Sho, meaning “South Africa for sure”, and it is Iscamtho. Youth programs such as Big Breakfast or Takalani Sesame use Iscamtho episodically. In the many shows of South African television in which the viewers can participate, it is not rare that people who phone to participate in the show express themselves in tsotsitaal. This is especially true in youth programs again. The broadcasting strategy of using tsotsitaal to reach urban listeners or viewers is appreciated:

“Radio is nice, but sometimes not, because sometimes they're talking very deep deep Zulu. But, eish, let Zulu tsotsitaal!! Because even here in our community, we're not talking real Zulu. They are few who are talking real real real Zulu.”

N., male 28 years old

However, what annoys the youth most is the contrast in programs who use (some kind of) a township linguistic behaviour to depict the life of successful youth living in the suburbs:

“The language that they use is good, [it shows that] we leave in a new South Africa, it's multilingual... But my problem is, the life that they depict. It is not our life. It's a remote life. It's a Sandton life, not the Soweto life... We don't do that thing. All the soaps that they do, even those drama series which depict the Soweto, the township life... They are there, but the problem
is, the story was made by a white person to tell a white story...”  

L., male, 32 years old

The depiction of Soweto, and especially its *tsotsis*, provokes sharp reactions when they don't use the local lingo, or when this lingo is modified, since White City youth are deceived by unrealistic depictions of their reality, which are the result of unaware scenarists:

“...It can be good from the actor's themselves, cause it's formal acting, I would say... If that actor can speak it, I'll say: “that one, he knows it for real”. But if you pick an actor from Eastern Cape to play someone from Soweto, he will suck in it! For other people, they won't see any difference, but to us, it will suck. Even maybe if the character is good, if he can't speak the language properly, it will suck.”

B., male, 25 years old

“How does he know about my life? How does he know how do I speak? How does he know how I dress... Cause if you take the way they show the *tsotsis* on television, they all take their sporties... There's no *tsotsi* who wears this cap, with a leather jacket, it's not like that... And how they speak, you would see: *Heita la, so!*... There's no *Heita la, so!* It's: *-Heita!, Hola!, Hoezit Kau!*”

L., male, 32 years old

More generally, the youth are aware of the strategy to include language-mix or Iscamtho in a script, and although it is not always realistic, it seems inevitable that some actors expected to mix or speak in the lingo won't do it naturally. But as it leaves space for those who can speak the language, it is appreciated. As will be shown now, the depiction of unrealistic language use or linguistic behaviours, or maybe of fake ones, is being overcome by the impact of “proper” Iscamtho through a number of media, and especially the former drama Yiso-Yiso, the entertainment shows by Zola 7, and the new local television Soweto TV, which has been in the national television landscape for about a year now.

II. Iscamtho as the one linguistic icon of kwaito and youth culture

Iscamtho already was favoured by television programs among other *tsotsitaals* as it was the lingo from Johannesburg, where most of the South African television industry is based. However, it has now become a kind of Standard *tsotsitaal*, the one which is prioritarily used for television, and which the youth from around the country love to hear and learn.

In 2003, a new television drama was released, which had a huge impact all over South Africa: *Yiso-Yiso*. The first reason why this drama was a success is that it stars Zola7, who is an icon among Black South African youth, and because the soundtrack, composed by Zola7, was a hit of kwaito music. But *Yiso-Yiso* was mainly noticed outside the youth for its topic and the way it depicts it: *Yiso-Yiso* takes place in Soweto, and shows how gangsters and non-gangsters have to find means of survival in the township. It was harshly criticised for being violent, using raw and explicit language, and showing explicit sex. However, Black youth all over South Africa, and White City youth are no exceptions, loved the drama especially for
these reasons, as they consider it showing their reality as it is, without any trick to make it more suitable or catchy for television:

“Yiso-yiso... that was a drama series... That would be more approving. Maybe that one would take 5 or 7 oscars... Because that drama, it gave you what was happening in Soweto. In others, there was always a little bit of exaggeration, or they didn't show you everything. But that one it showed you Soweto.”

B., male, 25 years old

*Yiso-Yiso* depicts the youth reality, the risks of being young in the township, and it uses Iscamtho in a very natural way, since the actors are actually from Soweto and speak it in real life. Despite the criticism, *Yiso-Yiso* was such a success that three series were made. Taking place in Soweto, and being centred on the experience of young gangsters, *Yiso-Yiso* is a program in which many White City youth can identify themselves. The pride that it provokes among them comes first from the fact that their reality is at last exposed to outsiders without alteration, and secondly from the fact that the difficulty and the violence of township life is still largely ignored by the most advantaged South Africans, who need to be educated on this reality. In addition, *Yiso-Yiso* deals with issues such as how to get out of poverty, HIV-AIDS, or domestic violence, and these issues are significant in the perceptions of the youth.

Following Yiso-Yiso, and after the hit of his *Umdlewmbe* album in 2001, Zola7 was given a weekly show on SABC1 in 2003. The show, entitled *Zola7*, takes the air right after Generations, the most popular youth program in South Africa. It thus retains the same audience. The show focuses each week on one person whom Zola7 accompanies in a “very special day” in the life of this person, such as a wedding or an exam. Zola7 helps his guest, and even organises the event if the person can't afford it. In a way, he is a dreammaker, but he also casts light on people's difficulties. Zola7 presents his entire show in his first language, which is Zulu-based Iscamtho. Thus, when addressing his guests, or when interviewing township residents anywhere in South Africa and no matter their age, Zola7 speaks in Iscamtho.

