

**What are the pertinent intersections in the lives of black women at
Rhodes University?**

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Abstract

After the 2016 #FeesMustFall protest(s), higher education institutions were dramatically altered with respect to their institutional cultures; the narratives of those who were historically side-lined and marginalised took centre stage. At Rhodes University social activism was constitutive of three components; a ‘revolt’ against the fee increment; a contestation of the rape culture; and a rejection of the colonial curriculum. These concerns, in their varied articulations, made up different social and academic realities that define(d) Rhodes University and affected how individuals experienced institutional culture. According to Ndlovu (2017) while these expressed acts (in the form of protests and institutional shutdowns) of resistance against the system of higher education subsided after the fees must fall campaign, these served to centre the narratives of the marginalised. Keeping with this thinking, the argument presented in this thesis explores the experiences of black women in higher education after the call towards coordinated resistance. Using qualitative data in the form of narrative interviews, the thesis documents how the participants continued their academic and social life post-resistance. This rupture of resistance created a complex matrix of individual subjectivity where participants engaged with traditional social academic norms in new spaces of resistance; a phenomenon that enlivened the intersectionality that came to define the higher education landscape of the country. This thesis explores the stories of the participant’s as they engage(d) with what is becoming a new institution—that is the University in South Africa, with a case-in-point being Rhodes University—and to understand the power relations and intersections that define their lived experiences. This study found that the reality of existing within the confines of power—with its fluidity—meant that black women operate both within spaces of privilege and oppression simultaneously. As such, and following Vivian May’s (2015) argument, this study concludes that black women are situated and simultaneously constrained by power. Thus spaces of resistance are constantly in flux and determined by their relations within power.

(Keywords: Black women, Intersectionality, ontological plurality, Matrix structure and Higher education)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The recent student uprising, what has become known as the #FeesMustFall campaign, called for a radical shift in the structure and core tenants of Higher Education Institutions. Langa, Ndlelu and Vilakazi (2016) argue that this radical shift that was inaugurated by the student ‘revolt’ represented a political and structural issue that spans over multiple and overlapping issues. These overlaps caused a rise of micro tensions, resulting in violence between male and female protestors (Ndlovu, 2017).¹ Hodes (2017) adds that the violence within the protest revealed a deeper seated issue between young men and women within the University space. According to Gouws (2018) the citing of feminism and black consciousness simultaneously within the movement sparked a collision between male and female protestors. Whilst the overarching concern was the fee increment, Gouws (2018) believes that they remained a sense of Othering in relation to the sexualisation and harassment of women in Higher education. Following these outcries black women took to social media to voice out their concerns over the reductive nature and single minded framework of the movement (Gouws, 2018) According to Gouws (2018) some of the hashtags and tweets such as #My feminism should be intersectional or its bullshit, opened up the conversations surrounding black women place in higher education and the issue of inclusivity within decolonial and anti-subordination movements. Ndlelu, Dlakavu and Boswell (2017) add that whilst differences was initially in the genetic make-up of the protests and the movement, sexism and heteronormativity separated one’s understanding of in-group differences. This disparity amongst individuals gave rise to a number of protests which include but not limited to the patriarchy must fall movement at UCT and the RUreference list at Rhodes University (Ndlelu, Dlakavu and Boswell (2017).

Following these protests, those who concerned themselves with the meanings contained therein tried to locate the primary underlying issues in the sector (Langa, 2017; Naicker, 2016; Xaba, 2017). Central to these studies were the experiences of black women in higher education in South Africa (Ndlelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 2017).

¹ We make mention of this, owing to the focus of this thesis, which concerns itself with the lived experiences of black women in Higher Education Institutions. This focus is privileged due to the ways in which black women negotiate the battleground that became (and continues to be) the University—as institution—in its varied and multifaceted definitions that have created an institutional space that is still grappling with the prospect of defining itself anew.

According to Gouws (2017) 2015 was a catalyst for radical transformation. She argues that the sharp uprising of students created a rupture within the system that shifted the attention from individuals who occupied central position in the hierarchical system of higher education to the marginalised who were often erased and rendered a position that subsumed them in the background. Langa, Ndlelu, Edwin and Vilakazi (2017) suggest that the #FeesMustFall protest was both symbolic and political in nature. Firstly, by challenging hegemony, it developed a critical consciousness that awakened individuals to become socially aware of the oppressive nature of institutions that had been perceived as a space of development and modernisation (ibid)². Gouws (2017) adds that the social uprising, which has been described as a ‘revolt’ above, that occurred within tertiary institutions created a double-edged sword by allowing students to penetrate spaces of knowledge production and exhibit socially sanctioned behaviours both within and outside academia.³ Institutional culture, colonial academic curriculum, pedagogy and transformation were all called into question. The challenge that was levelled against these taken-for-granted modes of existing within the University, substantiate the claim elucidated in footnote 3 below.

Lewis and Hendricks (2017) argue that these expressions of grievances and micro-tensions were not isolated incidences in that they were a direct representation of the structural issues embedded in the systems of higher education in the country. Over the past decade scholarship concerning issues of transformation and the structurally oppressive system that is higher education in South Africa has been extensively critiqued (see Badat, 2004; Shackleton, Riordan and Simonis, 2006; Cloete, 2014). Shackleton, Riordan and Simonis (2006) argue that while there have been significant changes in higher education, racial and gender inequality remain prevalent and the cause of attrition for those who at the receiving end of these discriminatory practices that are cited in the literature cited above here.

² The concept ‘modernity’ is mentioned with reference to the argument developed in Chapter 7, which details the university as space of knowledge production, dissemination and development. The argument critiques the University for perpetuating whiteness, both in relation to the curriculum and institutional culture. This calls into questions notions of academic development and modernization; a critique that is founded on a critical interrogation of curriculum, epistemological practices and pedagogy.

³ This double existence, it is useful to note, features here owing the contradictions that can be seen to constitute these two spaces that is the social (read secular) context and the intellectual (read academic) context. This is to say that these two spaces are defined by oftentimes competing value systems that when located together, may cause friction that ultimately surfaces as a mode of violence or rupture.

Staying with the challenges that continue to afflict the sector, in the case of the recent student protests, grievances of racial and gendered discrimination were frequently brought up as a critique of institutional culture, patriarchal systems and exclusionary academic practices (Ndlovu, 2017). Within such a context, racial and gender oppression have been used interchangeably – denoting the interconnections that define(d) the experiences of those who had been previously marginalised (ibid). The study of racial and gender intersections in higher education speaks to a larger context of complex social struggles that are co-dependent (Mabokela and Mawila, 2004). Put simply, as indicated above, with respect to the persistent challenges that continue to define the sector, the reader cannot quite appreciate the challenges of gendered (also read as sexual) discrimination without appreciating the nexus of concerns that were brought to the fore due to this unprecedented rupture that was the student ‘revolt’. These concerns speak to a larger context that operates in a matrix that functions both within and outside the structural patterns of identity politics.⁴

It is argued that black women experience oppression from racial, gendered and cultural aspects in South African academic institutions (Qambela, 2016), subsequently giving us the entry point—even if cursorily—into the intersectional analysis that will constitute this study. The student campaign (understood as ‘revolt’) highlighted other forms of discrimination that fell outside of the racial, gender and cultural paradigm (Qambela, 2016). These findings, which detail how black women’s experiences are still subjected to reductive analyses that centre on what can be read as essentialised oppressive struggles, highlight two things. First, the discourses surrounding black women’s experiences in higher education and secondly, practices that are socially accepted as normative behaviour that limits the ability to question such a reality.

