

“When the rainbow is enuf”: Black postgraduate women’s experiences and perceptions of higher
education and institutional culture –
A case study of Rhodes University

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G14G0917

Thesis in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of
Masters in Industrial and Economic Sociology (by coursework)

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Date of submission: December 2019

Word count: 23 270

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Acknowledgements

I will first thank my supervisor, Ms Tarryn Alexander, for her guidance and encouragement.

To the Rhodes Sociology department collectively, I thank you too. I must give special mention to Juanita and Sis Vuvu, for meeting the absent-mindedness of the overwhelmed Sociology MA student with graciousness and great patience.

Finally, to my family and friends. My family, for providing me with the extraordinary opportunity of postgraduate higher learning; and my friends and classmates, who have carried me through this time with great humour and unwavering support all through the year.

Abstract

This thesis sets out to investigate the perceptions which Black postgraduate students hold of the present-day toward Historically White Universities (hereafter referred to as HWUs) in South Africa as unique sites from which to investigate institutional culture and the legacy of educational marginalisation. Black women are of particular focus because of the interlocking nature of social inequalities that uniquely influence their comparable experience in the academy. Rhodes University, a top-ranked traditional university provides the institutional site for this investigation into HWUs. This thesis seeks to further explore the suggestion that desegregation of South Africa's institutions of higher learning have meant access, but not always acceptance. The paper explores what Black women students perceive to be Rhodes University's institutional culture and its impact on their lived realities. Subsequently, these women have learned who they are, and what place they occupy in South Africa today, through navigating a space not necessarily accommodating to Blackness and difference. There exists a plethora of literature on the issues which Black women scholars systematically encounter daily in the academy, in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Nonetheless, there needs to be a further inquiry on the question of belonging of Black womanhood in HWU post the student-led movements of the past few years that have renewed the challenge to South Africa's colonial past, its neoliberal present, and its scourge of gender-based violence.

This paper captures an ongoing conversation around the role of Black women in addressing transformation in HWU. As a Black woman in an HWU, I found myself wondering whether there are certain experiences students like me have in common – realities with nuances we call to identify with to some extent. I collected data from six Black women with whom I conducted interviews, and used it to compile this report and its analysis. I believe that the social significance of this study speaks to the importance of hearing the stories of subaltern groups that are positioned in spaces of privilege, yet continue to be defined by the disadvantage of their gender, race, and various other factors.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Black Women Students Post-Fees Must Fall

The past three decades have seen a slow yet steady increase in the higher education participation of Black students (Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017: 1; *Statistics South Africa*, 2017). The mid-1980s saw the mushrooming enrolment of Black students in historically white universities (hereafter referred to as HWUs) across South Africa as the fall of the apartheid regime brought about the desegregation of higher education. This allowed for unprecedented access to tertiary institutions for Black students (Martineau, 1997: 383). Major achievements have been witnessed since. Black women, in particular, are rapidly changing the academic landscape as they enter into spaces previously barred not only by racial politics, but by gender barriers as well (Martineau, 1997; McKeever, 2017; Naicker, 2013). Historically white, male-dominated spaces are widely, and aptly, believed to pose significant cultural and epistemic challenges for individuals who do not hold ranking within systems historically rooted in patriarchy and white dominance (Hotchkins, 2017; Matthews, 2015; Njovane, 2015). This is widely argued to be the case for the modern university in South Africa whose masculinist and ethnocentric history is well-documented (Bhaba 1963 cited in Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017; Davies, 1996; Rossouw, 2018).

HWU, as the specific institutional site of this research, also serves as the locus of what Black feminist scholar bell hooks befittingly articulates as the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1982). Indeed, to talk of social transformation in desegregated South African universities is to talk of forging a journey beyond a dense and intricate system of inequalities (du Preez *et al*, 2016; Heleta, 2016; Hudson, 2000). As such, this thesis sets out to capture the experiences and perspectives of Black women in higher education to grasp where in the continuum of history and transformation they perceive the state of HWUs to be today. In considering the personal perceptions of Black women at Rhodes University, I hope to gain a sense of how we understand our roles, identities, and agency concerning the troubled yet changing cultures of HWUs.

The argument is herein made that white universities in South Africa, despite their bids at diversification, remain mired in epistemic and cultural clasps of the past. The thesis explores the dual and rival forces of social reproduction and change as it takes place at HWUs and captured from the perspective of young, black women scholars. Tertiary institutions, be they historically white or historically Black, hold the profound function as a microcosm of stratified South African society, to simultaneously act as sites of post-apartheid social reproduction, and potential catalysts

for the urgent calls for social change (Douglas, 2005; Haupt, 2010). They serve as grounds on which particular social norms and values - both pre-existing in society, and created within the material confines of the institutional culture of the university- come to shape the experiences of the student population (Douglas, 2005; Roux and Becker, 2016;). These experiences are delineated by the research at hand in terms of identity conceptualization and expression; that is, how the Black woman student comes to understand who she is in the context of HWU, and how she can or cannot convey her sense of self (Heleta, 2016; Hotckins, 2017; Mackenzie, 1994).

While the university has many contradictions, serving various and sometimes opposing societal functions (as aforementioned), Black women arguably experience the brunt of the universities' reproduction of social inequalities. Indeed, as one scholar argues, they have not had the same privileges as other groups of 'being in their element' at university:

Furthermore, if we are 'out of our element'...our sense of belonging and our sense of deeply 'fitting' [with the university]...will also be undermined. We will not find ourselves and our deepest commitments mirrored in the institution's narratives (Vice, 2015: 52-53).

The research, therefore, is looking at the reality of Black women students today as participants in the South African HWU, particularly in the aftermath of 2015 - 2016 student protests. I hope to glean insight into the perceptions Black women have of these 'institutional narratives' - an idea that Dori (2016) defines as, briefly, a university's positioning in history, and the legacy it carries. The writer makes the interesting case that public universities often function as state agencies, and therein lies the great potential for them to be employed as state apparatus, to the benefit of ideological agendas held by the state and its allies. In the instance of South Africa, HWU were ideological instruments of the apartheid government. If the institutional narrative "is born out of political initiative", then Black women will not be able to find themselves reflected in the curricula, epistemology, or priorities of HWUs (Dori, 2016: 174; Vice, 2015: 53).

Institutional narratives of HWUs, generate conflict with the lived experiences of Black women students. Njovane (2015: 118) investigates these narratives, the ones belonging to women of colour at Rhodes University, remarking as a prelude that vocal Black women in HWUs are treated as 'unnecessarily political' or 'inappropriately personal'; and as such, Black women students have "[learned] to cope in silence". The resistance experienced by Black women regarding the grievances of *being* a Black woman is the unspoken disclosure that we need not provoke the

racializing (white) subject in HWUs (Maseti, 2018; Mirza, 2015; Mokhele, 2013). Black women are tasked to source their means of expression, validation, and Voice¹ when located in a space that, twenty-five years post-apartheid, remains tinged by injustice (Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017; Collins, 1986; Dancy *et al*; Mahabeer *et al*, 2018). This thesis embraces the autobiographical experiences of Black women who have forged their academic identities and intellectual lives within historically white institutions. Biography is essential to understanding ‘invisibilised’ experiences of non-normative identities such as Black women in historically white universities. This is based on the longstanding Black feminist belief that biographical research challenges the traditional and Cartesian “divide of the feeling body as separate from the thinking mind” (Khunou *et al*, 2019: 3-5)

In-depth, open-ended interviews were therefore used to enable Black women students to privately but frankly speak of their realities and truths. The qualitative theoretical framing employed is that of Black feminist standpoint theory, closely complemented by a phenomenological approach to understanding possible influences behind Black women's experiences (see *Chapter Two*). The research does not simply ask Black women students to tell their stories. It seeks to contribute toward growing literature on discerning whence our experiences come through highlighting how our lived experiences, unique as they are, are birthed from overarching historical processes and their persisting socio-economic injustices (Collins, 1986; Harnois, 2010; Reynolds, 2002.)

1.2 Goals and Sub-objectives

The primary goal of the research is to address how Black women narrate their own experiences as Humanities postgraduate students at Rhodes University - as per their perceptions of HWU - and, subsequently, their understanding of their purpose and fit in this particular institutional culture.

Specifically, the research will attempt to address, through fieldwork carried out, the following concerns:

- a) Whether and to what extent Black women students feel they are being given the opportunity at Rhodes University to explore their identities in university settings that, theoretically, are meant to lend growth and awareness of the individual, and her reality;

¹ See 3.2.3 *Belonging and the Black Voice* for defense in the capitalisation of "Voice"

- b) How Black postgraduate women describe racial, gendered, and classed aspects of institutional culture at Rhodes University;
- c) And what circumstances and ideologies present in HWUs may inform a commonality of experience for Black women postgraduates.

1.3 Methodological Paradigm

The research employs Black feminism as a theoretical framework. As a framework, Black feminist thought understands the intersectional discrimination that women of colour face - indeed, central to this school of thought is the creation of consciousness around oppression and concealed realities (Simien, 2004: 81).

In HWU, there exists the erasure of Black women thinkers and the contributions they have made to science, including the human sciences. It is befitting to my research that Simien (2004: 82) in particular talks about women taking charge of knowledge production to appraise traditional approaches - such as positivism - in reaching truths about race and gender (also see Moletsane *et al*, 2015; Dzuback, 2003). Black feminism proposes to be a suitable alternative to these traditional approaches, both methodologically and epistemologically. That is, using Black feminism as its own epistemology; notwithstanding, of course, its inherent use of interpretivism (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006; Edwards, 1990). Black feminist thought stands in direct defiance to the white, western history of positivism that confines social study to experience only that which can be observed empirically (Cancian, 1992; Sprague and Kobryniewicz, 2006; Udry, 2001). Thus, by restricting reality to only what one can sense and observe 'scientifically', and not what one can conceive by way of one's experiences of intangibly expressed oppression, positivist research has the potential to silence subaltern knowledge.

In contrast, schools of thought that place perception at the forefront, such as queer theory and feminism, give rise to pieces of knowledge that depart from tradition. In subverting convention, they challenge the academy's institutional injustice in necessary and profound ways (Rudy, 2000; Smyth *et al*, 2018). Black feminist methodology, therefore, serves to provide this paper with the lens of difference for the sake of flouting what Mbembe (2016: 32) termed the "Eurocentric epistemic canon" in which Western ways of knowledge production are positioned as the only way of knowledge production. As epistemology refers, fundamentally, to the validity and scope of knowledge, the Eurocentric epistemic canon therefore implies the exclusion therein of Blackness

and knowledge produced from ethnic experiences. The Eurocentric canon is the one practised in HWUs; it is the one that maintains racial exclusion and defends assimilation to Eurocentric norms (Heleta, 2016; Mbembe, 2015). Black feminist thought fights this canon, calling for the Black woman's Voice to resist, rebel, and redefine the parameters that HWUs has imposed upon her in Black feminist thought presenting alternative realities, and more nuanced truths to the academy.

1.4 Research Methods, Procedures and Techniques

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Black women postgraduate students at Rhodes University. The interviewees were exclusively drawn from the Humanities faculty and were recruited via purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of respondents based on particular objective qualities they share (Tongco, 2007: 147). The criteria for purposive selection were: Black women students registered in the Humanities faculty for postgraduate studies at the time of selection; and these were women I approached on campus, inviting them to participate if they matched the criteria as aforementioned. The interview schedule focused on Black women's experiences of HWUs with a focus on experiences defined by gender, race, class, and sexuality in the face of whiteness, patriarchy, and a society stratified by biased wealth distribution. Data collection took place over three weeks on campus in the postgraduate commons, and interviews were recorded for transcription and thematic analysis.

The interpretation and structure of the meaning of collected data were carried out and will be presented through both deductive and inductive reasoning (Johnson, 1932). That is, deductively, that the research offered assumptions and secondary sources about HWUs institutional culture (see *Chapter Two*), and made subsequent inferences that were put under interrogation during the interview process (Johnson, 1932: 27). Inductive reasoning, from that point forward, was employed to generate ideas on HWUs I had not yet explored leading up to the fieldwork. I emphasise the necessity of both avenues of thought, not only to endeavour for a stronger empirical basis for the concluding arguments of my research (see *Chapter Four: Conclusion*) but also with regards to the ethical considerations discussed below.

1.5 Ethical Considerations, Challenges, and Limitations

This research was conducted under the ethical guidelines set by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee that account for confidentiality and informed consent. Ethical considerations related to the research at hand involved, firstly, navigating the conversation with participants as they opened up about their respective journeys in understanding who they are, and the trails they have faced as Rhodes University students. This, in turn, presented two major challenges regarding, firstly, the nature of my interaction with participants; and secondly, how I approached my analysis.

Discussion upon the former issue stems primarily from the issue of bias and values in scientific research (Baddeley, 2015; Sica, 2006; Wilholt, 2008). While qualitative methodology and inquiry understand that research cannot be completely value-free (Norris, 2007), the study of this paper was additionally vulnerable to confirmation bias as a result of autoethnography being adopted as a research strategy (see *1.4 Research Methods, Procedures, and Techniques*). As a Black woman myself at the institution, the question of the appropriateness of my proximity to the subject matter has been a significant methodological and philosophical point of tension. I have had to practice introspection on my reasons for conducting this research: whether it has been for my sense of finding vindication for my afflictions in this institution, or if I have been trying to bring to life a dislocated part of my identity. The research was both driven by a sense of personal discovery, and a sense of duty to join in the uncovering of hidden identities and experiences in higher education. The research pursues theoretical rigour in asking the questions at hand, but it is a study that is undeniably driven by passion. The more we can understand the dynamics of what exists today, the more we may begin to construct what the university could be as a more equal place.