Zola7 is by far the most popular artist in South Africa today. He received a number of awards as a singer and musician, as a producer, as a television presentor, and as an actor. Apart from *Yiso-Yiso*, he also appeared on the cast of the movie *Tsotsi* in 2005. His popularity over Black South African youth has an important impact in linguistic terms: Zola7 is an icon, and his fans want to speak the same way as he does. Thus, Iscamtho appears through Zola7 not only as the language of his shows and music, but as an iconic element of kwaito and kwaito stars, whom the youth dream to resemble. The use of Iscamtho is highly appreciated by its speakers, and many would like Iscamtho to spread even more on television:

“I like to see it on TV, it's my culture. I'd like it [to have the news] in *tsotsi*, yes... But maybe they didn't come up with a strategy of using it, and whatwhat...”

N., male 28 years old

“They speak Iscamtho on TV. Like... programs like *Special Assignements*, when they were
interviewing people from the locations. They speak Iscamtho. And Yiso-Yiso, dramas... I like them. I'd like more of them on TV.”

T., male, 22 years old

“You know in TV there's a channel where they speak only Zulu and Xhosa. They must make another channel for tsotsitaal. [...] Because this is our language. They say here in South Africa we have 11 languages. I say no, we have maybe 13. Including tsotsitaal and sign language. So they must put it that we’re having 13 languages in South Africa.”

M., male, 29 years old

In fact, there is already a channel on which Iscamtho finds all the room it requires, although this channel is not yet a major feature of the South African media: SowetoTV. SowetoTV was created in early 2007, and began to broadcast on the waves in Gauteng on 1st July 2007. By september 2007, it was also awarded a slot on DsTV, the South African sattelite television provider, and it is now broadcasted through DsTV all over South Africa. An interview with Derrick, the program manager of SowetoTV, was most enriching and provided a good understanding of the impact of SowetoTV on Iscamtho diffusion, and the impact of Iscamtho on the viewers of SowetoTV.

SowetoTV started up with a memorandum which imposed that 50 percent of the programs would be in English, while another 50 percent would be in other languages. However, the purpose was first to make sure that the programs would be understandable by the largest number, but as the main aim is Black youth and as the television station wants to epytomise Soweto and its culture, a large place was made to Iscamtho. Only one program actually never uses Iscamtho: Imbokodo96 is a program aiming at female viewers, and it is a kind of talkshow. The languages used in it are English, Zulu, Sotho, and Tswana. Another show, Soweto Today is mainly in English, but other languages including Iscamtho are to be heard in it. Apart from these programs, a number of shows are open to any language, in the purest Soweto tradition, and any intervining guest in the program can use the language he/she wishes. This is especially true for two programs, Ziwamporoma97, a cultural program on Soweto's life, and Open Doors Policy, a musical show.

Finally, SowetoTV has one very popular youth program entitled Dlalangeringas98, which is mainly if not only in Iscamtho. Interestingly, this program using the typical Soweto language is watched and appreciated all over the country. Thus, Derrick confirmed the high number of SMSs sent by viewers from all of South Africa (more than a thousand per week). Many of these messages were written in Iscamtho, even when they originated from Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, or the Western Cape.

SowetoTV did not choose to use Iscamtho as a revendication, but simply the channel was founded by Soweto people living in Dobsonville, Orlando, or Jabulani, and it aimed at showing Soweto and its people. Thus, the lingo had to be present. And as presentors are young, they are used to speaking Iscamtho as a main language. Thus, it is only natural to them to speak the lingo on the air. The consequence of this is that Iscamtho appears on SowetoTV like any language: it is just the people's language, and no reference is ever made to a tsotsi style or to a kwaito attitude. It is not to serve a commercial purpose or to

96 A stone in Zulu. In Iscamtho, it refers to a woman, from a Zulu proverb claiming that women are tough like stones.
97 It's happening, in Iscamtho.
98 Let's speak Ringas, in Iscamtho.
reach a specific audience that Iscamtho is a fundamental element of SowetoTV, but simply because SowetoTV aims at being a reflection of the Sowetan society. And as the people who might speak on the air originate from different townships within Soweto, one can hear on SowetoTV all kinds of Iscamtho. Contrary to SABC's soapies, the lingo used on SowetoTV is always a real one. It also fulfils different purposes: depicting a reality that needs to be shown as such, not distorted; insuring that the presentors and guests feel free to express themselves in their own language; and sustaining a viewership mainly composed of young people, who strive for Iscamtho.

However, Derrick did not consider that SowetoTV had a major role to play as a vector of Iscamtho: indeed, he considered that Iscamtho was already strong enough to spread without SowetoTV, as it was the case before the creation of the channel. Iscamtho actually appears to him as to most young Sowetans as a language that must normally be considered as proper for media use: from the point of view of SowetoTV, where the makers of the television programs all speak Iscamtho, it would seem silly to force themselves to work in another language, and even more silly to try and represent Soweto and at the same time avoid its language. Equally, there isn't any real concern for the difficulties which might be experienced by viewers who wouldn't speak Iscamtho: after a short time, the speakers of Zulu or Sotho can grab Iscamtho, and they actually strive to learn it, as confirmed in their SMSs. It even reduces the distance between the presentors and the receivers of the shows, and according to Derrick, the use of Iscamtho and the possibility for viewers who phone to participate in talk shows to express in their own tsotsitaal if they want to, is a means to stabilize and develop the viewership.