Despite the growing body of literature that reflects on black women’s experiences Collins and Bilge (2020) argue that black women’s experiences remain essentialised. Such essentialisations take on varied forms of arguments vis-à-vis black identities. González and Collins (2019) maintain that it is heteronormative patterns of knowledge-based systems that value sameness over differences that keeps black women’s experiences within a reductive framework, both of interpretation and understanding. Yuval-Davis (2006) adds that this reductive nature is derived

⁴ The matrix denotes what is meant by systems of oppression that operate in multiple and overlapping ways, and that contrast with the existing literature that suggests oppression can be quantified or conflated into one form of concrete oppression. Chapter 3 details this in a more sustained argument.

from the obsessive concentration on identity politics analyses of disadvantages rather than a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates the structural, cultural and interpersonal components that define the lives of black women. Vivian May (2015) substantiates this position by arguing that the structure of research on black women experiences is reduced by a traditionally curtailed logic that opts for the separation of categories, a binary conceptualisation of struggles and the insistence of using homogeneity as the basis of understanding social categories. Carby (1982) views this misconception from a theoretical perspective, using Feminist theory as an example, she argues that black women's experiences are often conceptualised under theoretical constructs that are driven by a political narrative that involves meeting goals or patterns that don't align with black women's experiences. Subsequently, this forces individuals to pick and choose which forms of oppression best fit the theoretical construct in order to meet a directed goal.

Rationale

For the purposes of this study essentialism is understood as acknowledging oppressive experiences as a concrete struggle that can be identified in a singular form i.e. through a race, class or gender narrative pattern that seeks to conflate experience for the purposes of identifying homogeneity or universalism (Yuval Davis, 2006). According to May (2015:12) much of the scholarship that exists uses intersectionality as a word to describe the intersecting nature of race, gender and class rather than as an analytical tool that helps eradicate injustice by contesting dominant imageries that are embedded in traditional narrative norms; a contestation that would denote an orientation towards epistemological justice. Put differently this contestation would mean an ontological praxis that identifies matrix thinking and evades neutrality by accounting for complex subjectivity. Furthermore, such an orientation would facilitate a political orientation that identifies differences as a convergence point of solidarity rather than working toward sameness. This study contributes to this debate by breaking from normative patterns of singular conceptualisation, not just in terms of identity but in a larger context of complex subjectivity that accounts for multiple disciplines.

Gouws (2017) explains that even after the call to active resistance and radicalism, our liberating praxis is indoctrinated within a mono-logic that identifies with one political standpoint that does not move too far from traditional knowledge constructs. We therefore find ourselves in conflict with competing values constantly pulling from different political standpoints. In such a context, the idea is that our difference can be understood in a quantified platform that does not move outside

the border of traditional knowledge. At the centre of this conflict are black women grappling with spaces of resistance and conformity, by way of trying to find self-validation. This study provides insights on the complexity that defines black women's subjectivities. Their stories and experiences are understood as philosophically relevant, thus contributing to our understanding what it means to be ontologically plural⁵ not just in terms of identity but also in relation to power. To date, existing research on black women has analysed their experiences by paying attention to intersecting identities that reveal relations between social identities (See for instance Mabokela and Mawilla, 2004). This thesis contributes to this body of knowledge by extending the context of intersections to a multifaceted disciplinarian structure that incorporates epistemological, ontological and coalition politics in its analysis format.

Conceptual framework: Intersectionality

According to Collins and Bilge (2020) intersectionality is a political orientation that advances a critical inquiry towards social justice. Grounded on a multiplicity of considerations, it sets to unravel systems of oppression by delving into the praxis of structural oppression. Using subjective experiences, intersectionality critically analyses the conceptualisation that constitutes the interface between the world and the self. Traditionally, theoretical frameworks conduct studies under one discipline with a set of goals in order to construct a narrative (Bilge, 2010). Intersectionality breaks from that norm by using multiple disciplines to understand the lived experiences of individuals. As a critical praxis it engages with power, institutions, ideologies, agency and forms of resistance (ibid). According to Ramsay (2014) intersectionality understands individuals as living within the confines of privilege and oppression concurrently. May (2015) adds that all these factors operate under the matrix system that is intrinsically multidimensional in nature. By challenging dominant logic and subordination practices, it directly deals with issues of social justice.

Grzanka (2018) explains that owing to the fact that intersectionality incorporates epistemological practice and ontological plurality—the individual's intersections do not solely revolve around their

⁵ Ontological plurality is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, wherein the study applies itself to the argument of individuals who live outside the conventional concept of one positional state of being. Throughout the study, the focus is on broadening the modes of understanding oppression, by way of connecting the concept of multiple subjectivities and interstice that extend outside the constructs of race, class and gender to create multiple theoretical disciplines, which offer us a state of ontological plurality.

identities. Rather, it (intersectionality) highlights numerous perspectives ranging from the social, cultural and the personal (ibid). It is for this reason that it is used as a tool to better understand the experiential existence of black women in spaces that can be understood as oppressive and limiting. According to Collins (1989) in order to get black women into a space of social justice they first need to get themselves into a space of critical consciousness, i.e. questioning dominant narratives that surround them in order to understand where they come from, what are the purposes of their existence, who best do they serve and how are they interpreted. This thesis follows this challenge, by using intersectionality as an analytical tool it questions the dominant logic and institutionalised knowledge practices that surround the participants' lived experiences.

Method, technique and procedure of the research

A detailed description of the research methods, procedure and techniques used in this study are provided in chapter 4. This thesis employs a narrative approach to document experiences of black women at Rhodes University. According to Elliot (2012) narrative inquiry encapsulates the individuals' story into a sequence that connects events in a meaningful way. Josselson (2011) adds that narrative research revolves around the participants lived experiences and seeks to discover their form of truth. Put differently, and in view of the fact that intersectionality – as has been defined above – deals with what has been termed ontological plurality, the suggestion here is that the narrative of the women whose lives this study focuses on, are defined by what can be understood as competing truths that place them in more than one state of being. Thus, the objective becomes a discovery of the truth as understood by the participant telling their own story, through their own lens. This served as a crucial aspect in terms of understanding the participant's subjectivity towards social inequality and epistemic justice. In-depth open-ended interviews were conducted with 9 black female students who were registered at Rhodes University in order to understand their experiences of being at Rhodes. Fusch and Ness (2015) argue that reaching a point of saturation depends on the type of study. This study provides an in-depth understanding of the participant's lives thus rich and thick data was opted for rather than a large sample size. The data was analysed using both thematic and intersectional analysis.