In addition, I became aware ever so often throughout the process, of the inclination on my part to question, celebrate, or justify the experiences and subsequent values and perspectives of the participants. When their ideas on the various themes discussed in the interview schedule did not align with what I thought to be true and correct, I noted feelings of discomfort and, more troublesomely, feelings of intellectual elitism; where I placed my position as an MA Sociology candidate as the more legitimate standing. As aforementioned, though judgemental rationality is a cornerstone of critical realism (Archer *et al*, 2016: para 10), the heart of my research is the experiences Black women have of HWUs, and experiences are as such because they are not grounded in objective reality. Another ethical compromise was found therein, and I had to make

my deductions on the weight I would grant to subjectivity in the midst of interrogating the highly nuanced catalysts behind these subjective experiences. As the interview process went on, my motivations behind the research at hand went from being a vindication to an anthology, to a probe demanding as great impartiality as was possible.

As such, I believe I was able to find closure on these particular ethical and intellectual challenges by both employing the ideals of epistemic relativism, and understanding the place and relevance of judgemental rationality (see *1.4 Research Methods, Procedures, and Techniques*). My decision to propel my research forward in this manner was further buttressed - and, perhaps, even catalyzed - by my desire to lean on both inductive and deductive reasoning. That is, to gain a greater sense of the experiences of Black women students of HWUs by trying to understand what HWU institutional culture is in the first place. This, I believe is necessary, if for no other reason than to avoid a situation in which the research is effectively offering insight into phenomena that it has yet to truly grasp and articulate.

Finally, inductive and deductive reasoning - which I found to be the baseline for the route my thought process took - presented a way for me to

- a) Initiate the conversation of the research, and;
- b) Consolidate the unexpected turn of discourse with existing literature upon which my preconceptions had been founded.

1.6 Brief Chapter Outline

Chapter one will introduce the conversation of Black women at Rhodes University operating in HWU institutional culture, and how and why the research directed toward their experiences was carried out.

The objective of chapter two is to describe the literature that informed the research; and situate the literature spatially, historically, and socially in the context of South Africa.

Then, chapter three serves to analyse the data to understand the realities of Black women students at Rhodes, what higher education means for these women, and the role that the institution does or does not play in South Africa's path to transformation.

Chapter four will round up the research with concluding remarks.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Context and Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual framework and existing literature

The following chapter will discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework that will guide the research, before exploring the existing literature on the topic.

Briefly, this thesis is an investigation into how Black women students experience institutional culture at HWUs. The literature review will discuss how HWUs are spaces in which white patriarchy continues to form part of the status quo. Questions on the nature and extent of the continuities of the raced and gendered aspects to institutional culture at tertiary institutions in South Africa are at the centre. The crux of this inquiry is an investigation of Black women students' experiences at a historically white South African university.

Existing literature on the issues of alienation and rejection that are experienced by students of colour in HWUs are vast and enduring, and this research hopes to add to the ventures taken by Black feminists in addressing the lack of transformation within South African HWUs in the twenty-five-year mark of democracy (Fataar, 2018; Mahabeer *et al*, 2018; Roux and Becker, 2016). Scholars on this subject matter make the pertinent argument that desegregation has not necessarily led to integration in former exclusively-white spaces (Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017; Meier and Hartell, 2009; Sennett *et al*, 2003).

Responding to this claim, the research wishes to investigate the case study of Rhodes University, and how Black women students in this institution experience desegregated - though not yet integrated - institutional culture from the lens of their respective nationalities, postgraduate levels, and departments within the Humanities faculty. The research hopes to garner further insight into the issue by investigating whether existing literature on South African HWUs carries the same implications for Black women postgraduate students of different backgrounds, and how unique each of their experiences and perceptions is.

2.2 “The Outside In...The Outside Out”: Framing Black African Feminism

2.2.1 Black feminism – Rise in the western world

The theoretical framework of the research is Black feminist standpoint theory, a framework whose most recognised theorists are Hill Collins (1986), hooks (1981), and Davis (1983), who rose to critical international acclaim following the feminist movement of the 1970s. Combined, these three women have made clear and impactful conceptualisations for what was previously considered a sort of esoteric-type knowledge. hooks sums up the catalyst for making the realities of women of colour relevant, important and tangible long before Black feminist thought became a familiar and widely accepted theoretical framework and epistemology:

living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing society. We looked from both the outside and in from the inside out...we understood both (Hooks, 1984 cited in Collins, 1986: 15).

Black feminist theory became crucial for women of colour living in the west as the 1970s feminist movement on its own did little for the emancipation of Black women and minority groups; instead, working for the primary liberation of white women (Frankenburg, 1993; Wilson, 1996). Within what some may call ‘mainstream’ feminism, what was crucial to the movement was the one-dimensional oppression of gender under an idea of patriarchy that was seemingly not conceived as injurious to more than one sect of the western population (see 2.2.2 *African feminism – Understanding postcoloniality* for discussion on how the west’s attempts to emancipate itself from patriarchy was not extended to the harm that the global south suffered against western imperialism). As such, hooks explains in *Ain’t I a Woman* (1981), and *Black is a Woman’s Color* (1989), Black women were left to navigate their identity almost exclusively within ‘mainstream’ feminism. Black women have had to prove that they deserve the status, rights, and place as given to white women. Black feminist thought thus became a necessary paradigm for placing, articulating, and presenting the unique view that Black women have of social power, and of inequality in the between in the modern world. On the periphery of both mainstream feminism, and the anti-colonial movement, women of colour developed their ways of seeing the world. This intersectional perspective that Black women have was absent from popular discourse at the time that mainstream feminism was gaining traction. In choosing to refrain from assimilating into mainstream feminism that did not, as aforementioned, cater to their interests, Black women designed a lens and understanding of reality that spoke to them.

2.2.2 African feminism – Understanding postcoloniality

Ampofo *et al* (2008) provide a useful contextualisation for feminism and its significance to African women, and the oppressions we suffer specific to a history that western Black women may not necessarily relate to so closely. While transnational feminism and its impact on Africa is not necessarily a central theoretical point to the research at hand, it is a valuable insight into how the feminist movement broadly is relevant to and is sustained in Africa. It is an important addition to the conversation around Black women's lived realities that factors in spatially-specific historical legacies, and in doing so, confronts how mainstream feminism has chosen to be blind to aspects still crucial to the oppression of women of colour (Ampofo *et al*, 2008: 2; Desai, 2007; Kuumba, 2003). The writers aptly describe how transnational feminism, when used in conjunction with Black feminism to describe the experiences of the global south, is, in the succinct words of Ampofo *et al* (2008: 2), “a broader growth of feminist knowledge production and activism, based on anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonialist agendas”. Therein is the demonstration of the potential for African women to “resist and transform the global matrix of simultaneous nation/class/gender oppression” (Kuumba, 2003: 4).

Amina Mama (2004) talks of how necessary a revision of western feminism is for Black African women when one investigates how the mainstream feminism that developed in the 1970s was largely about entry for [white] women into patriarchal institutions (Mama, 2004: 121). Women of colour adopting similar approaches have found themselves only further relegated to the margins, and hugely disadvantaged. Imbricating Blackness to feminism, and further still, an Africanism, means, firstly, taking institutions that Black women need access to with the priority of fundamental social change from the outset (Mama, 2004). Secondly, and more urgently, Black African feminism means interrogating the idea of ethnic and racial identity – a concept taken for granted by mainstream feminists who have historically constructed feminism as the struggle against patriarchy (and solely white patriarchy at that) under the banner of gender alone. Women of colour in the global south must necessarily consider freedom from oppression beyond gender identification. Black African women must further contend with the anti-imperialist and postcolonialist struggle, with their inherent themes of colour, and class inequality.

Gqola (2001) and Mama (2001) raise the subsequent discussion around the identity of a Black African woman – particularly, how she structures, gives meaning to, and navigates her identity

(Maqagi, 1990). The implications of a Black woman both carrying her identity and deciding for herself the particularities of how she expresses and makes sense of it indicates the agency of women of colour amid her interlocking oppressions. This is a crucial point in understanding African feminism; that Black African women, despite their histories of struggle and silencing, remain agents of their destinies (Gqola, 2001: 12). Women of colour therefore need a means by which they can interrogate their realities and remedy their social conditions. Most pressing is the opportunity to confront the ideologies of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy with a strategy that "[excavates] the silences and pathological appearance of a collection of women assigned as the 'other' and produced in gendered, sexualised, wholly racialized discourse" (Mirza, 1997: 20). Black feminism was conceived to do just that, making a formidable exercise out of a set of ideas when combined with standpoint theory, as explored by Hill Collins (1986).

2.2.3 Standpoint Theory – Dismantling essentialism and misconceptions

In a sentence, standpoint theory is about recognising that authority over knowledge is established in an individual's perspective on that world, especially when that individual is an outlier of society by race, gender, etc (Allen, 1996). For this reason, I have decided to use standpoint as the theoretical paradigm for my research – as Black women students in HWU are certainly outliers to white institutional culture. I believe it provides a foundation upon which I might make important inferences from my interviews with the respondents. The 'common perceptual plane' is an idea drawn on throughout my research, for the sake of self-definition (Hill Collins, 1986). Key theorists of Black and African feminism discuss how self-definition is a precursor for self-determination in a world that has historically tried to determine the fate of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Lorde, 1982; Mama, 2001; Ngozi Adichie, 2017)

Neale Hurston (1943) is quoted as saying, "I have the nerve to walk my own way, however hard, in my search for reality, rather than climb upon the rattling wagon of wishful illusions." Her words shed light on the view Black feminists share on the agency of a Black woman in finding out who she is on her terms, no matter the limitations set upon her by outward circumstances (such as, aforementioned, those present in HWUs). Hill Collins (1986) discusses at length self-definition in relation to self-validation as well. The conclusion we can make from her and the work of other theorists, therefore, are that both self-validation and self-determination are crucial elements to the Black woman student understanding her experiences of patriarchy, class privilege, and social

capital in HWU closely associated with whiteness (see *1.1 Black women students in HWU* and *Chapter Three: Data Analysis*).

There exist interlocking oppressions that act against Black women. The Black woman's raced and gendered positioning in society gives her a particular frame of reference for understanding her subjective reality that is shaped by social institutions that stand objectively. Specifically, Black women occupy a space that allows them the potential to see, experience, and thus theorise about western patriarchy in a different way than any individual of a different race or gender would. This is what Rolin calls “the thesis of epistemic advantage” (2019: 218). One interpretation about standpoint theory is that knowledge generated by Black women about social reality is less distorted than that of privileged groups by the very absence of [certain] privileges in the lives of women of colour (Allen, 1996; Harnois, 2010; Reynolds, 2010; Rolin, 2019). The lack of social or economic capital of Black women communities means that the material and ideological oppressions behind otherwise concealed elements of power structures in our society are very real and very present to Black women. Black women, therefore, are susceptible to greater sensitivity in picking up the social injustices acted against their communities (Harnois, 2010; Reynolds, 2010).

Rolin (2009: 218) is careful to point out that epistemic advantage is not, as critics may be quick to claim, epistemic *privilege* that comes from being a member of an oppressed group alone. Rather, it is a collection of ideas and insight that is contingent on a Black woman's experiences and learned perceptions of the world. These experiences and perceptions are valuable to the oppressed and the privileged alike because they fill the alarming gap in popular discourse and epistemological praxis regarding groups on the frays of white patriarchy. Miranda Fricker (2008 cited in Rolin, 2009: 221) calls this 'hermeneutical injustice', particular social experiences denied from, or at least left unclear and almost esoteric within collective understanding about social reality. Black feminists contribute toward filling this gap with standpoint theory's notion of Black women sharing a 'common perceptual plane'. This is the recognition that Black women are not a homogenous identity, but that, rather, each of their novel experiences in some ways is shaped by shared themes, or factors widely recognised as catalysts for these experiences (Collins, 1986: 16).

A criticism of Black feminist standpoint theory that scholars and researchers must take heed of is the danger of representing a singular experience through the idea that the common perceptual plane is an essentialist experiment (Hill Collins, 2000: 299; Reynolds, 2002). For what tends to happen is that the already damaging perceptions of Black women held by the dominant group are

reproduced by what society deems as the appropriate gatekeepers to an identity (Hill Collins, 2000: 95; Reynolds, 2002: 594). The trope of poverty, abuse, and victimhood that attaches itself to society's understanding of Black women persists because of a handful of problematic circumstances. Most glaringly is the "sociological dysfunction...that pathologizes Black women's lives because they are unable to be conceived other than in a victim/problem context" (Mirza and Gunaratnam, 2014: 128; Reynolds, 2002: 594). At its core, this fetishizes Black women's plights without it being necessary for a scholar, peer, or observer to critically engage with the more crucial nuances to a Black woman's identity. It reduces Black women from subjects and pioneers of inquiry to objects of investigation (Longino, 1993; Reynolds, 2002: 595). The secondary problem is that, as this ontological fallacy persists, therefore, only Black women who fulfil the aforementioned specific criteria of disadvantage are brought into and made the centre of the conversation (Reynolds, 2002: 591). Perhaps it is less taxing for white men – and Black women, to some extent – to accept that the identity in question is complex and diverse, and calls for more than generic assumptions of chronic suffering. Finally, the reliance of popular discourse on these tired platitudes of what defines the quintessential Black woman's reality has founded a situation in which Black women who are privileged by class, sexuality, and colourism are called upon to speak for *all* Black women in an attempt to remedy negative perception (Hill Collins, 2000: 110; Reynolds, 2002: 600). The common perceptual plane is a means to try negate this fallacy: by acknowledging a range of different realities that exist for Black women.