SowetoTV is not an all Iscamtho channel, but it contains and uses all the languages of Soweto, and as Iscamtho is the main Soweto language, it is also the main SowetoTV language. One should also consider the night shows, which are broadcasting of parties in local clubs or of local concerts: thus, kwaito is the main night program, and increases again the presence of Iscamtho.

The example of SowetoTV shows that Iscamtho is fit to spread even more in the media, and could be used to discuss more topic. The issue at stake here is the social properness of Iscamtho: can the lingo be used in all settings for all topics? According to SowetoTV staff, yes it can. Indeed, Sowetans already use Iscamtho to discuss all matters, and as their lives can reflect on the waves of SowetoTV, there is no speech manipulation, and Iscamtho gets the place that it has in the real life. The progression of Iscamtho on established television channels could benefit from the growth of SowetoTV, and maybe some day, “serious” topics, such as the news or politics, will also be discussed on television through Iscamtho, which will then have completely left its status of argot or street language, to be a fully established language.
Concluding Chapter:

Iscamtho as a multi-functional language

with a rising status

This thesis tried to give a complete perspective over Iscamtho: the Soweto language was described in its forms, in its social meaning, and in the attitudes which its speakers adopt about it. The socio-historical description of how and why Iscamtho evolved from a criminal argot to a native and cultural language, combined to the anthropological analysis of the functions and symbolic values which its speakers tie to Iscamtho, now allows us to answer the question set in introduction: to what new status has the evolution of the functions of Iscamtho brought this language?

Considering the social characteristics of Iscamtho, and comparing Iscamtho with other African urban languages, as well as with the critics of the standard languages, Iscamtho will appear as a language which fulfils more functions than urban youth languages usually do, and which has reached a social status comparable to most official languages in South Africa. Iscamtho entails a number of values which undoubtedly give him the force and symbolism of any language in terms of conveying meaning and identity: it is diverse, and yet unique, and can address most domains of life (I); it contains the values of the tolerant post-apartheid society, which reflect also modernity and the Soweto way of life (II); and although it is new, it conceives modernity as entailing the more traditional values for which Iscamtho-speakers strive, and it can be seen as a prolonging of the pre-colonial African attitude towards languages (III).

1. Iscamtho: a diversity of forms for a unique and complete variety

Iscamtho has one main specificity: it lacks its own grammatical structure, and it thus relies on a matrix language. The structure of the matrix supports a corpus of Iscamtho lexicon, which integrates typical terms which are not to be found in any other language, as well as borrowings from several languages. As the matrix can change, Iscamtho can take virtually any form, even if the Zulu and Sotho matrixes are by far the most widespread, and if the Afrikaans matrix is excluded, being rather tied to Tsotsitaal. But one can hear in Soweto Iscamtho spoken on a Tsonga, Tswana, or Venda matrix for instance. The characteristic of one variety adapting to several matrix languages is not very common, but Kiessling and Mous (2004) describe the evolution of Indoubil in the former Zaïre from a Lingala matrix to a Swahili matrix, with the use of Indoubil lexicon in both languages. As with Iscamtho, the code was still termed Indoubil, and a speaker of Lingala-based Indoubil could identify and discuss with a speaker of Swahili-based Indoubil, as long as both
could understand the other's matrix. However, in the case of Indoubil, the Lingala-based variety developed first and then spread geographically to Swahili-speaking regions where it was adapted to Swahili. In the case of Iscamtho, the area of Soweto was multilingual before Iscamtho formally spread, and the Zulu-based and Sotho-based varieties appeared and spread simultaneously. The diverse forms of Iscamtho reveal the deep nature of this variety, since there has never been one single way to speak Iscamtho.

Therefore, in the context of such a diverse variation, which can be considered as producing an intrinsically “multilingual variety”, the most defining characteristic of Iscamtho is its lexicon. It is this lexicon which contains a heritage from Shalambombo as well as Tsotsitaal, and it is also in the lexical field that the youth can express their creativity: Iscamtho is alive, and it is permanently enriched of new lexical items, as the speakers create new words or introduce newly borrowed words. These borrowings might be used unchanged, or undergo an evolution in form or in meaning to become specifically Iscamtho. However, Iscamtho is already a variety with a long history, and it has developed a large corpus of terms which are properly Iscamtho or which have their own meaning in Iscamtho. Thus Iscamtho covers most of the fields of life, contrary to a criminal argot, a slang, a *jargon* or a *guild language*.

Iscamtho is now used in most social exchanges, including in cultural and entertainment media. Its speakers also wish that it could be used for more complex issues, such as the news, or to discuss politics. In their everyday life, Iscamtho speakers consider the lingo as proper for elaborated exchanges, to exchange in a respectful way with elders, or even to be used in sacred settings such as praying to god, or communicating with the ancestors (although it won't be the favoured code). This is also tied to the status of native language of Iscamtho, and to the fact that native and first-language speakers cannot tolerate to be considered as showing bad manners when they are just expressing in *their* language. It reflects the complex fields that Iscamtho can handle, and the richness of the meanings which it can possibly express: especially, the use of a multitude of lexical reservoirs at once from all the languages present in Soweto provide Iscamtho with a great reserve of items to express precise meanings.