Scope of the study

The focus of the study is on students at Rhodes University who demographically identify as black women. Some of the participants indicated that they do not identify themselves according to their

gender or race, however, they acknowledged that under the present academic environment that deals with individuals based on their demographic classifications, they understood themselves to be part of black female social structure. In order to understand their lived experience, this study took a holistic approach by focusing on areas that the participants felt comfortable in sharing. This was also done to avoid any form of a reductive reading of their social experiences; a caution that was taken in view of the challenges detailed above with respect to a reductionist approach when studying the lives of black women.

The study sample ranged from a second-year student to PhD candidates. However, it is worthy to mention that this study does not speak for all black women's experiences at Rhodes University. As a study that is informed by heterogeneity, the narrative experiences of the participants provide insight on how they engage with the various social surroundings, as they encounter them as individuals.

Thesis structure

Chapter 1

This chapter provides an overview and the background of the study, as well as the rationale methods and conceptual framing employed in the study.

Chapter 2: The Context of Black Women in Higher Education

This chapter discusses experiences of black women in higher education from a global, regional and local perspective. It traces the literature on black women's experiences while simultaneously outlining the dominant narratives that have emerged on black women in said literature.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framing – Intersectionality

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework of the study. It examines the argument and contentions developed in intersectionality scholarship. It draws on scholars like Crenshaw, May, Collins, McCall and Nira Yuval-Davis as well as others who discuss the concept of matrix thinking, power fluidity and complex subjectivity. It then draws out four concepts from the main theorists as a threshold for understanding the data generated from the interviews with the participants of the study to help answer the research question as it is framed in the study.

Chapter 4: Narrative Inquiry

This chapter describes the methodological procedure that was employed in answering the research question posed in the study. It provides a sequential account of the analytical process that was used during the study. The chapter describes the research design, data collection, participants and the analysis as presented in the thesis. It also discusses issues relating to ethics, rigor, validity and reliability.

Chapter 5: Not an Additive System but Rather a Matrix System

In this chapter, the study employs the matrix structure to analyse the intersections that define the participant's academic experience. The findings suggest that the participants live both in spaces of inequality and privilege. The argument developed in the chapter maintains that the experiences of the participants of this study are qualitatively different and complex in nature. Using Choo and Ferree's (2010) argument of oppression Olympics, the chapter further probes the idea of additive intersections.

Chapter 6: Structural Intersectionality

In this chapter the study makes the argument that the structural domains of power that remain hidden in the background influence black women's experiences. Using Collins (2019) intersectional structure that incorporates the structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal domains of power, the argument advanced here demonstrates that black women's experiences should be analysed intersectionally by incorporating these four domains. The rationale behind such an approach to analyses is that this framework gives the reader a better understanding of the epistemic and ontological components under investigation about the lives of women within whom the researcher is in conversation. Moreover, such an approach gives justification to an investigation of the concept of ontological plurality and agency within structural intersectionality.

Chapter 7: The Workings of Domination within the Matrix Structure

This chapter critically assess the underlying powers that influence and sustain dominant narratives. It makes the argument that social academic norms of institutional culture, curriculum, language and pedagogy re-instil the culture of oppression. This is to say that the culture of oppression under investigation in this respect, speaks to the dominant epistemic framework that defines the socio-political reality of black women's experiences. Thus, this chapter further probes how the

participants engage with spaces of resistance in academia. Such an investigation facilitates an argument that holds that the workings of domination are intrinsically connected to power, epistemology practices and ontology, therefore making it crucial for individuals to understand dominance from all three aspects. This understanding is what facilitates a confrontation with said forms of dominance for the purposes of working towards justice; or curating a just world.

Chapter 8: Single axis thinking

In this chapter the argument developed in the study demonstrates how active resistance is often confined by traditional single axis logic. The argument here reveals that even when black women engage in forms of resistance, which challenge essentialisation patterns of binary logic, a reductive politicisation of struggles always inhibits growth and by growth is intended the notion of liberation and justice as it developed in the previous chapter, Chapter 7. This chapter engages with the praxis of social justice and argues that it can only be achieved through coalition politics of accepting differences and multiple political standpoints. This argument undergirds the notion of ontological plurality both as it is denotative of the individual's experiences as well as it denotes the ontological plurality that is constitutive of a plethora of voices—that is to say a coalition that denotes a form of collaborative politics.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter draws conclusions on the main findings in relation to the research question posed in the study. It further highlights the key findings of the thesis and makes recommendations concerning moving black female literature towards spaces of epistemic defiance and epistemic justice.

Chapter 2: Context

Introduction

Kathy Ferguson (1993) maintains that the questions we ask about the world are either enabled or disabled based on the framework that orders the question(s). This is to say that the ability to conduct certain investigations is either curtailed or enabled on the premise of the prevailing epistemic structure that sanctions what is worthy of consideration and what doesn't require our collective attentions. To substantiate, Green, Pulley, Jackson, Martin and Fasching-Varner (2018) argue that while there is vast body of literature that has been produced on black women's experiences in the past decade, the manner in which information is extracted and produced fails to adequately unravel the social, political and structural issues that black women face in Higher Education Institutions. This is particularly the case Historically White Institutions (HWU).

In the past decade, Historically White Institutions have become central in the development of research on black women's experiences. Collins (1990) believes that this is due to the shift in focus from the individual to the larger integrated context in which the individual exists, i.e. the environment that they exist in. Transformation, institutional culture and institutional structures – all form part of the new form of studies conducted on black women's experiences. This is owing to an attempt at better understanding how black women integrate and adapt to the environments in which they are located. One can go further and connect this debate to the ever-growing concerns about the attrition levels of black women in the higher education section, however, this component does not constitute an integral part of the research under discussion here. Simply, then, Collins (1990) argues that literature on black women's experiences has been separated in twofold ways, the first speaks to the individual and focuses on personal experiences that encapsulate individual identities and their social aspects such as marginalisation, exclusion, lack of mentorship and othering. The secondary focus is on the structural systems of higher education institutions particularly within knowledge production and system patterns that perpetuates social inequality. The reader will, here, appreciate the reasoning behind a cursory mention of the challenge of attrition in the sector. This study subsequently focuses on the intersections of these two overarching components that are filtered through and define black women's experiences.

The Marginalised Individual

Literature, in this area of research, focuses on the marginalisation of black women in higher education (see instances Dahlgvig, 2010; Chandler, 1996; Gren, Pulley, Jackson, Martin and Fasching-Varner, 2018; Ellis, 2001; Davis and Brown, 2017; Simmonds, 1992; Fleming, 1983; Mabokela and Green, 2001). In the global west Collins (1990) estimates that almost half of the research produced on black women's experiences, from the 1970s right through the 1990s, emphasised the marginalisation of black women in predominantly white institutions of higher education. From the literature produced on black women there has been a number of arguments surrounding marginalisation. Baldwin and Johnson (2018) argue that marginalisation remains one of the core obstacles that black women face in the United States education system.