A criticism of Black feminist standpoint theory that scholars and researchers must take heed of is the danger of representing a singular experience (O'Leary, 1997: 45; Reynolds, 2002), which I believe may take place should Black feminist scholars be over-reliant in the idea that standpoint ought to fill a gospel truth lacking from the discourse about Black women (Hekman, 1997: 343). Already damaging perceptions of Black women in circulation are reproduced by the individual, group, or theoretical paradigm considered as the appropriate gatekeeper/s to an identity when the dissemination of a particular knowledge rests solely on either pathologizing or deifying the experiences of the marginalized (Reynolds, 2002; Hekman, 1997: 343; Welton, 1998). Still, there needs to be the discerning mind that does not, in rightfully placing Black women in the position of the subject, mistakenly place us in the position of omniscience (Harnois, 2010: 71; Hekman, 1997). It is imperative, I find, that the Black woman is not burdened with the weight of being the paragon of truth in articulating her experiences of injustice. In the error of doing so, Black feminist thought, and its long-standing companion of standpoint theory, may lose one of its greatest tenets of validating personal truths (Hartsock 1983 cited in Hekman, 1997: 345; Hill Collins, 1986);

instead coming to peremptorily portray itself as being beyond reappraisal, and the ebb and flow of change (Harding, 2004: 27; Hekam, 1997; Smith, 1978).

2.1.4 Conclusion – Relevance, application, and legitimacy

The insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one determining the technical accuracy of an image to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself (Hill Collins, 1986: 17).

Standpoint theory opens up the epistemic and cultural horizon for 'self-definition'; and for Black women, self-definition is a radical act. When Black women in HWU claim themselves from pathology, from circumstance, and from gatekeeping, they begin to breach the culture that confines them to an object of inquiry rather than the agent of her own exploration of reality.

Like all other ontologies and epistemologies, Black feminist standpoint must be met with caution for the sake of intellectual integrity. Nevertheless, it was an effective and pragmatic means of exploring and articulating experiences long undermined by Rhodes' institutional culture. As a South African HWU, the institution provides a space in which a multiplicity of individuals exist with their ideologies and standpoints. The philosophy and praxis of exploration of Black women's voices therein presented the opportunity to express the relevance of relegated lived realities in post-apartheid South Africa through the manageable microcosmic lens of a university campus.

The next section will further define and expound upon the ideas conceived by Black feminism and standpoint theory in addressing the realities of Rhodes University students. These ideas, in brief, firstly, speak to the experiences of Black women in HWU that have been consigned to second-class citizenship, so to speak. Secondly, they unpack how these experiences are, in fact, highly valuable to understanding HWUs in this era of student socio-political unrest – an era of dismantling hierarchies, challenging oppression, and acknowledging Blackness.

It is an era at Rhodes University that I believe has made its mark for a long time to come, and Black women must observe and consolidate our realities with ideas and discourse past and present.

2.3 "Somebody Sing a Black Girl's Song": The Story So Far

2.3.1 *A prelude to Black women thinkers*

Mirza (2009) provides an adequate starting point to link the theoretical framework of Black feminism to the discussion of its real-life implications for experiences of race and gender in higher education. Through locating Black women in postcoloniality, she provides clarity on the effects that the power relations – as aforementioned in the analysis of Rolin (2009) – have on the lived realities of Black women within tertiary institutions in an era of civil rights and feminism. Her emphasis on 'embodied intersectionality' and 'embodied narratives' is to illustrate how subjects that place themselves in spaces of academic pursuit are raced and gendered by the dominant group therein (Mirza, 2009: 234). It is a group which, conversely, is commonly expressed not explicitly as 'the white male' but simply a prototype and the definitive knowledge-producer (Collins, 1986: 26). Black women, once having entered into the white, male-dominated spaces of HWU, find they cannot forget their assignment of identity as appointed to and expected of them by the dominant group. All that a Black woman can do in the given circumstances is to prove her capability as an intellectual, and, more fundamentally, to demonstrate that her presence and participation is just as justified as that of her white male colleagues. Mirza (2009: 235) puts it in this way: "For postcolonial women of colour, it is impossible to escape the body and its reconstructions as we negotiate our embodied social institutions". For even in the success they attain, Black bodies are inhibited in transcending their physical form that sets them apart from the orthodox figure of the white male scholar. Black women who manage to establish themselves within HWU cannot simply be seen as erudite. Rather, their achievements are inclined to be articulated as 'exceptional' (Mirza: 2009: 235). That is, that they can only be the exception, and cannot instead be perceived as just as commonplace to knowledge production and transmission as white men are. In HWU, Black women are familiar with tokenism, and Bhattacharya (2000 cited in Mirza 2009: 235) warns that treating Black women's scholarship as 'heroic' or 'remarkable' may have the opposite intended effect by "[countering] invisibility and negative stereotypes deeply embedded in our thinking [about Black women's competence]" (Mirza, 2009: 235).

2.3.2 *Black women in white spaces*

HWUs are defined by a homogenous identity of whiteness (Casey cited in Mirza, 2009: 239). Despite growing numbers of people of colour within these universities, their institutional cultures remain a colonial gaze that prefers silence and assimilation, creating a space in which these individuals experience feelings of isolation, hostility, and disregard (Mirza, 2009: 240). Facing

doubt from others regarding one's worth – in this instance, specifically, one's competence to become learned in higher education – is a suitable breeding ground for processes of self-exclusion to take place: "a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is [already] excluded" (Reay et al cited in Mirza, 2009: 240). Notwithstanding, these processes remain underpinned by what Brah (cited in Mirza, 2009: 240) calls the juncture of structure, culture, and agency, where people of colour must navigate the social conditions they find themselves in tandem with proactive force needed to change these conditions for their own sake. It is necessary to confute the idea that Black women simply stand at the mercy of systemic oppression and wait for things to happen to them. Black women have always taken charge of combating the compromising conditions placed upon them, but the confines of institutions long held up by cultures that champion the dominant groups mean that pushing for positive change can be constantly met with great resistance. Further, this resistance does not show itself merely in conservative ideologies or right-wing protest placards, but is thinly veiled in the practices of HWU; namely, in the coexistence of invisibility and hyper surveillance (Mirza, 2009: 242). People of colour within HWU must grapple with being both unacknowledged, and being closely monitored in suspicion by authorities. Their experiences are met with either indifference or objectification, and their very presence attracts close scrutiny out of apprehension, voyeurism, and skepticism. To conclude on her discussion, the writer stresses the need for institutions of higher education as they stand to be understood as, firstly, the means to propagate prevailing discourses; and, secondly, as an experience of struggle (2009: 244). In doing so, Black women students within HWU, and even the dominant groups therein, may be able to recognize the necessity for change, through the open articulation of the nature of their lived realities that are impacted by the interlocking oppressions of the past.

These lived realities are tangibly captured in the literature that speaks to Black South African women at HWU; the interlocking oppressions of race, gender, and class that they face a consequence of the country's apartheid regime that allowed for the establishment of HWU, and the white patriarchal institutional cultures of these establishments thereof. To understand especially the racialized and classed dynamics of HWU, one needs to consider the country's past that enforced white patriarchal institutional cultures within universities as a means of preserving the control and the ascendancy of the white dominant group. The apartheid regime and its processes of race hierarchy were used to justify cheap labour and separate policy development (Roux & Becker, 2016: 132), and education provided an important mechanism for maintaining a society defined by the body, and its meaning defined by dominant ideologies. Both Bantu education and white

universities served the same purpose – to subjugate the Black population by reserving resources to grant the white minority greater wealth and opportunities. The exclusion of Black students from higher education, and later, the strict segregation between Black and white universities, founded an environment ripe for the economic and social interests of white South Africans demonstrated potently on campuses. Every institution of education possesses certain visions, objectives, and customs; all of which constitute their institutional culture (Vice, 2015: 62). Vice goes further to express that universities are essentially "[bearers and expressions] of tradition [which gives an institution] distinctive character". Tradition – its customs, objectives, and visions – are made palpable within an institution for a great number of years, and as such, HWUs have an expanse of history of beliefs and behavior which privilege whiteness. As such, despite progress made in South Africa's arena of racial politics, universities that socialized and educated white students during apartheid are now sites of great contradiction that wrestle with the country's democratic hopes, and the legacy of racial strains. Pillay claims that:

The individual is locked into, framed and envisioned within a group identity that he or she has not chosen to be in and this identity determines one's fate (Pillay cited in Roux & Becker, 2016: 132).

With the argument that race is not a neutral concept or negotiation (Pillay cited in Roux & Becker, 2016: 132), this means that South Africans who were given the banner of 'white' under apartheid legislation became the beneficiaries of state favour, and came to expect a treatment different from that handed to the population acknowledged as 'Black'. This has had enduring implications for how formerly segregated institutions navigate post-1994 social democratic policies. In the space of higher education, HWUs that were located in relation to the white South Africa of ample opportunity still benefit from reserves of significant calibre in comparison to the subsequently 'othered' ethnic universities (Thaver & Thaver cited Roux & Becker, 2016: 132). Therefore, one is right to question whether HWUs in democratic South Africa can fully comprehend the scope of what it means for an institution to be diverse and representative of all races (Thaver & Thaver cited in Roux & Becker, 2016: 132), and to be able to put into practice the responsibilities that accompany the changing landscape of the student population. Booi *et al* (2017: 500) puts forward the idea that progress made for the benefit of this changing landscape may not be met because of the assumptions that underlie the institutional practices of HWU regarding race, class, and gender. HWU comes from a past in which it was whiteness that defined the ideal side of the colour-line, "as evident in the widening gap between the rhetoric of transformation and the experiences of

Black students and academics at South African universities" (Booi *et al*, 2017: 500). Power relations of South African society are mirrored in HWU and continue to be perpetuated through perceiving certain practices and epistemologies as normal, ultimately contributing to hermeneutical injustice (Booi *et al*, 2017: 500). An instance in which white patriarchal institutional culture is seen to be celebrated to this day is when the university looks back on its 'history of excellence', invoking a past that was only kind to a minority selected for the birthright of their race and gender. Booi *et al* (2017: 501) makes the stellar argument that whatever is conceived as 'excellent' is beyond reproach, and the idea of change remains confined to classroom debates, as there is seemingly nothing within the institution that needs remedy.

The writers make brief use of Bourdieu in their discussion of how the value of HWU in present-day South Africa is based on social capital just as much as it has its origins in economic forms of capital. The networks made within these institutions as a result of bearing and associating with the right class, family name, and other conveyors of social status, are used by agents to create and sustain situations inclined to their favour (Booi *et al*, 2017: 501). Further, these networks remain viable and fortified through things like favours and almost esoteric information that serves to reinforce one group's dominance over the social capital relevant to a particular society or space (Booi *et al*, 2017: 501.) As such, there lies a degree of 'risk' in associating with individuals who do not have this social capital, as they may not be trusted to articulate the principles and perform the behaviour that would contribute to the prevailing social order (Booi *et al*, 2017: 502).

However, as much as membership to a particular group with established social capital is not automatic, it is also not entirely closed off from individuals outside the dominant group. A Black woman student in HWU, therefore, might be entrusted with the aforementioned services and knowledge of the privileged class should she be perceived as the 'right kind of candidate "likely to 'fit in' and safeguard the production of dominant cultural dispositions" (Booi *et al*, 2017: 504). The authors explain that this individual would have been identified by their acquaintanceship with central aspects of the institutional culture of HWU, having been socialized in similar environments throughout their lives (Booi *et al*, 2017: 504). She may have an 'accent' palatable to the white ear, is familiar with western canon, or possesses other attributes that make her less of a threat to the existing social structure. Nevertheless, the findings Booi *et al* (2017: 504) made are that even these 'ideal candidates' are vulnerable to experiences of invisibility and rejection when they diverge from their assimilation. When a person of colour attempts to disrupt the status quo of HWU, whether it be for ideology and curriculum, or action and norms, the reality of their position in relation to the

dominant group is exposed to not be a legitimate membership (Booi *et al*, 2017: 505). Rather, it is revealed to be lip service to the idea of integration, and simply another means of reproducing the ideology of the normative group (Booi *et al*, 2017: 505). The writers sum up the notion of institutional cultures of HWU rather aptly in saying that:

Existing unequal structural power relations, disguised as neutral and objective values of academic experience and 'excellence', are used by players in the field to sustain their privileged position and to reproduce the institution in their image (Booi *et al*, 2017: 508).

2.3.3 Subaltern Voices

Within HWUs, therefore, is the impasse presented to Black women students regarding her self-expression, and the space in which she may legitimise her identity. When integration is an ideal rather than a materializing priority in institutions of higher learning, marginalised groups remain confronted by a choice of duality. That is, assimilation, or rejection; whether by language, ideology, or culture. By virtue of its name, duality undermines multiplicity. Black women are stifled by the decision to exist either one way or the other, and it is in this way that the issue of Voice is so pressing in the academy.

In hoping to answer issues of gender inequality, HWUs have tended toward the plights of white women, resolving qualms with narratives and practices of white feminism. When addressing South Africa's historically race-based class disadvantage, these institutions draw up criteria founded on hard quantitative principles that subvert the reach of certain socio-political limitations. These linear approaches to solving problems present within spaces of privileged white patriarchy are ineffective in speaking to the intersectional oppressions of primarily class, race, and gender faced by Black women students. As such, these women are put in a position where they must not only make calls to authorities as the subordinate group but are also tasked with justifying their needs. As literature tells us, going back to the days of hooks, and entering into the era of Gqola, the pleas Black women make of the academy, and the subsequent claims of validation they have to provide are often through the telling of their accounts of white patriarchy. Voice of Black women - and by this, I refer to her experience (as opposed to other aspects of 'voice', such as accent and language) - has an invaluable place in HWUs for, if nothing else, the sake of education. Divala (2014) explicates the pivotal relationship between the lived experiences of Black women and the role that education should be intended to serve in the South African HWU. Her writings on the Black women academics' narratives detail how progress simply cannot be reached without the contribution of

Black women's truths. Though Divala (2014) deals specifically with academics, the gravamen of the conversation is that perennial knowledge production and dissemination rests on the reflexive and critical capacity of a thinker. It is only in engaging in 'niche' or subaltern narratives with the intent to listen and understand can the academy continue to operate reputedly as an institute of learning. For there exists crucial meaning between education and emancipation, as philosophized prominently by Ranciere. Divala (2014) makes use of Means' (2011 cited in Divala, 2014: 2083) analysis of this meaning, which is this: That education holds within it the potential to free an individual from the constraints of the present by offering a more scrupulous and equitable society. A critical mind, writes Divala and Mathebula 2013 cited in Divala 2014), is the enlightened mind.