The ever-developing lexicon of Iscamtho is also the result of the multiple identities of the youth: as they evolve between African languages in their families, English in the media, at school, or in the professional life, and Iscamtho with their friends or even in the family, Iscamtho-speaking youth have to combine opposite traditions, expectations, and requirements of the complex South African society. They also seek to express values which matter to them, and which reflect the cultural diversity of the township and the changes in the South African society. Youth languages have been analysed, in exoglossic countries, that is countries where a foreign (former colonial) language is used as national or official language, as an appropriation of the colonial language, which has retained its social power. This language is transformed and made typical by the speakers of the new urban form. Thus, it is no more colonial (Kiessling & Mous, 2004). This vision is certainly pertinent for the times when Iscamtho developed as an argot in a colonial regime that was imposing Afrikaans and English as the official languages. It is also extremely accurate in the case of Tsotsitaal, which is a clear appropriation of Afrikaans by African languages speakers. However, in
the present situation, where there are eleven official languages in South Africa, the functions of Iscamtho have long passed the stage of protest against a colonial order, to become an expression of youth identity and political positioning in the new South Africa, including careful adhesion to and propositions of enrichment of the “new” South Africa. If the youth language was an attempt to bring change in the apartheid society, it is rather now a support to the regime and society changes started up by the democratisation process.

In functions and status, Iscamtho is to be distinguished from youth languages such as analysed by Kiessling and Mous (2004), who mention the notion of antilanguage, in which a code has for primary function to express the difference between its speakers and the dominant group in society, and the rejection by the first ones of the present order. Indeed, Iscamtho was once a criminal argot, and it was founded and developed with all the characteristics of an antilanguage. However, if it still is a group identity marker, it rather tends now to integrate and enhance the values of the new order, rather than rejecting it. Iscamtho is an identity marker which favours inclusion, since it allows any speaker to bring in his/her own language form and linguistic features, the only requirement being mutual comprehension. Iscamtho can actually be seen as an antilanguage which found itself in the turmoil of a tremendous social change, and as the social system principles were reversed, Iscamtho became supportive of the new values promoted, rather than rejective.

II. Iscamtho as an embodiment of the values of “new South Africanness”

First language Iscamtho-speaking youth are largely critical of the results of the democratic regime as it has been since 1994: although more opportunities opened for a minority among the youth, most cannot see or experience the changes they expected. Especially, poverty is still the everyday reality in the townships, and the way of life of the youth has not been dramatically changed by the political reversal. However, the promoted and imagined “new” South Africa relies on values of involvement, openness, equality, and mutual respect. Iscamtho is a variety which embodies these values: it can adapt to different matrix-languages, and thus to different mother tongues; it integrates pieces of all the languages present where it is spoken; it is regardless of the origin of the items which it integrates, and can even integrate items from a language such as Afrikaans, which is per se not positively perceived by most youth.

The main function of Iscamtho is to mark group identity among the youth. The youth are a group which is supposed to be modern and creative, and they are the source of novelty in the townships. The parallel development of Iscamtho and kwaito has to be seen as a reflection of the new power of the youth in the South African society, as motor of change and creation. Especially, Iscamtho as well as kwaito are vectors of style, and the improvement of one's style through the demonstration of multilingual skills or the performance of creative Iscamtho are a source of prestige. Thus, the youth strive to learn new languages; to use words from these languages in Iscamtho; or to create new Iscamtho items by borrowing or by coining completely new terms. Permanent evolution is a characteristic which Iscamtho inherited from the values for which its speakers strive, and which have been present in Iscamtho from its origins: urbanity and city-slickness in a multicultural and multilingual environment rhyme with multilingualism and language-mix; all
languages and their speakers are equal, a fact which must imply interest in other languages from all speakers and the sense of accommodating one's interlocutor; finally, Iscamtho is an embodiment of the fast, risky and uncertain life which Soweto offered for several decades, and it reflects the capacities of adaptation and improvisation required by its speakers in the township. In this regard, Iscamtho does not only mark group identity, but it also reflects values for which the youth strive, and which they promote. Iscamtho is the vector of a complete youth ideology, although this is rarely expressed consciously. It embodies, promotes, and transmits the perceptions of the youth about how to consider and transform the South African society.

Yet, Iscamtho also marks differences, which can serve to distinguish smaller groups: it is the case for a variety such as Slista, for specific lexicon which can maintain secrecy over the speech for one group of individuals, or for the localised use of an uncommon matrix, such as Tsonga or Venda. When new items are created by one small group of people, hence enhancing their prestige, the newly enriched lingo becomes the marker of this specific group, but this group is meant to extend, as prestige comes from sharing the new items with individuals who did not know them. In this regard, Iscamtho is modern and “proudly new South African” because it is new, open to anyone, and everyone can join the group of Iscamtho-speakers, when it used to be secret and reserved to the initiates. Kiessling and Mous (2004, p.314) acknowledged this evolution of youth languages in Africa to an inclusive identity marker, considering that “in the case of African youth languages, one may note that what starts off as a resistance identity may turn into a project identity”, as the youth consciously transform and use their language to promote an alternative social ideology aiming at improving again the transformin South African society. White City and Soweto youth, although they appreciate the new order, seek to improve it, and Iscamtho expresses their vision of how society and social relationships should be organised.