Green, Pulley, Jackson, Martin and Fasching Varner (2018:296) assert that, globally, most universities provide opportunities for upward mobility while also perpetuating social inequality. Similarly, Mirza (2018), writing about institutional racism in higher education, emphasises the culture of social inequality embedded in institutionalised racism within higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. On paper, the legislative frameworks stipulate antidiscrimination and equal opportunity, however, Mirza (2018) notes that from the 1990s there has been a steady decline in student and staff members of colour. The 2017 statistics survey of academics in higher education reported about 3895 white females and only 345 British women of colour (Ibid). Within the ranks of women of colour, there were only 30 black female professors (Mirza, 2018:4). In terms of students, the 2017 statistics reported a large decline of black minority ethnic (BME) students within elite universities across the United Kingdom. Mirza (2018) states that institutions such as Oxford reported no admittance of black students within the past 5 years. Emejulu (2017), quoted in Mirza (2018: 4) points out that “[to] speak of universities is to recognise them as spaces of exclusion and discrimination which hide their epistemic violence behind a rhetoric of meritocracy, collegiality and the ‘free exchange of ideas’.”

According to Mirza (2006) issues of marginalisation and cultural diversity within institutions remain unaddressed at the level of foundations and principles of recruitment in Higher Education Institutions. As a structure built towards the service of the state, Higher Education Institutions follow global market trends that often frame scholars as consumers that are oriented towards a higher initiative of capital gain (Mirza, 2006), thus she argues that initiatives built within higher

education that call for diversity and differences, use this call for the sole purpose of multiplying diverse students whilst simultaneously maintaining white supremacy through maintaining staff and management positions for white academics. While the demographics are centrally focused on black female lecturers and staff members, the overall concern remains one of marginalisation and diversity programs in higher education institutions creating a rift between black females and their white counterparts. It is worthy to note here that this rift is not only one that concerns white women – but should also be inclusive of black and white men, who aggressively compete with black women in these spaces.

In the international context, May (2015) notes that the literature highlights issues of marginalisation when it comes to discrimination and matters of racial divide. May (2015), however, takes a different approach by analysing and critiquing texts on marginalisation. She questions the logic and reasoning behind the constant emphasis on black women within Historically White Institutions as the subordinate and the oppressed Other. She further highlights the inherently political nature of the constant comparison in higher education texts, wherein black women are constantly placed in the narrow end of the line, which is denotative of an oppressive or negative state. To elucidate, such a framing of black women—it is suggested—always locates them in the role of victim, a matter that is contested by May (2015), who challenges these narratives with the intention of inspiring more complex and textured understandings of the lives and experiences of black women in the sector.

The political nature of language has played a significant role in research on marginalisation. As an example, Patricia Collins (1998) notes the complex relationship that is constitutive of being an outsider within Higher Education Institutions and the importance of self-valuation and self-definition within a marginal context. She highlights the lack of agency that black women are subsumed by in research on marginality. She further argues that stereotypes are a form dehumanisation with respect to black women; a form dehumanisation that seeks to control and exploit them both in the confines of the workplace and in social environments.

Globally, the institutional foundations of Eurocentric knowledge production and research skills have had an overwhelming influence on marginality in higher education institutions. According to Baldwin and Johnson (2018) the Eurocentric foundations of academia in conjunction with the

historical background of oppression in the country, these factors all contribute towards the marginalisation of black women. Green, Pulley, Jackson, Martin and Fasching Varner (2018:296) add that the survival of Eurocentric interests is inevitable due to the structural systems at play in research skills (and their development) along with knowledge production systems that promote a form of homogeneity that solely benefits a structure of white supremacy, that certain individuals continue to derive benefits from – thus perpetuating a system of marginality.

Objectification of Black Women's Experiences

It can be argued that the literature deals with the paucity of representation that constitutes the knowledge production economy (See instances Mirza, 2018; Hancock, 2016; Robert, 2013; Wright, Maylor and Watson, 2018; Edwards and Ross, 2018; Perlow, Wheeler, Bethea and Scott, 2018; Carter and Hart, 2010). According to Phelp-Ward, Allen and Howard (2017) the majority of institutions in the global west and global north are not designed to accommodate black female scholarship. The structure of the institution itself makes it intrinsically difficult to accommodate black scholarship. This is due to the fact that black scholarship has always been undervalued, being viewed—oftentimes—as lacking any contribution to make when assessed in accordance with western epistemic frameworks. According to Collins (1990), due to the fact that western scholarship still remains in the control of the minority white elite, the structure of knowledge validation remains and will continue to be in their interests. Studies conducted on lack of representation have varied from issues of institutional environments, institutional racism and the structure of knowledge in the westernised university (Grosfoguel, 2013). For instance, Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury's (2017) paper on racial microaggression in higher education, highlights that universities that represent their environments as utopian spaces are often embedded in racial inequality that inhibits and maintains conditions of racial bias. Brown, Rosnick and Segrist (2017) add that internalised racial oppression in predominantly white institutions often correlates with the values and core principles within an institution.

Historical Differences

Historical content has always defined this area of scholarship in very useful and insightful ways. This is particularly evident with studies produced on black women's experiences. Moreover, the content—of said historicity—always varies based on the country where the study was conducted. The variance is determined along the lines of the historical conditions that constitute the

experiences of that context in which said research is conducted. A large contribution to black women's experience research has remained in the global west (as evinced in the work of Ricks, 2011; Phelp-ward, Allen and Howard, 2017; Porter and Dean, 2015; Rodgers, 2008; Jean-Marie, Williams and Sherman, 2009; Bonner and Thomas, 2001; Wallace, Moore and Curtis, 2014; Burke, Croppe and Harrison, 2000). The history of slavery, oppression and access to opportunity in predominantly white institutions has further buttressed the kinds of impact on the content of the literature to be found in the global west. Baldwin and Johnson (2018) argue that the Eurocentric foundations of the knowledge economy in conjunction with the colonial history of slavery in the United States has greatly impacted the education system. Racism and gender oppression remain key components to the main constraints within higher education (Ibid) theory; and this dearth is concerning theory that would assist the readers of feminist proclivities when it comes to higher education governance and the democratisation of these spaces such that they are receptive to black women, thus allowing them to thrive.

Stevens, Armstrong and Arum (2008) identify the differences of systemic outcomes within whiteness. According to these scholars, the historical differences between countries such as Australia and South Africa differ when contextualising whiteness. Countries such as Australia and the United States of America have maintained whiteness through numerical quantity and the reproduction of superiority through political, economic and social aspects. However, in South Africa while dealing with issues of whiteness, white counterparts have always been in the minority, thus acts of resistance have always been aligned with the growth of systemic oppression (Stevens, Armstrong and Arum, 2008). Put simply, while there are attempts to open these spaces—that is to say, making the sector more representative—there exist active resistance to such acts of democratisation, resistance that is experienced as the comparable and matched growth of systematic oppression.