'Oppression is a form of pedagogization of the social order' - a process that seeks to make people believe that what the social order offers is good and should not be changed (Divala, 2014: 2084).

As HWU act as microcosms, they cannot, no matter their esteem or degree of liberalism, claim to be free of the country's wider existing social order as lodged by the apartheid regime. The western, colonial-esque epistemology valorized in our curriculums, the concentration of resources in the hands of a majority white-male Senate, and social capital tied with generational wealth all point to a legacy of a gendered and racialised state of affairs on the campuses of HWU.

Henceforth, it is imperative that white institutions of learning approach and invite the narratives of its marginalized groups with a keen ear, if they are going to offer an education of integrity. That is, one in which enlightenment and emancipation are key, as heretofore outlined. Though a mere thesis cannot, of course, offer a gateway into a transformed world of pedagogy, the acknowledgment and acceptance of subaltern realities as bona fide sources of knowledge production is a necessary contribution to democratic education. Simply put, a Black woman's Voice in the South African academy constitutes education and social justice.

2.3.4 Articulating resistance

somebody/ anybody

sing a black girl's song

bring her out

to know herself

to know you

but sing her rhythms

carin/ struggle/ hard times
sing her song of life

The above excerpt from Ntozake Shange's (1976) play, after which this thesis is titled, is an appropriate segue to standpoint feminism, and how it can be demonstrated today by the Black women who occupy South Africa's HWU. As standpoint has already been discussed in the previous section (see 2.1 "*The Outside In...The Outside Out*": *Framing Black African Feminism*), this subsection will attempt to look into how Black women students at these institutions can convey their struggles.

Voice (see 2.1.3 *Subaltern Voices*) as a Black woman's experience is in many ways influenced by her accent and language, and how these things compare and contrast to her surroundings. Fanon (1986: 38) serves as an adequate reference point in his musings on the Black subject's grasp of the white man's language; that "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture". South Africa has eleven official languages, and the medium of instruction in most of its HWU is English. This means that, regardless of a Black student's background and mother tongue, her immediate culture, her primary world, is overtaken - or, at least, comes to share dominance with - English. South Africa's history of English cannot be undone from the country's history of cultural imperialism and oppression of Black languages. As such, a Black student taking up English for the sake of finding opportunity at an HWU runs parallel to the potential for misfortune that this same student may face on her campus. Using the oppressor's language to speak out against oppression was a concern taken up by Fanon, and relayed by Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam (2019) as they dissected how Black working-class students at South African HWU find, or do not find, academic success. The gravamen of the article speaks to the issues of social justice found within these institutions, but the writers make an interesting preface. That is, matters such as transformation and decolonization can only follow the trajectory of the tongue in which an HWU operates (Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam, 2019: 1-2). If, as aforementioned, the English language is a leftover vestige of white imperialism, the English language, therefore, can neither express the totality of its oppression nor bring about all changes needed to achieve decolonization in its fullest.

However, this is not the main point I wish to make. Rather, I bring this up in relevance to the various ways that Black women students at formerly white institutions can, and feel comfortable to, speak their truths. In the third world at large, there have been growing instances of women scholars writing theses in their home languages regardless of the university's teaching medium.

Otherwise, some papers that are written in English have been aimed at critiquing this very use of the language. However, it is not always the case that the student wishes to oppose English, or universities and their use thereof. South African HWUs have been delegatized with much more than English whiteness, but with unfair treatment toward gender and class differences (see *2.1.2 Black women in white spaces*). The relevance of this is as such: that Black women who occupy different socioeconomic conditions in South Africa will most likely speak differently. Aside from their home language (which do still play a role), the way they speak English will be different. These conditions point to class differences in the schools they attended, and, generally speaking, the schools a student attended prior to entering higher learning determines the degree to which she has a grasp of the English language.

The protests that spread across South African university campuses between 2015 and 2017, especially looking at those of HWU, were demonstrated with discussions, sit-ins, partial nudity, the collective sounds of struggle songs, and defacing of property. I would like to emphasise that as valid as all these means of dissent are, the focus of this paper is on experiences as related orally, and this sub-section is therefore delimited to how Black women students speak of their realities.

Two particular instances that interest me (and which I think may be relevant to the data analysis) are, firstly, the instance in which a Black woman student at an HWU speaks English as her white peers do; in accent and enunciation. The second instance is the one in which she does not; and only has an immediate and fundamental understanding of the language that admitted her into an English-medium institute of higher learning. My interest lies in how, outside of academic work, these two women address grievances they may encounter at HWU; how they each vocalize their resistance to institutional culture. The particular importance of this matter is highlighted by Fanon's quote as referenced above - in essence, that speaking English, is assuming to whatever degree the norms and identity of whiteness. This thesis itself falls into the paradox of resisting whiteness through whiteness, and the interviews conducted may be seen in a similar light. However, it is not the potential critique of hypocrisy that concerns me - Black women, local or diasporic, have been using English to delegitimize its monopoly over HWUs for decades by telling their stories. Though their accounts may not speak directly to the language itself, Black women scholars concerned with Blackness and decolonization address the institutions and norms that subscribe to whiteness, and, by virtue of that, to the English language.

If we return to the two Black women presented in the above paragraph, we might postulate the following. The one who speaks English as the white student speaks it, comes to embody whiteness, in some respect. No matter her efforts, her expression of who she is and of her reality, when articulated in the colonial language, conveys her as a colonial subject. I believe this may be a fair observation to make, what with her positionality in the HWU space of colonial history. I use the latter instance, the student who does not have such a fluent handle on the language, as a means of comparison; useful in understanding the degrees to which whiteness may come to shape us as Black women (see *3.1.3 Belonging of the Black Voice*).

Still, as I mentioned in naming the scholars local and diasporic who use English to critique whiteness, Black women articulating resistance in English is not inherently problematic. We must use the words that we have at our disposal, to dismantle the structures that stand in our way. When those words have been used to oppress us in any way, we must use them to subvert our subjugation.

2.3.5 Whiteness - Culture, values, institutions

This thesis talks to Blackness, but Blackness need only be specified and prioritized because it lives in a world of normative whiteness. As such, whiteness as the hegemonic force acting upon how Blackness is defined, experienced, and defended, should be deconstructed to understand the impact of how it has historically served to 'standardize' existence.

Reddy (1998) has a take on how invisibility and hypervisibility can refer to whiteness (see how this contrasts with invisibility and hyper surveillance of Black women as outlined in *2.1.2 Black women in white spaces*). By this, she is referring to the theory of normative whiteness: how whiteness is invisible to white people because it is the norm by which society judges and places 'non-whiteness', but is hypervisible to people of other races because other races are so aware of how they are 'non-white' (Reddy, 1998: 55).

“Being white, Frye (cited in Reddy, 1998: 58) is not a biological condition. It is being a member of a certain social/political category, a category that is persistently maintained by those people who are, in their own and each other's perception, unquestionably in it”. It is what Frye calls "whiteness": a way of being in the world, with relation to whiteness analogous to the relation between masculinity and maleness; it is performing whiteness as presently constructed. Minorities are able to answer questions such as, 'why is it like to be this and this identity and/or orientation' because their realities are persistently held up in comparison to the standard of being white; to

whiteness'. Being white, being heterosexual, and being middle class are comfortable conditions that may not require significant critical thought. However, fall outside of any or all of those circumstances, and who you are becomes a spectacle and an inquiry. It is inevitable that in a world in which whiteness and being white is what goes unquestioned, that anything else is inevitably an 'Other'. Reddy (1998: 59) asks, then, in a bid to raise consciousness within whiteness; that is, in an attempt to make whiteness visible to itself - what it is like to be white. She is not asking the intellectuals what it is to be white - those who are epistemologically privileged, protected, and validated - but places her question in the context of the ordinary white individual what their everyday experiences are in a body that is normal and legitimate. In her keynote address, Frye (1992) wondered whether such questions could ever really be tackled by white people. A crucial point she makes is that, according to other racial groups, whiteness is not only the default but the objective default (Frye, 1992: 113). If Black people's experiences of racism are always subject to partiality, then the white experience of racist or racially-fuelled incidents is always right, always fair, always - quite literally - uncoloured (Bell, 1992: 59).

White privilege in general, and not just pertaining to racism or the justice system and its handle thereof, is such a hotly contested issue because the word 'privilege' suggests white people are being given benefits that go above and beyond what society has to offer. Therein lies white privilege, in fact - that these benefits are not an especial set of circumstances, but the set of circumstances society believes should be given to whiteness (Morris, 2007: 955). That is, that white privilege operates in a system in which white privilege is not a privilege to white people, but common courtesy. It is people of colour that know it as privilege because it is people of colour who see that they are not afforded the same allowances (Morris 2007: 955). Today's HWUs are more difficult to be outrightly judged as racist because the racial classifier of apartheid's white universities has been replaced by normative whiteness that is privileged by HWU institutional culture. Blackness in these institutions is remarkably easy to identify, to give a name to; and, subsequently, to applaud, critique, or investigate, because it stands so stark beside the perceived 'blankness' of whiteness (Morris, 2007). As such, issues of Blackness, or issues concerning Blackness, at HWUs is very susceptible to being observed as 'subjective' or reliant on context.

The latter argument is a fair point to make. However, Black students hear so rarely of the experiences of their white peers being deliberated on because of 'context'. HWUs are the institutions in which whiteness is taken for granted, and it is only when significantly challenged by protests and movements disruptive enough, that these institutions might momentarily

acknowledge that their institutional culture is, indeed white-centric. However, HWUs are still much less ready to acknowledge that said culture is actually normative – that it does not simply prioritize whiteness; it is whiteness.

The misgivings that a white normative society and its institutions of higher learning have of the Black experience ultimately undermine the gravity of, if not racial incidents on campuses themselves, then the sentiments held by Black students of their encounters with racism. Whiteness makes the charge that Blackness is caught in a state of self-victimization. If that is the case, we must ask where such feeling and psychology stems from. One need not even travel back into time for answers of colonialism. What Black students of this generation are facing is far more relevant, and it is this: that whiteness continues to maintain its monopoly on all things rational. Whiteness is authority. It is the authority on social norms and values; but more so than that, it is the authority on truth. Our subjugation in being Black women is embedded in the persistent argument over whether our realities are right and valid. For normative whiteness, I dare say that Blackness has little place outside Blackness. For whiteness, Blackness is confined to opinions and ideas; and the former is made uncomfortable when the latter ventures into spaces of knowledge and understanding.

2.3.6 From whence we came; to where we go

So far, the literature consulted for this paper has discussed Blackness and Black womanhood all within the context of white institutional culture. I have thus far encountered ideas about Black women, from her body to her mind, all predicated upon her being a subject, researcher, or object of inquiry of patriarchy and colonialism. Now that I believe I have understood what it means to be a Black woman fighting to think, create, and exist in the patriarchy, I turn to embrace what it means to be a Black woman, as an end in herself. For Black women neither manifest from nothing in the corridors of prestigious universities nor do they lie dormant in abstract spaces while they wait for the next struggle and protest song. The Black woman scholar thrives outside of HWU campus walls, and finds her satisfaction in the Arts, in her household, in her church. When a Black woman voices her reality of oppression, what her audience may not hear or acknowledge, is that she does not do it for fame. She does not do it for power, or pleasure. The Black woman thinker is not seeking privilege, but synthesis. Her children, her marriage, her hobbies, her relationships - these are all facets to who she is that contributes to her fight. She wishes to be integrated and to be done so into a world that does not simply tolerate but accommodates who she is and what she wants

outside of identity politics. This thesis is a hope to capture her experiences of HWU, but her reality as a Black woman reaches far beyond these institutions.

In South Africa, the identities of Black women fall on a scale of many shades, and great nuances. From the upper class to the working class, from university-educated to the illiterate, this country raises women of colour who live by similar, diverging, and sometimes utterly opposing norms and values. Still, we are women who, regardless of our socioeconomic backgrounds, are not only able to find familiarity in issues that plague our womanhood; but can discover and rejoice what binds us in instances of success, triumph, and empowerment. Frenkel (2008: 3) brings to the fore in her discussion of feminism in Africa, the case of an ANC member of parliament. Tinyiko Nwamitwa-Shilubana wished to be recognized as the chief of her community in an area close to Tzaneen, as she believes tradition rightfully calls her to be. The trial caused a debate around Black traditions that place ties on women taking up positions of leadership and authority in communities that they have always called their own. This is hardly an unfamiliar challenge to any Black woman who has wanted to perform her ambitions and competence in fields dominated by men, or by the narrative of masculine entitlement. However, I find that the crux of the Shilubana and Others vs Nwamitwa (2008) case speaks, in this instance, more to the self-assuredness of Black women in the face of patriarchy, and not patriarchy itself. Frenkel (2008: 4) highlights the importance of this trial in contemporary South Africa: having a woman who asserts her birthright to ascendancy to a position of power, and using who she is, and the resources at her disposal, to address structures within [Black] South African traditional practices. With this, the writer emphasises how tradition need not be done away with, as opponents to feminism or African womanism may argue; only adjusted to meet the humanity of individuals living in a democratic world (Frenkel, 2008: 4).

Salo's (2001) interview with British-Nigerian writer, Amina Mama, sheds light on the conversation around Black women coming into their own as African feminists. Though many did not always identify as such, they noted that the ways in which they engaged with literature and with their communities were vastly different from the expectations held over them, and from the behaviour of those around them (Ngozi Adichie, 2017; Salo, 2001: 58-59). Mama's family strongly encouraged her pursuit of education, and as she continued on the path of scholarship, societal norms that were directed toward a young woman of herself in Nigeria seemed to become less relevant to what she believed to be her purpose (Salo, 2001: 59). Her background of education informs her convictions on the capacity and capability of the Black African woman in relation to knowledge; that is, that knowledge is something that can serve us well:

We, women, are in no position to deprive ourselves of the intellectual tools that can assist us in the pursuit of gender justice. The arena of the intellect has been used to suppress us. We cannot afford to ignore the importance of intellectual work, especially in the 21st century when knowledge and information define power more than ever before (Salo, 2001: 63).