As the South African regime radically transformed, so did Iscamtho, to become for the youth the vector of their new youth identities in an open society. The success of the youth ideology and the values newly tied to Iscamtho can be seen in the coming of Iscamtho as an acceptable lingua franca and a vector of kwaito music and culture in all media. The reversal of social and institutional norms opened the door for a new social meaning of the variety. The values of equality, openness and linguistic accommodation which first-language Iscamtho-speakers show can be understood as the application of the democratic principles to linguistic behaviours. However, it is difficult to decide if these values first supported Iscamtho or if Iscamtho first supported these values. One could consider that the gangster attitude, of which Iscamtho was a fundamental, was aiming at spreading freedom and equality between the speakers of the lingo: they would be “free” as they were able to speak to each other without anyone understanding them; they would also get some power over the regime, since they could hide their thoughts and speak in secret in presence of regime agents such as the police or their informants; thus, the Iscamtho-speakers would be more equal to the officials, as the balance of freedom and power would be displaced to their advantage. However, this notion of equality could not be considered universal as it is today, since there was especially a sexist discrimination towards the use of the lingo. In a way, Iscamtho is an antilanguage which went through a second stage in which, liberated from oppression, the youth did not construct their identity against a social system, but
instead their renewed identities were embraced within a renewed social system. Iscamtho has become the positive reflect of an active and creative generation, it has lost most of its negative prejudices, and it has become proper for many intergenerational and intrafamilial exchanges within the township, although adjustments can occur to mark respect or to accommodate interlocutors.

III. **Iscamtho as renewing traditional values into a modern ideology**

The youth tend to recognize in Iscamtho more and more of the collective and intergenerational values of the township. For instance, *hlonipha* is not forgotten with the adoption of Iscamtho, and showing a respectful behaviour towards the elders is a meaningful principle to the youth, even when they want to impose Iscamtho as the normal vector of their exchanges with the older generations. In that matter, Iscamtho stops being a conflict code, and doesn't mark any more opposition between its speakers and the rest of society.

In the same way, *ubuntu* is promoted, and some youth regret that the end of oppression and the development of individual opportunities enhanced individualism over togetherness. The ideology of *ubuntu*, which is indeed politically promoted by several leaders such as Desmond Tutu or Nelson Mandela and in many kwaito songs, is seen by the youth as the value to be implemented for the improvement of the post-apartheid society. One can see in the linking of Iscamtho to the traditional values of humanity and togetherness – for it is inclusive and respectful of many cultures, languages, and individualities – an expression of an attachment to a typically urban and Sowetan value developed when Soweto residents where the victim of the regime. The democratic South African society saw the end of the feeling of identity between the township youth and their political leaders, who are largely seen as corrupt and indifferent to the life of township youth. The belief that the new society is serving them is not the most widespread among the youth. Thus, there is in a way a rejection of the liberal-individualist modern values to the benefit of more traditional values, which themselves are made-up to become the new modernity, and the next stage in the transformation of South Africa.

Thus, the attachment of the youth to their modern, urban and Sowetan identity does not prevent them from taking very seriously the traditional believes and rituals, and especially the ancestor's rituals. Neither the need to master the English language in the “new” South Africa nor the intimate link of the youth to Iscamtho can justify that one person ignores his/her family language. However, Iscamtho is more and more acknowledged as suitable for the ancestor's ceremonies, as most youth don't master the ancestor's language well enough, and as prayers are matters of soul, not language. In a context where the youth have to integrate and practice opposite values and social behaviours, Iscamtho appears as an instrument of cohesion of this diversity: the softness of Iscamtho and its essence which combine antagonistic elements offer the youth an instrument of social integration in any context. The Iscamtho-speaker can consciously decide to refer to the youth, the newness, and the creativity of Iscamtho, as well as to its history or its integrative values; city-slickness or *tsotsi* attitude can give room to solemnity and *hlonipha* in a formal setting. Thus,
allegations that Iscamtho would not be proper or respectful will only be accurate in particular settings requiring the use of a traditional language.

In other settings, Iscamtho has gained respectability, and although some individuals might still be uncomfortable with the use of Iscamtho, the ambiguity and multiplicity of the values conveyed by the lingo allow to consider it as any other language. Although the South African policy gave a higher status to the eleven official languages, it is conform to the values of equality and freedom defended by the youth to consider individuals and their native languages as equal to each other. Thus, Iscamtho is being consider more and more often as just another language, as valuable as any other, might it be traditional.

Sinfree Makoni (2003, p.132) proposed a solution to the dichotomy between Standard African languages as created in the colonial process and indigenous languages as used, spoken, and regularly transformed by African people:

“I would suggest that a productive way out of this political, linguistic, and intellectual impasse is to institute a program to disinvent African languages, hence reconceptualizing the notions of language and ethnicity on which the South African policy is founded”

Makoni suggests a “program to disinvent African languages”. Iscamtho-speakers have long abolished the borders between the invented standards to melt them into one variety through which they developed their own conception of language, their own relation to ethnicity, and their own vision of society. Iscamtho, as an urban, mixed and diverse code, is a transcendence of ethnicity. Thus, it could be seen as a solution for the purpose proposed by Makoni, to disinvent African languages in order to give them back their diversity, flexibility, and to revive identities between cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups who were artificially separated by colonialism and apartheid. Indeed, Makoni himself recognized the power of “kwaito language” and urban varieties as disinventing the post-colonial linguistic order.