Africa

A sizeable amount of research on black women in higher education has been conducted in Africa (See instances Bennet, 2002; Vanyoro, 2020; Gaidzwana, 2007; Bunting, 1994; Kwesiga, 2002; Mama, 2003; Okeke, 2003; Chivaura, 2000). Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies have been deployed in researching the experiences of black women in higher education in Africa. According to Barnes (2007), when dealing with scholarship pertaining to

African women, the question of feminism within an African context always comes to the fore. A vast amount of literature on African women deals with the complexity of gender and feminism and its relationality with coloniality. For instance, Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) argue that the dominant discourses of Western feminist theory place women and girls in a system that emphasises their experiences as the Other⁶. Contrasting this system with those found on the African continent, they (Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010) argue that indigenous Tswana cultural patterns in Botswana place black women at odds with western gender theories and policies. They (Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010) further argue that this oppositional relationship plays out in education, language and religion, both in the public and private spheres, simultaneously. Collins (2002) adds that the dialectical relationship between Western theory and indigenous cultural practices stresses the need for new forms of conceptualisation of oppression outside the traditional ‘global west’ norm.

For instance, in the western region scholars such as Tsikata (2007) challenge issues of post-colonialism and gender at the University of Ghana. She expresses the deeply entrenched gendered system that come to define the university.

A sizeable number of scholars examine the interplay between black women in higher education and the larger conversation of nationalism (Bennet, 2002; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango, 2000; Rathgeber, 2003). The literature suggests that black women in African universities find difficulty in being accepted due to the larger context of the state not recognising black women as equal citizens within the arrangement of the state. Odejide (2007) adds that within the lived experiences of black women in higher education institutions in Nigeria the hierarchies of gender are quite evident. The dynamics are often defined by contestation of dominance and subordination where black women have to challenge what are perceived as ‘natural’ and cultural constructs in the workspace (ibid).

The literature clearly demonstrates the gap amongst men and women in academia. However, while many of the scholars deal with the intersecting nature of social categories and structures of oppression from both pre-and post-colonial times. Only a limited group of scholars engage with colonial texts in an effort to dismantle these structures of oppression, while they acknowledge the existence of various gendered hierarchies within post-colonial times. Tracing the intersecting links

⁶ We understand the term “other” as a process of subordination, where black women are placed outside the social norm. For the purposes of the study, we will delineate this term with the capital O.

of these oppressive structures remains at a minimum level in scholarship that concerns this phenomenon.

South African Context

According to Gouws (2017) as a settler colonial state, the South African higher education system is still haunted by the footprints of apartheid. She argues that although the system has undergone a transition to accommodate diversity exclusionary mechanisms such as heteropatriarchy, racial hierarchies and white privilege continue to persist. These structures still thrive, a factor that ultimately inhibits transformation. A large body of literature on black women in South African institutions covers issues such as transformation and the dominance of the historical apartheid ideologies that continue to prevail to the present day (see instance Matandela, 2017; Mangena, 2008; Rabe and Rugunanan, 2010; Davids and Matabeni, 2017; Idahosa, 2019; Walker, 2005; Mophosho, 2013; Pillay and Mclellan, 2010; Bitzer, 2010). Arguments, in this set of work, range from matters of transformation, institutional culture and issues of decoloniality within institutions.

Transformation

A sizeable amount of research on black women in higher education in South Africa deals with the issue of transformation (see for instance Ramohai, 2019, Mabokela, 2001; Reddy, 2004; Akala, 2018; Souiden, 2010). According to Badat (2010: 4) a constitutive part of higher education's developmental goals is to eradicate inequality through increased access and the inclusion of black female students. Historically, when looking at transformation-policy wise-Badat (2010) highlights the significant changes made by government. Policies such as the 1997 White Paper 3, highlight the importance of diversity from a national perspective that contributes towards a non-racists and non-sexist society (2010: 10). On paper these policies seem progressive towards the development of black women in higher education. However, Walker (2018:123) explains that

while access to higher education has expanded overall from a headcount of 575,412 students in 1995 to 983,698 in 2013, the actual participation rate, that is the percentage of each social group who are in higher education, is still skewed to white students at 54,7% compared with 16,5 % for black students

The overall number of females has increased to 58%, however, the distribution across departments remains uneven (Walker and Wilson-Strydom, 2016). Mama (2007) adds that the high number of

black females within the academic space has created a shift from gender policy redress to race matters for political capital. Put differently, Mama (2007) emphasizes the separation between racial and gender categories as a means of indicating the gap that details how educational institutions calculate racial on the same terms as transformation. According to Rabe and Rugunanan (2012) this is evident in the disparity between black and white women in the academe. Although white women have a higher leverage within academic spaces their focus tends to lean towards the gender aspect rather than their race whereas black women are overshadowed by the racial challenges that they encounter.

A bulk of research on black women in academia has been conducted to highlight transformation as a means of gender equality (Akoojee and Nkomo, 2007; Govinder, Zondo and Makgoba, 2013; Hemson and Singh, 2010; Evans, 2007; Shavers and Moore, 2014). According to Akala (2018) transformation is articulated in the form of gender equality and equal remuneration. Issues of research funding, publications and possibilities of promotion are still a cause for concern. As indicated in the text above, black women are still undervalued in HWU. This speaks to the larger context of the disparity and confusion between gender equality and racial inclusion. Matandela (2017) takes a different approach by looking at gender equality in the form of womxn and gender queer pupils been included within gender equality discourses. She notes (2017) the colonial imposition in Africa and its extent to other social categories included the coloniality of gender that is still present in the ideologies of today's society. She further notes that the coloniality of gender is unique in that it intersects within race, class and gender.

Identity

Much of the literature on black women in South African higher education focuses on identity (Walker, 2005; Toni and Oliver, 2004; Mophosho, 2013; Shefer, Strebel, Ngabaza, and Clowes, 2018; Cross and Carpentier, 2009). Arguments often vary from Historically White Universities and Historically Black Universities. Walker (2005) places emphasis on the impact of the "rainbow nation", and the effects it had on the identity construction of black students in higher education. According to Walker (2005) the dominant discourse of a rainbow nation that was endorsed in post-apartheid South Africa, created a huge identity crisis. Gaines (1998) believes that this crisis was derived from the universalisation of a national identity. He (Gaines, 1998) argues that the assertion of a singular identity created opacities and cracks that privileged the white minority from the

previous apartheid era, which the state sought to change. This indicates a clear gap between practices of transformation and the tools used to facilitate change. This study follows this gap by studying the dominant practices used that either allow or inhibit spaces of change. While South African universities embraced the issues of a non-racial society, social realities and policies often had no correlation with this attitude. He (Walker, 2005) uses the example of the education system endorsing English as a medium of practice and how this created a certain type of identity that aligns with whiteness.