Black African women are a people with a rich history. Our legacies involve demonstrations against systems of racial segregation, collective mobilization for revisions in sexist labour laws, and increasing representation in our national governments. Great efforts have been put into assembling structures for our emancipation, but greater work must still be done. In South Africa, many Black women have achieved, through the works of our predecessors, material and political freedoms, but in HWU, we grapple with psychological oppressions and, at times, crippling social ambivalence regarding where we belong. The future of Black women's struggles may be uncertain at best, but there is a comfort in knowing where we have come, and how far.

Chapter Three: Data Analysis

3.1 Overview

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as the main research design for the collection of data. The approaches used for the analysis were thematic analysis and interpretivism. Thematic analysis, briefly, is identifying patterns in each set of data collection, and subsequently classifying all relevant information into themes or sub-themes (Aranson, 1995: 4). Interpretivism stresses that realities are multitudinous and socially constructed, as are the truths found therein, and are subject to change (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002: 44-45).

These methods are ideal in exploring the common perceptual plane that is so crucial to Black feminist theory and its themes of shared experiences along with it; taking the accounts made in the interviews as valid and true for the individuals who experience them. This paper prioritizes Black women's Voices, and though the analysis to follow cannot possibly interrogate each complex facet of identity presented by the respondents, it does hope to present their experiences in a way that Black women's Voices are heard, understood, and appreciated.

The chapter will consist of three parts, per the three overarching themes presented in the interviews. Namely, Black women at HWU; perceptions of psycho-social meanings for higher

education; and Rhodes as a microcosm of South Africa. As per the ethical standards required of the research (see *1.5 Ethical Considerations, Challenges, and Limitations*), no participant will be disclosed in the analysis; their names replaced with pseudonyms (indicated with an asterisk upon the first use of the pseudonym), and any particular information that might undermine their anonymity will be discarded.

3.2 Black Women at Historically White Institutions

The conversation around Black women thinkers in the academy is a dynamic and ongoing one. It is one that, in this current socio-political climate, demands greater attention if the academy and its hope to enrich knowledge circulation and bring about transformative conscientisation on matters of social justice are to extend beyond traditional tropes of racial accounting, diversity, and inclusion. This thesis seeks to contribute to extending the scope of the transformation discourse by capturing contemporary perspectives of young women scholars in the post-Fees must fall higher education environment. The respondents presented unique anecdotes and stimulating reflections on how their self-perceptions and complex academic identities as Black postgraduate scholars have developed while at Rhodes University. Their insights ultimately shed light on the simultaneous forces of grief and growth illustrative of the experiences of many black women in the South African academy.

3.2.1 Women and Black feminism at HWUs

This sub-section will deal with the issues of Blackness, and the expectations placed upon Black women in HWUs. It is placed in the context of white privilege to contrast the vastly different realities held by white students and Black students, and lends a focus to Black women students in how they face and mitigate their experiences.

"Being called a Black woman is more than just your colour."

These words from Cleo*, a coloured female in her final year of LLB, was her response to my inquiry as to how she responded to being called 'Black'. This paper, as aforementioned, defines the term in the democratic post-apartheid sense, and her remark called for further interrogation. Not philosophically speaking, or talking to what the essence of what a Black woman is, but in understanding how being a Black woman at an HWU is more than just your skin and form, but your narrative.

A related and recurrent topic that emerged in the research is the idea of 'Black excellence'. Not all the respondents put it in those terms, but each woman expressed that she felt, at one stage or another, the obligation or the pressure to do more than what was expected of her; to achieve higher than the average; to push herself further than what she could bear. The subject matter of mental wellness will be explored in the second part of the analysis (see 3.2.3 *Emotional labour and mental health*), but what will be touched on here is the idea that Black women in HWU strongly perceive that they must go above and beyond in their academic pursuits. This expectation may come from family or within themselves, stirred by the desire to succeed, or is a reactive fear prompted by institutional culture that values membership of white patriarchy alone. A set of seemingly contradicting yet dangerously complementary conditions exist in institutes of higher learning that are still learning to leave their country's constitutionalised oppressions behind: the invisibility and hyper surveillance that place along the forced dichotomy of the mind versus the body. (Griffin and Reddick, 2011; Lander and Santoro, 2017; Mirza, 2006). The intellect and expertise of Black women students and scholars are passed over and diminished, but her physical presence is keenly watched for rebellion, inadequacy, and struggle. Though they may appear to be at either end, these two scenarios, they occupy the same spaces of reasoning.

In the case of invisibility, Black women students are the antithesis of the white male sentinel. Therefore, if western positivism is what is accepted and acceptable, Black African feminism is the deviant Other. Black women continue to be positioned in this role in the case of hyper surveillance, because Black women populating an institution that caters to white men arouse uncertainty, threatening gendered and raced privilege. Uluthando* says this:

At Rhodes, it's easy to identify the more vulnerable bodies. And it's easy to identify the bodies that believe they need protection. And the people who believe they need to be protected are white men; protected from us. The way they move in this institution is so scary. They move like they can't be touched, but they're scared that they will be.

When asked after making this remark, Uluthando said she was not afraid of white men; she was not shy to express her discomfort with them. For the Black women, disadvantaged by at least two intersecting oppressions against her colour and race, HWUs are sites of incredible privilege. Whether that privilege is distinctly concentrated either in their masculinity or their whiteness, the

Black women who walk amongst them are kept ever aware that they (Black women) are inhabiting a territory, and not necessarily a space of fair and equal advantage.

3.2.2 The common perceptual plane and the multiplicity of identity

The work of Hill Collins's (1986) discussion of the common perceptual plane has been central to this paper, and it was inspiring, albeit, at times, painful, to be confronted with her work in a context with which I am familiar. The main preconception I had of what I might encounter in data collection was that, at HWU, 'whiteness' would be central to how Black women experience oppression. Respondents came forward with stories far more nuanced; testimony to the writings of Black feminists internationally and locally, then and now, that Black women do not occupy a space of uniformity monopolized by white institutional oppression. The common perceptual plane offers the understanding that popular catalysts prevail over our experiences, but that our experiences are often so vastly different. This speaks to the layered nature of identity, especially one lived under intersectionality; pointing out the fallacy that the respondents all put their Black womanhood before anything else, or encapsulated all of who they are into that one particular label.

Four of the six respondents each presented to the fore of their experiences novel facets of their identity - aspects to the private lives of Black women, outside of race and gender. Further exploration was therefore needed to unveil this wide range of distinctiveness between them, between us; and, at the same time, to bring together these differences under a banner of inclusivity.

Uluthando identifies as queer, and describes the social climate of Rhodes regarding her sexuality as follows:

We're the anomaly. We're the thing people don't know about; we're the thing that people fetishise but don't want. We're both wanted, but feared at the same time. Those expressions of fear and desire come out in very different violent ways, from white men and women; from Black men and women. It's quite menacing.

Black queer theory was developed as a school of thought on its own, as it rightfully should be, but sexuality within the Black women's community was certainly raised the early works of Black feminist thought. hooks (1984: 238) explained how the feminist discourse in its broadness may feel exclusionary to certain groups, and it is only when these groups identify factors that alienate them can they find their place in the praxis of resistance. Being able to distinguish heterosexism is

in the active stance against the oppression of gender, sexuality, and race is what enables Black queer women to speak out (Bridewell, 2016; Lewis, 2011). As Uluthando expressed, consciousness requires language - being able to articulate pain is being given the most fundamental tool to remedy suffering (Chafe, 1974; Nelson, 2018).

Prior to coming to Rhodes, she knew something was amiss about the space she occupied in her predominantly white schools. Black women are not ignorant to the ways in which we experience subjugation. "I have always been the 'too Black to be White' and 'too white to be Black' girl in school," writes Griffin (2012: 141). From childhood, we learn that we are not the right colour, or that we do not have the right hair. As we grow older, more truths about the Otherness of our existence make themselves apparent to us in ways that are far more insidious, for they are directed toward our character; what the world perceives our innate nature to be (Griffin, 2012; hooks, 1982).

Even being loud [in school], Black girls were ridiculed, though we were just being normal. We were called in many times about hair and attitude. Especially in matric, it became very clear that there was division along racial lines. Even among students, it just became weird.

It took me coming to varsity to realize that [that] behavior isn't normal. And also having the language to say that that wasn't okay - I only got it now in varsity. In high school, you understand that you feel uncomfortable, but you don't know how to communicate that. (Uluthando)

Though it was not necessarily a defining moment in Chengetai's* interview, she was the first respondent to bring up the issue of sexuality on campus, and how Black women face a very different response from white and Black men alike on how she dresses, and how she expresses her gender identity. She used the words 'fetish' and Othered, sentiments later echoed by Uluthando.

Chengetai felt the following way:

Black women are far more sexualised than white women. We're fetishised, really. With a white girl, let's say if she's wearing shorts, nothing will be said about it, but when a Black woman wears the same things, guys will be like, 'Oh, so you're a butchery today, busy showing meat'. [And] I'm starting to see that Black trans people are Othered, while white trans people are 'embracing who they are'.

In similar terms, Uluthando said this:

[Black queer women] are the anomaly. We're the thing people don't know about; we're the thing that people fetishise but don't want. We're both wanted, but feared at the same time. Those expressions of fear and desire come out in very different violent ways, from white men and women; from Black men and women. It's quite menacing.

In HWUs, Black women - whether they belong to the queer community, or simply were of the opinions expressed above - experienced a convergence in responses eliciting themes of threat, vulnerability, and intimacy in interacting with other students of varying demographics (Lockhart, 2019: 171-172). The vulnerability lies in her form, her intimacy is implicit with her authenticity, and threat comes with the resistance of others to your body, and to who you are (Lockhart, 2019).

For Terri, an Indian postgraduate student in the English department, her upbringing of miscegenation evokes new considerations around the status of 'outsider'.

I would describe myself as a South African Indian transnational woman. Transnationalism is very much about crossing boundaries. So, geographical boundaries, but also linked to identity. It goes back to the issue of diaspora. I have a complex identity that's not fixed. It means that I am multiple, multitudinous; no matter what. It means there are so many different parts of my heritage that I don't know.

[At Rhodes], my own race treats me differently. Because I don't sound the way I should sound, I guess. But mostly, it's been amazing to encounter different people and different cultures. That's what being transnationalist is about, really. Bridging the gaps. I have all sorts of different people that I associate myself with.

Transnationalism is what Desai (2007: 333) calls "a descriptive term rather than a theoretical perspective". Transnational feminism is marked by the tenant that the 'global' aspect of the movement is only in response to the globalized issues affecting women, and in no way suggests that it represents and can address the needs of women everywhere (Desai, 2007: 333). This is important to note, as Terri's assertion of her transnational identity is her way of aligning herself with the possibility of belonging outside of her race and class, while still acknowledging that she faces very spatially-bound challenges.

Transnationalism, and Terri's identification with it, serves as an important reminder that Black women do lie on the common perceptual plane, but not all of their experiences will be shared. Their diverging realities perhaps makes the common perceptual plane all the more relevant by highlighting the shared sentiments and interpretations they have of their realities. Like Uluthando, Terri experiences vulnerability, intimacy, and threat in perceiving herself and her world as different from others - a valid and thoughtful sense of self that carries across Black women situated in HWU. In the view of transnationalism, race is a web of "transterritorial concepts and ideas" (Goldberg 2009 cited in Schmitt *et al*, 2017: 240), highlighting the significance of the concept of place. South African HWUs are not simply spaces, but, as aforementioned, enclaves to distinct cultures of whiteness. In this, however, it is explained how cultures do not stand alone; especially whiteness. Historically, whiteness has fed off the enslavement and degradation of ethnic groups and their cultures (Gilroy 1993 cited in Schmitt *et al* 2017: 240), and the attitude of resistance whiteness has had toward co-existence with other ethnic groups certainly appears to prevail in HWUs. The preference for homogeneity that HWUs seem to have, create for Black women like Terri limitations to how she is able to express her identity in its multiplicity.

For Yenyii*, the significant facet of her identity she wished to put forward was one of balancing her domestic responsibilities with her quest for intellectual fulfilment, mentioning that, "A lot of women tell me I'm looking for trouble. Gatekeepers of womanhood. But I can do it." Her interview gave grounding to the sentiment aired by many of the respondents that they are "not just a Black woman". Being approached to tell one's truth as a Black woman is one thing, but perhaps it is another for one's skin and gender to be erroneously perceived as her complete being, and her whole life (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989; Foster, 2008). Each respondent contributed an additional facet to who she thinks she is. Nationality for a couple, sexuality for one, faith for another. One thing I did find striking, and significant for debate was the pair of dichotomous views from two of the respondents regarding this idea of whether the label of 'a Black woman' had its boundaries or its place in the life of a Black woman.

Amahle*, an MA student in the Philosophy department, had this to say:

It's so easy for my body to become politicized for someone else's agenda...If I'm always a Black woman, it's easy for that to be taken up in movements, and it takes my freedom away to say no. Let's take the protests, for example, which say that I'm Black, I'm a woman, and therefore, I

have to be here. And I get that, but I can say no, because that's not all I am. All there is to my life isn't in this body.

Yeniyii, however, had a polar view with her energy for embracing Black womanhood as its whole. She is a Nigerian Black woman, and within her form, she is a mother, a wife, and a scholar. She kept no distinction between one component of her and another component. For her, being a Black woman, and knowing you are a Black woman, and loving that you are a Black woman means living in synergy:

I try to create a balance, not because I'm trying to prove anything to anyone, but because I know I'm capable [sic]. In putting everything together, I find fulfilment. I'm happy with how everything comes together. If I try to keep [things] apart, I may go into despair. Better for me to look at the bigger picture, to create a whole.