In many aspects, Iscamtho reveals paradoxes of township youth identities: although it is diverse and inclusive of all languages, it is unique; it expresses modernity and newness, but it is tied to traditional values; it allows the expression of youth freedom in the “new” South Africa, and at the same time it embodies an ideology and a vision of the world, which are meant to improve this democratic society by introducing in it some older values. These paradoxes should not surprise the observers of Iscamtho and its speakers, because they reflect the social position of first-language Iscamtho-speakers, who often have to fulfill paradoxal social expectations, and who need to conceal diverse if not opposite identity. Language, according to Makoni (2001) as well as to Iscamtho-speaking youth, is not a set of rules compiled in dictionnaries and grammars. It is first and foremost communication, as it was in the case of inter-ethnic contacts before colonisation. The freedom to be highly multilingual, to permanently create language and to
make it alive was a pre-colonial reality. Iscamtho could thus support one more paradox in its functions: beeing the embodiment of the linguistic modernity of the “new” South Africa, and at the same time going back to the ancient ways towards languages and linguistic diversity. To take account of the success and growth of the most important urban language in South Africa, an official acknowlegement of Iscamtho, and more considerations in law for the growing variety and its growing number of native speakers, will probably be someday inevitable for the South African democracy. In the meantime, Iscamtho-speakers have set up their own linguistic policy, non-regarding of so-called linguistic rules: “Speak as you want to speak: just be free!”
Appendix n°1 : Compared glossary

This table was made from a questionnaire. For each entry are given the words used by the informants when speaking Iscamtho, Zulu, and when expressing themselves at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>ISCAMTHO</th>
<th>ISIZULU</th>
<th>When at home</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Father</td>
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<td>Ubaba</td>
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<td>Upapa</td>
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<td>Ithaima</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Brother</td>
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<td>Ibroeket</td>
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<td>Son</td>
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<td>Usisi omgane</td>
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<td>Indotakazi</td>
<td>Incosi ye cherie</td>
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<td>Incosi ye cherie</td>
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<td>Boy</td>
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<td>Iautie</td>
<td>Indodana</td>
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<td>Ujita</td>
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<td>Intombazana</td>
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<td>Indoda</td>
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<td>Imbokodo99</td>
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<td>Old man</td>
<td>Umakhinja</td>
<td>Umkhulu</td>
<td>Umkhulu</td>
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<td>Grootman</td>
<td>Indodandala</td>
<td>Grootman</td>
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<td>Umagriza</td>
<td>Ugogo</td>
<td>Ukoko</td>
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<td>Intombindala</td>
<td>Umagriza</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