King as quoted in Mophosho (2013) contextualises identities from an environmental perspective. He argues that the institutional cultures in Historically White Universities have an overwhelming impact on the students and their processes of identity formation. In most cases the cultural identities often clash with the institutional culture within Historically White Universities which leads to marginalisation or exclusion (Mophosho, 2013: 29). While there is a lot of literature that engages with black women's experiences in higher education, most studies remain fragmented. Studies that focus on the identities of black women align their experiences in the categories of race, class and gender often mimicking triple oppression. Social categories such as culture and religion are often identified as add-ons from the race, gender and class paradigm. This leads to additive processes that regurgitate known knowledge(s). Gouws (2017) identifies this as the process of a dominant knowledge system that maintains the status quo of oppression.

Race, Class and Gender

According to Magubane (2006: 2) one might consider all South African women within the confines of gendered and racial oppression due to the current economic trends affecting South African universities. Mkhize (2005: 117) adds that black women's experiences were understood in threefold ways during apartheid, through the intersection of race, class and gender. Traditionally, studies on black women's identity in higher education centred their arguments on a homogenous understanding of black women's oppression either from a race and/or gender perspective. However, recently studies have started shifting towards understanding the heterogeneity and complexity of black women's experiences in the sector. For instance, Johnson and Nord (2010) conduct research into the lives of black women and argue that black women cannot be understood merely from a biological point of view, which makes it important to address narratives of black women not under the lens of gender alone but rather "women". May (2015: 40) adds that black

women's experiences should always be understood as mediated and not static, a mediation that gives us an insight into the lived experiences, social location and historical context that all play an important role in understanding black women's subjectivity. She further adds that the process of understanding identities as schemes and discursive constructs that reproduce our realities creates ambiguity wherein more than one form of interpretation can co-exist with one another.

According to Gouws while the literature highlights the distinction of the racial and gendered intersection, black women's identities remain essentialised. Due to the large disciplines that are used to examine the lives of black women, those black women's experiences that are examined are concealed as these narratives are adjusted to fit the description of certain political projects or disciplines (Gouws, 2017). Gouws uses the example of the #RURefence list protest which shed light on the issues of black women and sexual violation at one of the country's universities. When read in context, these women were protesting naked in order to dismantle the gendered and racialised systemic violence against their bodies. However, images in the media reduced them to their bodies by way of body shaming.

Recent studies (by scholars such as Smele, Siew-Sarju, Chou, Breton and Bernhart, 2017; Gouws, 2017; Qambela, 2016; Mirza, 2018) suggest that emancipatory discourses in higher education critique the higher education system from both an epistemological level and a structural level. In the former, that is the 2015 #FeesMustFall movement that called for free education, this movement placed emphasis on decoloniality and substantive representation in higher education. Matandela (2017:12) notes that the movement that was rephrased under "Fallism" called for the fall of white supremacy, hetero- patriarchy, capitalism, and structural oppression. Gouws (2017: 19) argues that "[the] fees must fall protest provided a distinct ontological break from past enunciations of feminism[s] amongst African women, who have an uncomfortable relationship with feminism that is often viewed as a white, western [importation]." From an epistemological standpoint the focus is centred on contesting the naturalised systems of knowledge production and dissemination, this relates to curriculum and pedagogy, with a structural critique contesting the routinized multi-layered form of domination, whether it be patriarchy or whiteness.

Lewis and Hendricks (2017:2) adds that the #Fallist movement echoed previous feminists work of transforming the curriculum and scrutinising racialised and masculinist institutional cultures. The

scrutinization of heteropatriarchal norms in Higher Education Institutions also shed light on issues of gender-based violence within Higher Education Institutions.

Violence Against Black Women in the Academe

According to Gordon and Collins (2013) gender-based violence in the South African higher education system sets as a testament of the epistemological and pedagogical systems of violence that have become normalised. In South Africa, the research indicates that gender-based violence unfolded in the form of sexual harassment, rape and feminicide. While the recent #Fallist movements revealed that the sector is afflicted with the challenge of gender-based violence, through protests, Gordon and Collins (2013) argue that the response of institutions towards femicides is very class and racially biased. Gouws (2017) uses the example of the End rape culture campaign where female students used their naked bodies as a symbolic tool towards the rape culture in higher education as a means to show the disparities between white female protestors and black females. According to Gouws (2017) although white women participated in the protest stereotypes of promiscuity were alluded towards white women and cultural body shaming was predominant amongst black women.

Work by scholars such as Gordons and Collins (2013), Gqola (2015) and Moffett (2006) – speaks to the intersection of race, power and cultural practices of rape culture in the post-apartheid era. Gqola (2015) states that social norms in conjunction with cultural practices that further promote male patriarchy contribute towards gender-based violence against South African women. Gqola (2007) further notes that the culture of femininity amongst women incubates and feeds violent masculinities and further contributes towards gender-based violence. Moreover, Research conducted in Higher Education Institutions has shown the social habits of slut shaming, the militarization of male patriarchy during protests and violence that is accepted during protests, all contribute to the gender-based violence ingrained within social practices (see for instance the scholarship of Xaba, 2017; Langa, Ndelelu, Edwin and Vilakazi, 2017; Maringira and Gukurume, 2016; Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 2017)

The contextualization of the recent protest of fees relied heavily on feminism. According to Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell (2017) the marginalization and discrimination of black women in the various iterations that were constitutive of the broader protests, gave rise to a range of feminist

interventions Xaba (2017) believes that the violent uprising of students mimicked ideologies of black radical feminism, the militarised masculinities coupled with the violent backlash against women leading the protest, all pointed to the structural inequality embedded in the patriarchal and gendered system that has been an underlying force in academia, which has bearing on the social practices of students. What followed from the #RURference list at Rhodes University, to the naked protest at Wits University – was an intervention from a black feminist perspective (Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 2017: 2). Lewis and Hendricks (2017) take this argument a step further by comparing the 2015-2016 #FessMustFall protest to the feminist academic intervention in the late 1980s. While these various scholars evaluate the epistemological shift towards black consciousness and radical feminist perspectives, the majority of the studies only surface these micro tensions in the movement. To be sure, there is a paucity of literature on the transformational shift of black consciousness and black feminist interventions post the #Fallist movement(s).

Rhodes University

According to Badat (2010) Rhodes University is a Historically White University that draws from the founding principles of an African identity. With a student body, of which over 50% is made up of black males and females, it prides itself on building a diverse student body that adheres to principles of equity on all academic platforms. In the 2015 research report under the slogan “the future is female”, the University provided a detailed report on the first (all female) Vice- chancellor awards at which three new members of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) were all awarded to females. According to the report of all the SARChI Chairs at Rhodes University 50% are now occupied by women.

In an effort to eradicate discrimination, several anti-discrimination policies and committees have been developed to ensure progress. These include the Equity Committee, the Equity and Institutional Culture Committee and the Senate Disciplinary Committee. Part of the University’s commitment entails adhering to the constitutions’ anti-discrimination policy. A considerable amount of literature on equity at Rhodes University, speaks to members who are employed within the academe. For instance, Mkhize (2005) speaks about her role as lecturer at Rhodes University. She (Mkhize, 2005: 112) argues that “[hiring] black women, who are in any case privileged by educational background does not necessarily signal that South Africa is becoming the decent, free and inclusive society we all so badly yearn for.” She asserts that the employment of black women

in Higher Education Institutions does not guarantee radical transformation. Fourie as quoted in Mkhize (2005: 118) argues that

transformation of higher education institutions is therefore not only about changes in the composition of staff and students ... essentially, it is about the transformation of the organizational culture and development and acceptance of new, shared values. This can only be achieved through fundamental changes in the mindset.