This sub-section deals with the common perceptual plane and the multiplicity of identity. Whether one perceives these two ideas to be complementary or in opposition, I return to Hill Collins' (1986: 529) plea that we must come to accept our "[unique] personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge". The common perceptual plane understands that both women endeavour knowledge (Hill Collins, 1986), and the multiplicity of identity acknowledges that both women are their own woman (Hill Collins, 1989). The two attitudes about form can coexist, and do prevail under different circumstances. For some, being a Black woman is not definitive enough (Coard and Breland; 2006; Woodard and Mastin, 2005). Your colour and gender expression neither speak of your talents and your thoughts nor your shortcomings and your accomplishments outside of your body. For others, being a Black woman may speak volumes. If a white man does not have to say that he is just a white man, or that he is more than a white man, why must a Black woman express these things? For some, being a Black woman means defying expectations by expanding what it means to be her (Gqola, 2001; Mahabeer *et al*, 2018). "You can have it all," Yeniyii believes. "If that is what you want."

There is a world that exists within a Black woman. As its creator, she may define that world as she pleases.

3.2.3 Belonging and the Black Voice

Similar to the capitalization of 'Black', 'Voice' in this paper has been capitalized to distinguish it as the narrative of the Black women respondents from her accent or language, as 'voice' in

reference to accent and language will also be touched on in this sub-section. It is important to me, as a researcher who shares some experiences and sentiments with the respondents, to prioritise our subjugated stories and sense of self, and the capitalisation of Voice assists with this, if even in acting simply as a grammatical tool. The concept of Voice in this paper is supplemented with the respondents' experiences of how they express themselves, and how their 'self' is manifested and received in HWUs.

This sub-section will deal with the sense of self in relation to the respondent's Black identity. Identity gatekeeping in the Black community was something expressed by most of the respondents. It plays a role in the issue of Voice, and how loudly it can be heard when it does not align with the preconceptions of others regarding what it should sound like, and from whom it should come. Spencer's (2009) article on the novel, *Coconut*, by Kopana Matlwa (2007), analyses the different identities worn by young, Black South African women born into the middle class. Befittingly, she writes that they oscillate between the idealism of African principles that lie within their family and the desire for white privilege that they encounter in the world. The way an individual speaks is broken down into two immediate assumptions: ethnic, or white (Spencer, 2009: 6). I find that the following perfectly encapsulates the process by which individuals of colour evaluate their peers' identity and judge how closely they associate with whiteness simply by the way their friends, neighbours, and classmates speak:

to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (Fanon cited in Spencer, 2009: 7).

Therefore, when a Black woman speaks not unlike a white woman, the assumption made by those listening is that she has assumed whiteness, supports whiteness and has cast her Black identity aside. A Black woman's narrative so precariously hinges on her accent; the legitimacy of her Voice so arduously founded on her voice (Spencer, 2009: 6-7).

"The way I speak English sounds like privilege", Uluthando admits. The respondent has lived her life in spaces of whiteness, from a middle-class neighbourhood, and primary and secondary schooling in predominantly white institutions. Her home language is Zulu, but throughout the interview, the topic of language always came up against that of self-expression. As a result of her upbringing, the way she articulates herself most comfortably is in English, and - as the Black

community of friends and family tell her - in the manner of whiteness. Although Uluthando has experienced this kind of response regularly and went on to accept that, in some respects, she certainly may be an outsider in some of her closest circles, she is not an anomaly, whatever her more 'traditionally' Black friends or acquaintances may think.

For the sake of ease and brevity, the ideas of language and 'Africaness' will be conflated here, as language came up in the interviews as pointers of how the respondents deviated from societal perceptions of how 'Black' or 'African' they are. That is, the more fluent they were in English, and the less they spoke their mother tongue, the less African they are perceived; as Spencer (2009) made mention of. Shunned for their perceived inclination to whiteness, Black women educated at former model-c schools have to grapple with their familiarity with and comfort within white spaces when they enter politicized institutions like Rhodes (de Coninck, 2018: 156-164). Black individuals that are raised in spaces of whiteness - or, at least, raised in spaces of whiteness - can often feel that whiteness is a part of them, to some extent (de Coninck, 2018: 164-165). This may not be a conscious thought, but upon entering other spaces in which whiteness is critiqued (one need only to think back to the Rhodes Must Fall protests), their identity is recognized as flawed, and these flaws are recognised as duality (Canham and Williams, 2017).

For the most part [when I came to Rhodes], I was hanging out with whites. So I made an effort to be friends with Black people, but at the time, our interests weren't the same. From music to the way I dressed, I was viewed as outlandish. And it's not like we didn't like the same things at all. But it was also like, but you like white people things, so where do you lie? (Uluthando)

Canham and Williams (2017) wrote an article on the white gaze and the Black gaze that the Black middle class in South Africa are subject to in the unsettling post-apartheid era of volatile identity politics. They mention the words 'contestation' and 'complexity' in describing South Africans who claim that identity, and how, despite having achieved the position of the middle-class (that, in South Africa, previously belonged to whites exclusively), they remain in a precarious condition. 'Too Black to be white; too white to be Black', is how one writer puts it; and indeed, Canham and Williams emphasise how the Black body is always perceived through a racial lens, because of its difference (Canham and Williams, 2017). In addition, Black people do not experience racialisation from white people alone, but from their own communities. The authors reference Foucault in their ideas about the 'Black gaze', working off his conceptions of discipline and surveillance:

It monitors the transgression of class boundaries and established and accepted norms of black behaviour. It seeks black uniformity and loyalty to black disadvantage or a black working-class identity (Foucault cited in Canham and Williams, 2017: 30)

This idea of Black disadvantage or a unified identity in 'the Black struggle' can come up against limitations toward realizing what an individual may perceive the common objectives of the Black community has (whatever these objectives happen to be at the particular time that a set of social or political issues crop up). This is not to steer the conversation toward politics; the quote below simply acts an illustration of Canham and Williams's (2017) remarks toward the way South Africa and its HWUs tend toward duality in identity:

With the [Fees Must Fall] thing, I don't shy away from disagreement. And in those spaces, it seemed as if it was very emotive. If someone suggested something, or asked the hard questions, [the response] was just like, oh, you're anti-Black; you're anti-poor. It was just like, you're either for us or against us. Which I thought was very tyrannical. (Amahle)

The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (Act 53 of 2003) defines what it legally means to be a Black person in democratic South Africa. As inclusive as it wishes to be, however, there are snags and conditions in the Act which exclude individuals based on age, immigration status etcetera. Cleo recalled an argument she had with a fellow student, and it is with the Act in mind that I mulled over this exchange; for if the state cannot bring Blackness into inclusivity, then how can its people?:

[She] said coloured isn't a race, it's a culture. So I asked, "What is the definition of culture?" Because it would be completely different from the definition of a race. I think, in the beginning, it was a bit murky. But so many years post-apartheid, people have recognised coloured people as a race as well as a culture. [What she said] kind of makes you marginalized. There are full-on coloured communities all around you. What am I ticking on a form? Other? How can you regard us as Other? At some point, we become something. At some point, you have to recognise us as something. And she was like, "No, you're Other."

To belong, one needs to know what one is. It must be defined, and its existence must be recognised. Black women at HWUs struggle to find a space they can call theirs, because HWU institutional culture does not place them as a norm or standard. Black women recognise and understand this,

and it becomes even more urgent that they claim and continue to reclaim their narratives without making alterations to their accent, use of language, or self-definition. Uluthando does not deny that she is in some way assimilated into whiteness. Yenyii will not apologise for wanting to have it all. Chengetai will never reject where she comes from. However they sound, and whoever cares to hear them, the respondents remain committed to their truth; to their Voice, and to forge their sense of belonging. With a smile upon telling me her ongoing journey of the pressures of LLB, Cleo finished with this: "It's taken me this long to find my voice. And now that I've found it, I want more."

3.3 Perceptions of Psychosocial Meanings for Higher Education

The complex host of issues that that Black women students at HWUs have to contend with are not always matters that can be addressed by speaking to institutional culture, or acknowledging privilege. Problems of a socio-political nature are not the only issues she must grapple with as a result of her social location at HWUs; but serve as a catalyst for other questions around her body and mental health (Breda, 2017; Somer, 2013). The respondents each allowed me access into their accounts of what goes unseen; or, at least, what cannot be perceived so readily when they speak of living their Blackness on the Rhodes University campus. These women have private lives that go beyond activism or scholarship. These are lives that are entangled and made complete with family, culture, and self-fulfilment found outside of the institution.

3.3.1 Family, community, and Ubuntu

This sub-section will provide a focus on how the communities from where Black women students come determine their self-definition and creation of culture in a space of norms and values that differ from their own. In an institution in which whiteness prevails, Black women have to come up with novel ways to express themselves and to drive their liberation and survival in these spaces.

[Belonging is about] representation of my own identity, but...also just understanding that I can go to my Black women gay friends and know that they will protect me. It's understanding of my experience. It just feels good. (Uluthando)

The diversity that exists on Rhodes University's campus is one positive aspect that can be attributed to the institution. Of course, the ways in which certain individuals within the desegregated student population face the institutional culture is a different issue, but every one of

the respondents expressed finding hope and fulfilment in associating with one social group or another, whether that social group physically looked like them or not. Rapport and security were found by the respondents in people that shared, if not necessarily their most immediate struggles, then their vast and nuanced perceptions of the world.

A couple of the questions featured in the interview schedule touched on how they believe white values differ from Black culture, or whether 'white communities' exist in the same way that people of colour organise themselves and prioritise each other. Eliastam (2015) writes on the concept of 'Ubuntu' in the context of contemporary relevance in post-1994 South Africa. He recalls the accolades that some South Africans credit to 'Ubuntu' - stories of friends feeding one another, and neighbours schooling each other's children -, while not shying away from how other individuals may delimit Ubuntu:

'[Ubuntu] is for our people.' I asked what was meant by 'our people', and the Respondent laughed in response. 'You must know what I mean. It's the people in our community. White people do not understand Ubuntu, they do not want Ubuntu.

'Ubuntu is for Africans. White people must go back to Europe where they come from (Eliastam, 2015: 4)'.

A couple of the respondents mentioned the idea of Ubuntu specifically. Uluthando recalled an incident that made its rounds through the institution a few years ago, when a white lecturer was called in to teach a philosophy class about Ubuntu. It is uncertain whether the university or the department addressed it - indeed, some students have been inclined to call it something of an urban legend -, but the impact that it left on students can be summed up by Uluthando's sentiments on what she believes to be inappropriate gestures on behalf of Rhodes University:

My department is one of the most forward-thinking. But actual representation to support that thinking, no. To have a white man teach me about gender and development scared me. [The department doesn't] understand how intimidating that is. To have a white man teach me about how I'm oppressed. And then try to convince me of the challenges men have. In the position you're sitting in right now.

The communities from which Black women students at HWU come from play a significant role in how these women confront and navigate both who they are in society, and the challenges presented

to them at the university. A recurring theme in Cleo's interview was her family, and how they remain a point of reference for her in times of decision-making, and in times of great distress:

My degree hasn't been straightforward. My parents have been nothing but supportive. 'You do whatever you want [with your degree]. And if you don't want it, it's fine; just know that as long as you are doing your best and trying your hardest, we are happy. But if you're not, that's on you, and that's something you need to have a discussion with yourself'.

The communities that the respondents join or forge within HWUs, however, can be an endeavour of vastly different results. Uluthando and Chengetai spoke briefly of the collusion carried out by white women toward Black women students. They referred specifically to the case of 'white tears', a phrase that grew traction on social media at the heights of the Black Lives Matter movement. It has proved difficult to ascertain the actual origins of the term, as it has been used in other contexts, but the respondents used it in the following way. In sum, the term calls specific attention to how white women perform white guilt in spaces in which Blackness should be taking preference (Spanierman *et al*, 2012: 176). 'White tears', according to the quantitative study carried out by Spanierman *et al* (2012), seem indicative of particular traits amongst white women. These traits were centred on the perceived proportion between empathy, critical racial awareness, and cultural sensitivity (Spanierman *et al*, 2012: 177). According to the respondents, 'white tears' acts violently against the endeavour to address oppressions Black women face.

There's this saying [sic.] going around - white tears. And I think it really explains well how white women do this thing where they believe they are being discriminated against. And it's like, this isn't even about you, though. (Chengetai)

The way Black women suffer is very layered. Intersecting oppressions. And when we cry, we are not seen. We are not heard. But dare a white woman shed a tear. (Uluthando)

For these two respondents, a sense of community with white women is difficult to forge. For Yenyiii, however, strength has come from fellow Black women thinkers in the institution, which is a solace echoed by many Black feminists in the academy (Hill Collins, 1998; Gqola, 2001; Mahabeer *et al*, 2018; Mama, 2004; Mokone *et al*, 2012) She is unbothered by the motives of or the misalignment she may have with groups outside of her demographic.

Still, circles of support may not always be found with those who look or think exactly the way you do. A Black women's race or gender need not always define where she finds closeness and affinity (Coard and Breland; 2006; Woodard and Mastin, 2005). In a 1982 speech, Audre Lorde said, "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive," expressing how there are so many parts to her, and as such, parts of her will offend others, and that there are parts of her that even she may not always be completely satisfied with.

3.3.2 Body politics, emotional labour, and mental health

For Amahle, Lorde's words in the previous sub-section hold substantial weight. Her comfort has been rooted in individuals outside of her immediate professional and intellectual space. She reveals how there came a point, after various incidents within the Philosophy Department and on campus at large, where she needed to establish a boundary between her personal life and her professional life, insistent that being a Black woman or a philosopher is not the primary way she wants to identify, or the main directive by which she would like her life to take. She has forged, from experience, a dichotomy between the personal and the professional. Even prior to us sitting down together, she was plain about not permitting her form to be syndicated by identity politics:

I wanted something that is above me to kind of tether me. Because it's so easy for my body to become politicized for someone else's agenda.