99 In Zulu: a stone
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Incosi</th>
<th>Umtwana Ingane</th>
<th>Ungwana Incosi Umbabino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Impintsí Achuse Bra Browam</td>
<td>Umgane</td>
<td>Umgane Achuse Browam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “chick” (girl)</td>
<td>Ucherie Utikini</td>
<td>Intombi</td>
<td>Intombi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman</td>
<td>Ukgata Jealous Boys Umzapoza100 Umgai</td>
<td>Uphoyisa</td>
<td>Ukgata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security guard</td>
<td>Isekzana</td>
<td>Umantshingi lani Onogarda</td>
<td>Isecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop tenant</td>
<td>Iowner yishipa</td>
<td>Umthengisi lani UStoro</td>
<td>Iowner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soweto</td>
<td>Msawawa Sotra eKasie lama kase</td>
<td>Soweto Ilokishin Ilohishe</td>
<td>Msawawa Sotra Soweto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White City</td>
<td>Khenza Kanza Canzer</td>
<td>White City</td>
<td>Kenza Khenza Canzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Soweto</td>
<td>Pansi khona eSotra</td>
<td>Phakathi eLokishini</td>
<td>Ekasie Deep Soweto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Isgela</td>
<td>Isikolo</td>
<td>Isikolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shebeen</td>
<td>Tavern Spot Esbotini Lonjane</td>
<td>Shebeen Eshebhini Esipotini</td>
<td>Shebeen Esipotini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Ikar Transit Isbac</td>
<td>Imoto</td>
<td>Ikar Imoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>Idladla</td>
<td>Indlu Idlo</td>
<td>Indlu Idladla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Istulo</td>
<td>Isihlalo</td>
<td>Istulo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Igawulo Icando Dipapa</td>
<td>Ukudla Ogupla</td>
<td>Ukudla Igawulo Icando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Ivati Amavatsatsa</td>
<td>Amanzi</td>
<td>Amanzi Ivati Mavati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Icomputor</td>
<td>Umqwafazo Ikomputa</td>
<td>Icomputor Icom-com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellphone</td>
<td>Icell Intseletsele</td>
<td>Umakhala ekhukwini</td>
<td>Icell Icellphone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100 In 26 language: those who are late
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Zulu</th>
<th>Afrikaans (groet, Afrikaans)</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoe</td>
<td>Intselaboya</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dieta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ibhathu (plur.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ibhatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarette</td>
<td>Inkayza</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kwayi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inkwazu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inkawuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ishemu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ispuravet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Izolo</td>
<td>Umthunzi we nkukhu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Igada</td>
<td>Insangu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Izesta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Itai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor</td>
<td>Ivati</td>
<td>Amanzi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imbombe</td>
<td>Utshwala</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imbobi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Ispinza</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Isbarara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>Imbombi</td>
<td>Utshala</td>
<td>Amabeya</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ipopla</td>
<td>Ubhiya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ubeya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Inyuku</td>
<td>Imali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Izaka</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umdabolo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inyuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Shizel</td>
<td>Isibhamu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insimbi&lt;sup&gt;101&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indoshi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingadla</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insosiza</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>Icab</td>
<td>Itakisi</td>
<td>Taxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ibus</td>
<td>Itekisi</td>
<td>Iktekisi, Iteksi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>Igado</td>
<td>Isetimela</td>
<td>Isitimela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Itrayini</td>
<td>Itrayini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To talk</td>
<td>Ukuringa</td>
<td>Ukukhuluma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To sleep</td>
<td>Ukugidla</td>
<td>Ukulala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To walk</td>
<td>Ukuvaya</td>
<td>Ukuhamba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To greet</td>
<td>Ukugrunta</td>
<td>Ukubulisa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;i&gt;groet, Afrikaans&lt;/i&gt;)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To come</td>
<td>Ukutwakala</td>
<td>Hoza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukuzwakala</td>
<td>Ukuza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukuzinkila</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To go</td>
<td>Ukuvaya, ukuvia</td>
<td>Ukuhamba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To love</td>
<td>Ukuncaya</td>
<td>Ukuthanda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukuncanywa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukuntsanywa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>101</sup> In Zulu: steel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Xhosa 1</th>
<th>Xhosa 2</th>
<th>Xhosa 3</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To kiss</td>
<td>Ukulamza</td>
<td>Ukuqcabuza</td>
<td>Ukuqcabuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To kiss</td>
<td>Ukuqcabuza</td>
<td>Ukuncabuza</td>
<td>Ukuqcabuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have sex</td>
<td>Ukushaya inkayza</td>
<td>Ukulala</td>
<td>Ukulala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have sex</td>
<td>Ukushaya inkawoza</td>
<td>Ukulalana</td>
<td>Ukulalana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have sex</td>
<td>Ukushecela</td>
<td>Ukushecela</td>
<td>Ukushecela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke</td>
<td>Ukunkayza</td>
<td>Ukubhena</td>
<td>Ukubhena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke</td>
<td>Ukufolisha</td>
<td>Ukubhena</td>
<td>Ukubhena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke</td>
<td>Ukuncabuza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke</td>
<td>Ukuncabuza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
<td>Ukunkauza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke dagga</td>
<td>Ukukauza</td>
<td>Ukubhema insanga / intsango</td>
<td>Ukubhema insanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To smoke dagga</td>
<td>Ukuzishisa</td>
<td>Ukuzishisa</td>
<td>Ukuzishisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To argue</td>
<td>Ukuskwilisana</td>
<td>ukuphikisama</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To argue</td>
<td>ukuphikisama</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To argue</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight</td>
<td>Ukuclasha</td>
<td>Ukpkelela</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight</td>
<td>Ukuhlasha</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight</td>
<td>Ukuhlasha</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight</td>
<td>Ukugura</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight</td>
<td>Ukugura</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To kill</td>
<td>Ukubhodisa</td>
<td>Ukulwa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To kill</td>
<td>Ukukimbila</td>
<td>Ukulwa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To kill</td>
<td>Ukumorta</td>
<td>Ukulwa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To kill</td>
<td>Ukumorta</td>
<td>Ukulwa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuskiti</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukushaya insimbi</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukupresa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukundisa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukundisa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuzishisa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuzishisa</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuheila</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuheila</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuheila</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shoot</td>
<td>Ukuheila</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
<td>Ukufosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink water</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink water</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink water</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
<td>Ukuphuza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink alcohol</td>
<td>Ukumbomba</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink alcohol</td>
<td>Ukubushaisa</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To drink alcohol</td>
<td>Ukubushaisa</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
<td>Ukupuza utshwala</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

102 From 26 language. Also under the English form *foolish.*
103 From English *to clash*
## Appendix 2: Song Lyrics

“I love you” by the band AmaKhenza (extract)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language (mix-es) and Language / switch</th>
<th>Original version with borrowings /and language-switches</th>
<th>English translation (with meaning precision)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho(Eng/Zulu)</td>
<td>D darling my baby /oyangi shaya</td>
<td>The darling my baby you're hitting me (moving me, charming me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho(English)</td>
<td>Dark material stoff sanmu selahle</td>
<td>Dark material my coal stove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Isacamtho</td>
<td>Each an'everyday my baby / oyangi charmer</td>
<td>Each and every day my baby you're charming me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho/Zulu</td>
<td>Oyangi njava / ongithanda no mangi lamba</td>
<td>You impress me you love me when I am starving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Ozoba name ntwana noma nqidta dollar</td>
<td>You'll be with me when I eat dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho/ Zulu</td>
<td>Baycoma / nabuthi ngizo kolatha</td>
<td>They're mad / when they say I'll leave you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Ngizokotrowa mina ngizoko lobola</td>
<td>I'll marry you, me, I will pay lobola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Abomona bakubeza oma gosha</td>
<td>Those with jealousy call you a prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu (English)</td>
<td>Eish!! bangi pula inside</td>
<td>Eish!! They break me inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu (English)</td>
<td>Mangi hamba nawe angi lahle ne side</td>
<td>When I'm with you I don't look aside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho</td>
<td>Ko Ferrari o zoba inside</td>
<td>In a Ferrari you'll seat inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho (English)</td>
<td>Mtwana o womonta ngizoku shada nge pride</td>
<td>Somebody's baby I'll marry you with pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho / English</td>
<td>Aothi ngibabekele / maybe they will understand</td>
<td>Let me tell them maybe they will understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho(English)</td>
<td>Owami chery bafowethu akuyise one night stand</td>
<td>My Chérie guys is not a “one night stand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English / Iscamtho</td>
<td>And another thing / akoi thandi sende</td>
<td>And another thing She doesn't like the balls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho</td>
<td>Nyeke omtole a folole inyama kuma braystand</td>
<td>You won't find her queuing for meat at a braaistand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho</td>
<td>O Tsholo okadsola a manga mtwana ngalo Sophie</td>
<td>Tsholo is telling you lies about this Sophie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho (English)</td>
<td>O ngibone naye baby ePetori</td>
<td>She's saying that she saw us in Pretoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho (English)</td>
<td>Soyi two mtwana sebokele imovie</td>
<td>Both of us watching a movie (at cinema's)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iscamtho/Afrikaans</td>
<td>Lomunto bakoesola ngaye / ek ken om nie</td>
<td>The person she's telling about / I don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3: Song Lyrics