The Rhodes University anti-discrimination policy highlights several factors of promoting a culture of acceptance of diversity through social cohesion. These include a commitment to and support by the executive and senior managers, implementation of institutional policies that are geared towards inclusive transformation by Heads of Department and all managers, the allocation of resources and personnel and appropriate structures that support this inclusive trajectory, the orientation of new staff and students and accountability. Mkhize (2005), however, reminds us that changing the demographics and identity on paper does not necessarily alter the institutional feel, which subsequently informs the prevailing institutional culture that dominates the University. She further adds that Rhodes feel like a white space. Similarly, Qambela (2016) who articulates the struggle for transformation during the #FeesMustFall protest at Rhodes University under the slogan “Rhodes so white”, describes discrimination at Rhodes University as informative of how the institution prioritizes needs for students. In most cases the needs of low-income black families are neglected (2016: 38), conversely the white middle to upper class minorities along with their needs are prioritized.

Conclusion

The focus on black women in higher education has been discussed in relation to the gender disparities between men and women in academia. The majority of work conducted, in this chapter, highlights the lived experiences of black women from a marginal perspective. In light of this the intersectionalities of black women’s oppression were brought to the fore, as a way of priming the theoretical ground for the work to be developed in the following chapters. What the analysis presented in this chapter highlighted was that that the intersection of race and gender is nearly, always, highly popularized amongst scholars and how they treat the experiences of black women in the sector. Whilst these intersections represent the overlapping components of oppression on

women, this is merely one aspect of the puzzle. Dhamoon (2015) explains that as individuals living within settler colonial states, our experiences stretch far beyond the mere gendered and racial oppression. In most cases it is the structural system that works in hierarchal formats that highlights some aspects while simultaneously hiding others; a matter that only becomes clear when the reader of intersectionality applies themselves to such a systematic analysis. Our job as scholars is to dismantle the system firstly by unravelling the workings of domination through tracing marked and unmarked categories.

Chapter 3: Intersectionality

Introduction

In the 2008 Soudien report, Saleem Badat highlighted some of the pressing matters that black women are subjected to in higher education, an observation was made in relation to the high levels of inequality that exist owing to the historicities of apartheid (Badat, 2008: 31). His analysis emphasized the importance of the higher education system being part of social institutions that facilitate social reforms through educational transformation (ibid). According to Mabokela (2000) while various transitions have been made from 1994, issues of racial and gender oppression are still common in the social experiences of black female students, in the sector. Badat (2008: 31) notes that the specific histories of Higher Education Institutions that linger on, perpetuate racist and sexist practices in conjunction with providing privileges for some, in view of their social classes. The suggestion from this observation is that this not only hinders growth and social inclusion within Higher Education Institutions but further alienates certain individuals through the prevailing institutional culture. He (Badat, 2008) further adds that the combination of institutional culture and various social identities reproduce exclusion and alienation in Higher Education Institutions.

Various overlapping forms of oppression and discrimination are not uncommon with respect to experiences of black women. According to Crenshaw (1990) black women's experiences are commonly not influenced or affected by one social group but rather by a combination of multiple social categories and power relations, that all intersect with one another simultaneously causing an overlap. It is for this reason that Crenshaw (1990) argues that it is important to study these intersections and to unravel the complexities inherent therein; complexities that cause multiple forms of discrimination and oppression.

Intersectionality

According to Collins and Bilge (2020), the origins of intersectionality cannot be organised in a neat time period or location. This is due to the vast number of scholars who have used the concept of interlocking forms of oppression in multiple contexts, dating back as the early as the late 1800's (ibid). May (2015) explains that because intersectionality arose from the histories of inequality, the documentation of interlocking oppression can be traced back, in black feminist scholarship and

liberation praxis, to illustrate social justice outside the paradigm of singular conceptualisation of oppression.

The Term Intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in an effort to describe multiple intersecting relations of power that bear down in the oppression of black women in the United States justice system. Crenshaw (1989) at the time, used the word heuristically in an effort to describe the intersecting relationship between black women's gendered and racial identities in criminal court cases. As Collins (1990, 6) argues, while western dominant discourses of feminism and oppression centrally focused on one form of oppression that commonly emphasised white middle class women's experiences, black women expressed a unique form of oppression that was constitutive of the intersection between their race, religion, culture, gender etc.

The Definitional Dilemma of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality has been employed in a wide variety of disciplines, over time its original intent and meaning became distorted, losing its definitional clarity. (Cho and Crenshaw and McCall, 2013)

May (2015) argues that intersectionality is a theory that sets out to explain the lived identities of individuals living within the matrix structure of power. This matrix structure is a complex system that cuts across different domains incorporating various structures and systems of power. Intersectionality views individuals as people living both within the axes of privilege and oppression simultaneously. May (2015) further notes the multidisciplinary function of intersectionality that cuts across the structural, experiential, political and epistemological domains. Put simply, when using an intersectional lens—these components as mentioned above here—are illuminated with the intention to better understand how they assist in the meaning making process of those whose narratives are used to co-create knowledge and better understand the world. While May (2015) views intersectionality as a transversal theory that cuts across multiple disciplines, there have been other scholars that have understood intersectionality differently.

According to Gouws (2017: 19) intersectionality refers to the interlocking relationships within the axes of domination.⁷ She argues that axes of domination as they play out in intersectionality cut

⁷ It is important for the reader to bear in mind that while his analysis of intersectionality is useful, it might also be worthy to consider how such a treatment of intersectionality; one that merely focuses on the negative as opposed to

across social, political, cultural and economic dynamics that simultaneously intersect with the individual's identities.⁸ Both Gouws and Collins (2016) employ intersectionality from the axes of power. According to Collins (2016) how we examine the intersection of categories such as racism and sexism is through the domains of power, she further argues that the organisation of power within a society is not influenced by one factor but rather shaped by multiple facets that can be understood as symbiotic as each component may at times contribute to the other. Collins (2016:2) explains this dynamic by comparing the shift from single axis thinking to multiple axes. Gouws (2017) agreeing with Collins' understanding of power employs the narrative of the matrix domination of power.

While Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) initially used intersectionality as a theory, various arguments have been developed to date over the type of discipline that intersectionality should be used in and understood as. A prominent intersectionality scholar Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights the possibility that intersectionality is conflicted between identity and transversal politics. Most of the scholarship developed on intersectionality in the past decade, the concept has been understood as an analytical tool. According to Collins and Bilge (2020), people generally use intersectionality to solve problems that they, or others around them face. Institutions like higher education often find it difficult to create equality and inclusiveness with students from different social backgrounds showing up with their various components that make up their lived experiences i.e. ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality and religion (as examples) – all of which compete for recognition in the curation of social spaces that are inclusive (2020: 2). Thus, in instances such as these, intersectionality is used to develop campus equity.