Amahle's approach was very different to the attitude held by Uluthando regarding owning and associating with the idea of the vocal Black woman putting her body on the line for the causes of her community. Even outside of the 2015 and 2016 protests, Black women may, as Uluthando did, take up the 'role', so to speak, as a Black woman easily recognized for the long-suffering attached to her Black womanhood.

I'll stay away from the word strong, because I'm not that. And whether I identify as it, I don't know if that is relevant. But if I look like that person, I will take that on. Because I deserve to be the angry Black woman. And if you're going to use that trope to ridicule or hurt me, it's not going to work. And I'm not going to wear it as a badge, because I don't want to be angry. But understand why, when using that trope, that I'm angry and tired. My response would be, then what?

Griffin (2012) writes an autoethnographic paper on why she claims the label of the 'Angry Black Woman', and how she finds validation in it. Not because this is the way in which society can perceive and understand her, but because it helps her to find meaning in her pain (Griffin, 2012: 138-139). It is, for Griffin and others, a tool to subvert the narrative that society has imposed upon them. It is to deliver tirades instead of suffering in silence, and to find strength to exist authentically in a world that rejects her legitimacy (Griffin, 2012: 140). For others, however, rage becomes a distraction from a Black woman's sense of validation. Women of colour want to be more than loud and angry, as Uluthando expressed above. They desire a life outside of politics, and a life outside of the body.

Something that started happening during [the protests] was that I started to really hate white people. And I just thought, I don't think I want to live like this. I needed to figure out, how do I want to live? How do I want to identify? Because that's where my life is going to go.

It used to be that I'm a Black woman. Now, I'm a Christian first. Because there have been times, and there are times, when the two clash. Where God requires me to love people, and I just want to cuss out someone who's just been racist toward me. I'm not a pacifist, but again - not allowing people's stuff to become my stuff. (Amahle)

Amahle found it necessary for her wellbeing to establish distance between her work and personal life; and though this is not the sentiment necessarily found in Griffin (2012), it still subverts the idea that women of colour need to live by their skin colour and physical form, and the oppressions attached to them. For Cleo, being a Black woman is not exactly central to the decisions she makes, or the individual she aspires to be, but she does understand the weight that her body carries in her place of work:

I got into LLB in 2017, and it was just downhill that year. The work and expectations and schedule was [sic] so intense. I can't even say I had my nose above water. I was drowning. And lecturers came down on you for sinking. It's cut-throat. It's not said; it is felt. You need to shape up or ship out, and in order to shape up, you've got to be cut-throat. You've got to find that testosterone that you don't have to have yourself be heard and respected.

Evans and Moore (2015) write an enlightening article on HWUs and the effects that institutional culture have on the mental health of students of colour. A defining contradiction in HWUs which affects the mental health of academics of colours is the racialized experiences which shape their

daily lives on one hand, and the denialist discourses constitutive of mainstream whiteness which says these experiences are false (Evans and Moore, 2015: 441). As a result, Black women students have to grapple with navigating these experiences without responding to them in a way that would suggest that they believe these experiences have an impact on them, or even exist in the first place.

Cleo can account for how her time as a Rhodes LLB student has affected her mental health over the years, Cleo believes that the challenges she has faced has made her stronger, and Amahle knows that the psychological distance she put between her and campus have made her considerably more at peace with herself, and her understanding of the world.

Uluthando's presence on campus - that is, her participation in the counter institutional culture (see *3.2.1 Decolonisation – The paradox of the liberal, English University*) on campus - has, over the years, given her great insight, but also great pain. Like Griffin (2012), Uluthando is a woman who articulates this pain with pride in who she is, but also acknowledges that living to justify her race and gender can and has come at the cost of her emotional wellbeing:

I want to get out. I went through a phase in my third year when I would just wake up in the middle of the night crying. There's nothing I can do except [leave the university], and even that doesn't offer any kind of security. Because you're still in the body that you're in. I used to be very angry. I still am, but I'm now more tired than angry. Which is also sad.

The following section will elaborate on Uluthando's remarks, but as a brief conclusion, this section has attempted to convey how being a Black woman in a white space affects her emotional bearings; and subsequently, the sort of refuge she must seek on her campus for her necessary aid and assuagement.

3.4 Rhodes University as a Microcosm of South Africa

Uluthando's sentiments that concluded the last section carry great weight in the coming discussion on the role that Rhodes University has to play as an institution in the country's democratic transformation. Her words convey a feeling that 'getting out' is both understandable, and futile. Upon trying to understand my pressing desire to 'just leave' wherever I am that is presenting me with hardship, I, as a Black woman, must always come to acknowledge that, though we can

advocate and fight for change, we cannot change what does not want to be changed at its essence. Uluthando's remarks pained me, because, ultimately, we remain in the suit of the Black woman long after we leave Rhodes University. As a significant facet of HWUs is the microcosmical behaviour of a greater world of injustice, leaving a campus of privilege means walking into an entire world of greater privilege.

3.4.1 Decolonisation - The paradox of the liberal, English university

The concept of decolonisation in the vein of transformation of the curriculum is a concept that is widely defined by a host of scholars, but briefly, pertains to revising what tertiary institutions regard as knowledge, to include the colonial experience that has served to undermine local cultures, and history (Fataar, 2018; Leboloane, 2018; Padayachee *et al*, 2018).

Respondents raised issue with the purported connection between the social dynamics at Rhodes University and the social dynamics in South African society as a whole. Amahle questions whether a status quo that exists regardless of Rhodes University's existence or intervention is really the university's burden to bear in the first place. Chengetai, too, is puzzled as to why students think our campus and its management is so influential. If, for instance, it cannot even remedy the water problems that exist in Grahamstown, how can it effectively address things like rape culture or gender-based violence; issues that not even national government is able or willing to curb?

When the discussion of decolonisation started to spread in the Rhodes Must Fall student protest movement of 2015, the respondents felt that it became apparent not very long thereafter that words such as 'decolonisation' and 'transformation' meant very little outside the arena of consideration; that is, in the arena of implementation.

Decolonisation is a buzzword. So there were baby steps toward realizing intersections and oppressions. But it wasn't enough. And it may have been just to say that they did it. If we're going to call for representation, and there's only one person to represent us, is that representation? When one person is the poster child? Where are the other people? (Uluthando)

As far as the respondents perceived it, the idea of decolonisation was only insofar entertained for a term or so. For the most part, it gained traction in persuasive lip service presented in widely circulated emails of think tank discussions, and minor changes made to already specialized courses in select postgraduate classes in the Humanities. Perhaps, as one respondent glumly put it, the idea

of decolonization is the curse of the white liberal university - it is necessary for ideas like this to come about in an age of desegregation, for the sake of the show of progress.

They're putting on a facade as if they are [changing]. I've been here for seven years, and certain things have changed, but not a lot. And when they do change, it's for that period [only]; that buzz, that excitement. And three months later, [everything is] back to normal. And next year, the same issues arise again. (Cleo)

Measures employed to address sexual assault on campus and curriculum transformation seem to be ineffectively driven down from the chambers of management, because issues of feminism and Blackness seem not to be consistently prioritized. Chiang (2017) traces the colonial history of Rhodes University that presents an epistemic challenge to real considerations for transformation. When the university is named after a renowned imperialist, how does the institution extricate itself from his legacy of oppression while remaining a beneficiary therein? Rhodes University stands tall and elite in a province of poverty and drought. While previous Vice-Chancellor Saleem Badat set a fair precedent for prioritizing discourse around the university's complicit role under apartheid, the public apology issued by the university in 2006 highlighted its reality. That is, if under the internationally sanctioned regime of racialism and colourism, Rhodes could not fight its apparent agenda of liberalism, how much less of a will does it have to oppose today's norms of sexism and neoliberalism? How far can transformation be reached, or even weighed, in an institution historically marked by collusion - whether active or passive - with autocracy and injustice?

I hate to admit it - because I'm part of the problem - but this is the kind of backlash [that philosophy] gets. We did a course on African philosophy and had some readings on how Philosophy departments, in terms of being politically involved, [are] very apathetic. White, English-speaking universities that were anti-apartheid, and Afrikaans pro-apartheid universities [taught the same things]. I can see how something like that happens. Because we're not having the decolonization conversation. Even with my own [MA research]. I'm not looking at that at all. (Amahle)

Mbembe (2015) makes some interesting points on how decolonization of whiteness must be catalyzed by demythologization of whiteness. As it stands, the call for transformation in pedagogy and knowledge production is based on the perception that South African students are learning about matters pertaining, or relevant to, whiteness alone, because they come from whiteness. The

study of social sciences, in fact, has its roots in positivist observation of the philosophy of science, taking shape in the US in the 1830s as a novel way of understanding social order and group identity (Cravens, 1986: 186). It became popular in circles of observing physical differences between racial demographics, and as such, it is fair to argue that the social sciences originated as a concern of understanding and prioritising whiteness (Cravens, 1986: 186). Therefore, if the idea is that history is white, the thing to do is dispute that idea by demonstrating that human history reaches beyond whiteness:

Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside (Mbembe, 2015: 3).

Decolonization at Rhodes University is a crucial issue because the institution is a literal remnant of European imperialism that denied the humanity of Black Africans, Black history, and Black land. The university is not simply an institution of learning, but an 'outpost' of colonial rule (Mbembe, 2013: 5). For Black students that are privileged not by race, class, or patriarchy, the institution poses the challenge to find ways that their needs, questions, and concerns are adequately and sustainably addressed (Mbembe, 2015: 6). African scholars have suggested that decolonisation of the curriculum in particular, became so popular amongst students because of the expeditious and impassioned way that radical ideas are promulgated in an intellectual space. Decolonisation started to be seen as an answer to questions of Black students' existential angst, and a remedy for a campus of white privilege thus far gone largely unchallenged. However, Cleo's aforementioned words remind us that the implementation of epistemic and cultural decolonization never quite gained traction as its proponents believed it should. For her, this brings to the fore the fundamental issue as to whether universities want to change; whether whiteness wants to change. Cleo had this to add:

[Rhodes] makes us passive, promising that things are going to change. Change takes time, yes, but how long? And you can't keep arguing constraints. It's been enough time for you to figure out ways around these constraints. [Maybe] the changes are there, but the change isn't felt.

Lack of change may be both a result of a lack of volition, and a lack of understanding on the part of the structures and authorities charged with transformation. Yeniyii's paper in the philosophy department speaks to a necessary, but largely overlooked aspect of decolonization amongst student

conversation. Her paper does not focus on the practical blueprints for what it means to decolonize, or an argument to naysayers as to why it is necessary; but rather, to those eager to jump ahead into making decolonization a reality, and the appropriateness of particular matters that must come before decolonization can be realised.

The focus of my research is knowledge production in society. We must [revise] a lot in what we know, and what we have yet to construct. My research will not be on the practical side of decolonization [of the curriculum], but the theoretical side. (Yeniyii)

For her, the pragmatism of theory must come before the practice of implementation, which is a fair point to make. Colonial institutional cultures cannot be toppled with changes in learning material alone. It is HWU culture, informed by ideology and buttressed by the systematic schema of prejudice, which must ultimately change.

3.5 Resistance - and Progress

Step one is trying to prove that I deserve to be here. And just laying down the foundation of 'this is me'. I need you to hear me and acknowledge me. (Amahle)

In 2015, our campus saw what would be the beginning of a wave of student-led protests. The flinging of feces at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the grounds of the University of Cape Town revealed strata of buried feelings of insecurity held by the Black student population nationwide. These insecurities were, as demonstrated by the chain of protests that unfurled over the next few years, of an interlocking nature; namely: of poverty, of Blackness, and of womanness. All but one of the respondents were registered at Rhodes University during Rhodes Must Fall, Fees Must Fall, and the RU Reference List protest movements, two of them were actively involved in the protests.

Amahle opened up about how her emotional investment in the movements and her eventual departure from protest action defined the ways in which she understands and relates to spaces of struggle:

I was so involved [at first]. But I don't like to feel helpless. How do you make someone hear you when they're not hearing you? I'm thinking about the rape protest and the reference list, and women feeling rightfully angry, and people went on with their lives like nothing happened. It's not like I'm not compassionate. I do care. I just don't think I am able to be as involved with something like that. I'd rather have [discussions]. Not in the streets.

Cleo did not speak to any participation on her part in the protests, but shed light on the observations she made of her peers and her department during that time, and how, therein, she came to understand the bigger picture of the significance of Blackness and Black issues in HWU:

When there are things happening, the show must go on. When there was the Silent Protest, the lecturer was taking register, and people were like, you can't take register, and he was like, [the Silent Protest] isn't my problem. And while the [Fees Must Fall, and Rhodes Must Fall] protests were happening, we just powered through. It's like nothing else is happening; we've just got to get through our courses. That kind of environment goes into the law students as well. You can hear how the law students speak. They'll be like, "Can this just pass? We've got stuff to do".

I noted that the respondents who revealed their involvement in the protests, to whatever degree, expressed sentiments of fatigue. One would, of course, expect instances of burnout and exhaustion amongst the student population at large from the almost consecutive years of unrest. Still, it made me ponder the greater significance of the protests outside of the demonstrations themselves – how their deeply sensitive subject matter of identity and South Africa's turbulent social status quo reflects the daily realities that Black women scholars already face (Harley, 2007). The Rhodes Must Fall and RU Reference List movements were especially taxing, as reported by a handful of the respondents, because of their direct relevance to the intersecting violence against Black women in the academy.