“Amakhenza” by the band AmaKhenza (extract)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language (mix-es) and Language / switch</th>
<th>Original version with borrowings / and language-switches</th>
<th>English translation (with meaning precision)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Sonkelesikathi benisebekisela panse</td>
<td>All this time you're looking down upon us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Nezedsela okuthi sezodla panse</td>
<td>Telling yourself that we will quit/flee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Kanti yai ne shaye panse</td>
<td>Sorry guys, you've hit down (you were wrong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Benithi se ruff se funa amaAutograf</td>
<td>You thought you were rough, now you want autographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Ninga kohla okuhi you make us laugh</td>
<td>Don't forget you make us laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Ore kanjane Makhenza</td>
<td>How about it amaKhenza (those from White-City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sotho</strong></td>
<td>Omgang wko kae</td>
<td>Who are you, from where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sotho</strong></td>
<td>Otlontswetsa ke ya kae</td>
<td>Telling me to go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iscamtho / English</strong></td>
<td>Pamproga / like a kite in the sky</td>
<td>Floating like a kite in the sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Ongishayisa amaDry</td>
<td>Wasting my time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Ngoba O puza Hunters Dry</td>
<td>As if you were drinking Hunters Dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sotho/Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Leseke la lebala / ningakohla okuthi</td>
<td>Don't forget Don't forget you said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>benithi nizosifaxa</td>
<td>you would fax us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Lentwa zeya beda</td>
<td>This boys are bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ende sizozi paja</strong></td>
<td>Moreover we'll page them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Cause now we doing this</td>
<td>Cause now we're doing this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Seje kiphe nama hits</td>
<td>We'll be taking out hits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Sizoya naze Greece</td>
<td>Well be going to Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Ngisho kona overseas</td>
<td>I'm telling you there overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Ngakini soko bohlongu</td>
<td>On your side it will be painfull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sotho</strong></td>
<td>Onkare nihamba ebusuko</td>
<td>As if you've been beaten by ghosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English (Sotho)</strong></td>
<td>Like a man without Borogo</td>
<td>Like a man without trousers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu (English)</strong></td>
<td>Now nesethia thela pezulu</td>
<td>Now you're taking us high (respect us)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zulu</strong></td>
<td>Nje ngo monto omkolu o hosiesesu</td>
<td>Like someone who's respected Walter Sisulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iscamtho</strong></td>
<td>Ore kanjane Makenza</td>
<td>How about it amaKhenza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iscamtho</strong></td>
<td>Noma banga thine i Kenza</td>
<td>No matter what White City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iscamtho</strong></td>
<td>Lesazo Vena</td>
<td>will win</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 4: Song Lyrics

“Yangena Impisi” by the band AmaKhenza (extract)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language / switch</th>
<th>Original version with borrowings and language-switches</th>
<th>English translation (with meaning precision)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Yangena impisi izinzazacela</td>
<td>The hyena enters, dogs flee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Efikile yona inkosi ye zinja</td>
<td>Here comes the king of dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu(Isacntho)</td>
<td>Kona manze instile sam ngizobabekela</td>
<td>And now I'm telling you my style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu(Isacntho)</td>
<td>Ngizikele mena boza ha ngembela</td>
<td>Here comes a boss for real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho/English</td>
<td>Zonke zinja / claiming to be dog</td>
<td>All dogs claiming to be dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho/English</td>
<td>Ngine dselanonke oko / they go back to the box</td>
<td>I'm telling you all dogs go back to the box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho/English</td>
<td>Ngoba impisi manze / they are ruling your blocks</td>
<td>Because hyenas now are ruling your blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho</td>
<td>Ongadideki thina sezel nge harvoek</td>
<td>We came with force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>And we are knocking straight at your door</td>
<td>And we're knocking straight at your door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho/English</td>
<td>Osaboko ouna / you're not ready for the third world war</td>
<td>You're scared to open / you're not ready for the third world war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho</td>
<td>Nja ngiko dsele bogg</td>
<td>Dog, I'm telling you straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isacntho</td>
<td>O yo mgogo ende futhi o yiflop</td>
<td>You're a wandering dog and you flop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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