Fine (2002 cited in Segalo, 2015: 74) gives this reality a name: the presence of absence, which talks to how Black women may have crossed the threshold into the possibility of intellectual and material freedom, yet still find themselves standing in the reality of the lack thereof. It is almost as though scholarship for Black women is the façade over prevailing gendered racial inequality (Segalo, 2015: 74). That is, that occupying a space of "participation in the public domain does not equate to a higher degree of empowerment" (Yuval-Davis 1991 cited in Segalo, 2015: 74) presents a situation of disillusionment for Black women thinkers. Yuval-Davis (cited in Segalo, 2015: 75) makes a powerful statement in saying that women are only conditionally recognised as equals to men. "There are always rules and regulations – not to mention perceptions and attitudes – specific to women..." [that can be rightfully termed as 'conditional belonging']. If we factor in race, we can see how the protests brought to the fore for Black women students the set of highly untransformed circumstances they face in democratic institutions.

The final few questions asked in the interviews were centered on how the respondents perceived the changes that had happened on campus since the last 'big' protest, the RU Reference List of 2016. The respondents were candid in what they thought had been the impact of these student-led movements on students themselves and within the institution. As a researcher, I found particularly inspiring the courage that prevails in most of these respondents, despite their awareness of the university's slowness to change, and the issues of violence and injustice that face our nation in its entirety.

Each of these women had to forge unique means of survival and enrichment during their time here, coping mechanisms and sources of comfort and happiness only realized through the

Challenges that they continue to grapple with. The profound nature about the ways in which the respondents defined overcoming obstacles, was how their triumphs ultimately lay in embracing their Black womanhood in whatever way it finds meaning and hope.

For Chengetai, the value she both has and that she can give lies in building community; to feel part of something working toward the greater good. For Yeniyii, identifying the opportunities that being a Rhodes student has presented to her is how she understands her purpose as a Black woman scholar, regardless of whatever else happens around campus.

After sharing her story of class struggle, and difficulty with cultural dislocation, Terri had this to say:

I have more confidence than I did. There are still times when I doubt myself, [but] I had to learn to trust myself. And I had to believe that the work I was putting in had to be good enough.

Cleo expressed similar feelings of finding fortitude from within; that is; she acknowledged that who she is, is more than sufficient for her to carry herself through difficult times:

There [have been] out of body moments where you check yourself. Like, you're not really living up to your identity; you're kind of just blending into the wall. But there were times when it was like no, but you have to [live up to who you are]. So there was conflict. But toward the end, I was like, I'm just going to be myself.

Amahle explained how the separation she made between campus, and her personal life was, further, a boundary she wanted to establish not solely for the sake of detachment from her work and university politics but to realise her personal truth that she wants to live by:

So one of my primary interests is virtue. It's great having these intellectual conversations. But there is the rest of life. One of my beliefs about philosophy is that it needs to inform the way we live. So that's why I'm keen on virtue philosophy. The other stuff will do very little for my character, and my character is what I'm deeply interested in.

Finally, Uluthando spoke to the idea of companionship within the struggle, that "Black women have each other". Validation is not necessarily found in pain itself, but in the company of people

who share that pain: the idea of Black women solidarity. It speaks to a crucial tenet of Black feminism in which standpoint theory and the common perceptual plane gain significance. Oppression for Black women takes on no homogenous nature, and women continue to be divided so long as attitudes regarding prejudices outside of race (class and sexuality, amongst others) continue to propagate the myth that oppression for each woman is entirely her own struggle. hooks (1986: 127) mentions how damaging and counter-productive these ideas can be, and how true and lasting effectiveness of Black feminism is reached through the acknowledgment that the struggles we each face are vastly different in their nuances, yet neither stand separate from each other underneath the overarching oppressive nature of white supremacist patriarchy (hooks, 1986: 127).

Chapter Four: Conclusion

The primary aim of this research was to explore how Black women perceived and experienced the institutional culture of Rhodes University, a South African HWU. A framework of Black feminism, with particular focus on its use of standpoint theory, was employed to analyse existing accounts of Black women postgraduate students at Rhodes University; and subsequently to understand how Black women students at HWUs derive meaning and identity from their experiences.

A motivating factor behind the research was a great interest in how Black women saw themselves and their surroundings in the post-Fees Must Fall era, and in the aftermath of protest action against gender-based violence in the RU Reference List movement. The involvement of Black women in these protests did, indeed, have an impact on how Black women students understood their place

(and, for some) their purpose in HWUs. The protests provided a useful backdrop to addressing further concerns of the research that had to do with the respondents sharing how they would describe gendered and raced aspects of their university experience. With Fees Must Fall, and the RU Reference List as context, the respondents provided the study with intimate and unique perspectives on race and gender; from Black womanness encompassing all of who they are, to being Black and being a woman to experiencing a higher sense of self.

The research, conducted through the qualitative approach of in-depth interviews with the six Black women respondents in the postgraduate Humanities class, conveyed that the institutional culture of the university was perceived by these women as complex and multi-faceted. Identity exploration and individual growth were seen to be fostered by issues of Blackness and womanhood that the respondents encountered inside their lecture venues, through participation - to whatever degree - in collective protest action, and in engagement with regular campus life. By analyzing Rhodes University's postgraduate women who live and identify as Black, the research found that race and gender are, as the hypothesis favoured, very much still distinct characteristics that influence a student's experiences of higher learning in formerly white institutions. However, the research also found, upon conducting the six interviews, that the respondents did not feel that race and gender were the only, (and in one or two cases) or even the main, components of the injustice wielded against them. Instances not considered in research prior to the fieldwork included racial dislocation, sexuality and sexual orientation, and ideas about faith and religion. The sentiment expressed by the respondents that being a Black woman is not to do with their colour or gender identity alone is important in recognizing the array of personality, histories, and hopes of Black women; as expressed in this paper as the 'common perceptual plane'.

Hill Collins' common perceptual plane provided the cornerstone of the research and its fieldwork. The integral role that respondents had in the research reinforces the significance of the common perceptual plane, and its relevance in today's HWUs. For merely writing about the shared, and yet, highly idiosyncratic lives and truths of Black women would not have demonstrated as clearly the truths and importance of the common perceptual plane. The fieldwork proved itself to be very necessary in actively debunking misconceptions surrounding the realities of Black women; namely, that we face and fight injustice, and define who we are in a homogenous manner. The literature that informed this research was drawn from scholars international, and from a different time, in addition to the local and current works of sub-Saharan African feminists; and it was imperative that, despite this well of knowledge and theory, that this paper conducted the fieldwork

that it did. Literature on theory and methodology, no matter how well-researched, cannot replace the ever-changing shifts and peculiarities of tangible reality.

The literature provided in this paper defined the Black feminist standpoint comprehensively, moving from broader paradigms of Blackness popularized by the west, to localised issues of African postcoloniality that hold greater relevance in South Africa. Though the former gave me a wide understanding of important concepts referred to throughout this paper, articles speaking to Black scholarship in South African HWUs were the resources that proved invaluable to my research. This includes the invaluable contributions of Gqola (2001), Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), Fataar (2018), and Mahabeer *et al* (2018). A hope of mine is that further women academics delve into this subject matter on a grander scale, or in greater depth than a MA thesis allows. The local academic resources that I did have access to were profoundly beneficial. However, there is to date a challenge present when trying to uncover a body of literature specifically dedicated to ideas of identity formation of the Black woman academic at South African HWUs that had traversed the novel landscape of her undergraduate years. We face a distinct challenge to produce literature on Black women academics, how they come to understand issues of capability, intellectuality, and self-validation in the complex terrain of South African higher education. I cannot claim that this is the gap my paper has filled, but I do hope that my attempts at capturing a part of the dialogue that the community of Black women thinkers have faced for decades has been successful in relaying that it is a conversation that can unlock boundless conversation on academic identity and citizenship. As I hope my research has conveyed, the Black woman is vast in her experiences, is deeply cognisant of the oppressions acting against her, and is deftly resourceful in necessitating her own survival, success, and the subversion of that which tries to silence her.

Conducting my analysis was challenging, and, at many times, overwhelming. Though the literature provided me with what to expect regarding the subjects of race and gender on an abstract plane, it was the interviews that brought these issues to a deeply inward, personal level. Though I do believe that my study has some applicability in the area of Black women scholarship, I would suggest, to any further research done on the issue, that greater attention is given to the emotional weight Black women in HWUs are already holding by virtue of simply existing in those spaces. My research was not centrally about the psychosocial realities of Black women students, but it is an area that deserves significantly more attention than the length of this paper permitted. My inherent relatability with the research meant that every interview left me with both epiphanies of, and further questions surrounding my own identity formation within, and journey through Rhodes

University. If there was anything I would perhaps do differently with this paper, I would have made a concerted effort to glean greater insight from the autoethnographies written by Black women in the academy. The potential scope of this MA paper was too limited to explore the dynamism autoethnography offers, and I believe employing more of its aspects would have helped me fare better in sorting through the complex relationship I had with this paper that went far beyond an academic commitment.

Having said all that I wished to say in this chapter, and having articulated it as well as I could manage, my final words return to the purpose of the thesis, and its significance - addressing how Black women students perceive and experience institutional culture at HWUs. For the sake of brevity, I will point to the three outcomes I believe to be most relevant, as outlined by the sub-goals mentioned in the introduction to this paper (see *Chapter 1.2 Goals and sub-objectives*). Firstly, Black women students carry out identity exploration in a variety of ways that diverge from specific focus on race and gender, such as navigating religion and sexuality. Secondly, they describe aspects of institutional culture in ways that certainly denote acknowledgement of their outlier status, but do admit to circumstances in which they find comfort, security, and validation in communities that exist on campus to cater to their primary identities. Lastly, the respondents spoke of how there are ideologies that are prioritised by the university, but that these ideas and how they influence their (the respondents') realities are not necessarily anything novel to their lived experiences in their entirety. As Rhodes University is a microcosm of the society in which we live, as the respondents agreed to, its intersecting violence against them did not begin here, and does not end here; but, most significantly, will not be the set of circumstances to break them.

Major strides have been made in South African higher education; from desegregation to programs of affirmative action, to discussion around curriculum decolonization. The Black women experience as illustrated in this paper represents how far we have come, and highlights the great possibility of progress and change needed to reach true integration, inclusion, and community.

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Appendix A



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Where leaders learn

Participant Consent form (Interviews)

Department of Sociology

Prince Alfred Street, Grahamstown, 6139, South Africa

PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa

t: +27 (0) 46 603 8361

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Name of researcher: Ayanda Gamedze

Brief description of the research topic: I understand the primary goal of the research is to address how Black women postgraduate students narrate their own experiences as students in historically white universities, and their perceptions of the institutional culture therein.

Declaration

1. I, (Name and Surname) _____ have read and understood the attached information letter for the Masters research proposal conducted by Ayanda Gamedze for the partial fulfilment of the Industrial and Economic Sociology MA degree of 2019.
2. I confirm that the purpose of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me verbally or in writing.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason - however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.
4. I understand that data collected during the study, will be used by the researcher and that my personal details gathered during this research, especially my name or identity, will be kept private.
5. I agree to be interviewed and to allow audio or video recordings and transcriptions to be made of the interview.
6. I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the report is written. OR
7. I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised for academic purposes only.

8. I understand that should I choose to opt out of the study, any information I have contributed will be disregarded and not used in neither the data analysis process nor be included in the final report.
9. I understand that signing this consent form means that all information I contribute to the research will be selectively used in the data collection process, and in the final report.
10. I understand that I am free to ask for the final report once I have been notified that the research has been completed.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix B

MA RESEARCH
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Rhodes University

Researcher Ayanda Gamedze

G14G0917

Respondent Information

Full name

Student number

Contact details

Department

Course currently registered for

Interview Information

Date

Place

A. Biographical Information

1. Where are you from? Can you tell me about your primary and secondary schooling? (*Follow up questions on location, class and nature of education system*)

2. Are you the first person in your family to attend university? (*Has this affected your experience of Rhodes?*)

3. Are you the first woman in your family to attend university? (*Has this affected your experience of Rhodes?*)

4. What is your home language?

5. What socioeconomic class do you identify with?

B. Non-Academic Aspects of the Student Experience

6. What type of residential area do you live in when you are at Rhodes? (*suburb, township, informal settlement*)

7. What is your primary source of income (*salary, wages, allowance*), and do you feel you are able to make ends meet? Do you have any alternative sources of income?

8. Do you feel you are able to indulge your personal wants, and enjoy the university experience that Rhodes has to offer?

9. Which group of people, broadly, in terms of race, gender, and class, do you feel most secure around? How so?

10. Which group of people, broadly, in terms of race, gender, and class, do you feel most vulnerable around? How so?

C. Academic Aspects to the Student Experience

11. During your time at Rhodes, have you ever experienced difficulties with understanding or expressing yourself in academic English? Have you ever experienced difficulties with engaging with other students in English?

12. Were you ever part of the Extended Studies program at Rhodes? If so, did you feel it aided you in any way in integrating yourself in the academic commitments of the university?

13. What has been your greatest obstacle in succeeding academically at a postgraduate level?

14. With regards to the call of the decolonization of curriculum, do you feel your experiences have been represented in the attempts to change the content of your studies?

15. In the same vein, do you feel there is adequate representation of gender, class, and race in your faculty in terms of students and academic staff?

D. Political Experience of Rhodes University

16. Are you a part of any societies at Rhodes that you believe represent your identity and experience? (*political societies, cultural societies*)

17. How would you describe your experience as a Black women at the university? Do you believe that all individuals who identify themselves as such share some common experiences?

18. Do you believe Black women students at the university have the resources to empower themselves not solely within their studies for academic success, but also with regards to self-expression and self-validation?

19. Do you think Black women have a different experience of sex and gender at historically white universities than white women do?

E. Perceptions of Institutional Culture

20. What do you regard the institutional culture of Rhodes University to be? That is, what do you think the university prioritizes in terms of how it presents itself, how it operates, and what it deems as normal and acceptable?

21. What were your earliest attempts at trying to integrate yourself into the Rhodes culture, that you remember, and were these endeavours successful?

22. The vision and mission of Rhodes is, briefly, to embrace human rights, to redress past inequalities, and to support disadvantaged students? Do you feel the university is achieving these objectives?