Some scholars have developed an understanding of intersectionality through identity politics. According to Collins (2015: 1) the term intersectionality refers to the critical insight that race, gender, sexuality and other identities don't operate as exclusive entities but rather in a reciprocal fashion that constructs phenomena. Similarly, in the case of Schulz and Mullings (2006) intersectionality entails the linking of various identities as mutually constitutive.

the positive intersections, might be limiting in the full understanding of the theory and the liberatory potential that it was intended for by its progenitor, i.e. Crenshaw.

⁸ The notion of identities is useful in plural to refer to a single individual, with the understanding that the individual has different identities in the various contexts in which they are located owing to how they relate to those contexts in view of these axes of power.

Some people have come to understand intersectionality as a methodology rather than a theory. According to McCall (2005) intersectionality serves as a methodology that is used as a frame or lens that guides the execution of empirical inquiry. Her work conducted with Sumi Cho and Kimberle Crenshaw (2013) sets out to develop both the understanding of intersectionality as a methodology and epistemological framework. According to Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) intersectionality serves as an “analytic sensibility” where one must not simply use the word to explain a phenomenon but to analyse data intersectionally. By deploying various disciplines and categories to think critically about issues of sameness and difference and its relation to power, intersectionality invites us to think more about what it—the theory—can do rather than what it is. Grzanka’s (2018) agreeing with McCall’s (2005) argument adds that intersectionality should thus be understood as a commitment rather than a prescribed methodology. He further notes that due to its cross disciplinary nature any method can be understood as intersectional insofar as the conceptualisation of categories is multi-active and dynamic.

Grzanka (2018) believes that when we think of intersectionality as a method it can be used as a step towards understanding the power that lies within the epistemological work inherent in intersectionality. He believes that McCall’s (2005) statement, when he refers to the theory as being about analytical sensibility, this claim inspired the idea that the theory is about contesting dominant imaginaries by interrogating conventional knowledge. When looking at the attendant epistemological work within intersectionality, Vivian May (2015) argued that the philosophical practice or methodological norm is irrelevant, rather what remains of great importance is to identify and unpack the workings of dominance within an intersectional framework.

Matrix System

While there are various competing views on intersectionality and its application on disciplines and emerging social theories, traits of commonality lie in the understanding of the matrix system. Audre Lorde explains that nobody lives outside the matrix structure and thus we all have multiple forms of identities and complexities all working together interchangeably. This is to say that these forms of identities inform how we experience the, i.e., our experiential knowledge and how this informs our understandings in making meaning of the worlds we inhabit. According to May (2015) the matrix structure serves as a system that locates the workings of domination and the intermeshing of various inequalities that meet at a central nodal point causing an overlap, in how

we understand the world. Dhamoon (2011) explains that the matrix system operates within two parts simultaneously. By viewing lived experiences both within the confines of penalty and privilege, this forces us to view the interactive process of power and its constant fluidity across various disciplines (ibid).

Collins (1990) looks at the matrix structure from the perspective of its interlocking linkages, by using the example of a black woman who experiences oppression in various forms that don't fit into one static concrete category. This inevitably forces one to look at the dynamics of power and its co-construction. Both Dhamoon (2011) and Collins (1990) use the individual's differences and lived experiences to make sense of the axes of power within the matrix structure. Dhamoon (1990) adds that the matrix structure is both process-centred, and system centred. He explains this thusly:

“by process I am referring to the ways in which subjectivities and social differences are produced, such as through discourses and practices of gendering, racialization, ethnicization, culturalization, sexualization and so on. By systems I am referring to historically constituted structures of domination such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, capitalism and so on” (Dhamoon, 2011:5)

Ferree (2009) takes a different approach by looking at the matrix structure from the perspective of frameworks. For her, frameworks underline the working structures of how systems work in certain spaces. For instance, he makes an example of social practices in everyday knowledge that privilege a certain type of thinking and a certain type of knowledge. By alerting us to frameworks that often align to one side Ferree (2009) inevitably alludes to the politicised nature of knowledge production. Ferree (2009) views the matrix structure from an epistemological standpoint, centrally focusing on the loopholes that society forces us to ignore. The literature that addresses itself to the questions of intersectionality analyses the gaps within feminist literature.

For instance, Collins (1990) and Oyěwùmí (2002) work on intersectionality critically analyses mainstream feminism and its effects on gender and sexuality. By revealing the homogenous and inevitably constrictive nature of feminism both Collins and Oyěwùmí unravel the naturalised logic behind intersectionality scholarship. May (2015) argues that by questioning the norm and naturalised logic of women's exploitation and discrimination, components that are centralised

under gender, this reveals the dominant discourse of oppression that predominantly leans towards white middle class women.

Historical Overview

According to May (2015) intersectionality serves both as analytical framework and a mechanism that pays attention to historical literature. Using Collins work on black feminist thought May explains the importance of analysing historical content in order to understand the inner workings of power within the matrix. She (May, 2015) suggests that part of breaking hegemonic thinking lies in tracing patterns of normality that have been placed within literature both in (pre) and (post) colonial times.⁹

With intersectionality being knowledge centred, the literature on the historical interventions of knowledge – has largely relied on the thinking produced by the western academe. As example, black feminist scholars such as Harris (1993) as quoted in May (2016) have questioned the American law systems' neutrality over racialised and gendered bodies. Harris (1993) questions the American legal systems' blatant disregard of the historical foundation of black males and females being categorised under the law of property, which inevitably alters the nature and dynamics of black pupils both within (pre) and (post) colonial times. May (2016) further adds that intersectionality in today's society teaches us the importance of accounting for multiple registers.

The pattern of analysing historical texts and accounting for alternative forms of thinking that lie outside the ideologized norm, set a trend throughout feminist literature and other disciplines at large. According to Spade (2013) what started out as a project of identifying law reform in the United States of America's incarceration system by Kimberle Crenshaw turned into an anticolonial, antiracists, anti-subordination concept that set to undo the injustice that plays out in structural power both within (pre) and (post) colonial times. Spade (2013: 1032) identifies this era as the intersectional resistance phase. While Spade (2013) was looking at the gendered and racialised law reform of the United States of America, he highlighted other disciplines that intersectional resistance could be applied to. Collins (2015) agreeing with Spade highlighted the effects that intersectional resistance had on mainstream feminism. According to Collins (2015)

⁹ The reasoning behind the use of parentheses in the orthography of (pre) and (post) suggests that we cannot quite understand the world outside of colonial matrices of power. A matter that is taken up by a series of thinkers who have applied themselves to the colonial question (both in the literature on post-colonial theory as well as decolonial theory).

while the turn within feminism came at a time when literature ventured towards the alignment of multiple forms of thinking, historically specific social justice became a matter of vital importance, both in its application and theoretical consideration. The growing movement of Latina, Chicana and Asian feminism asserted calls for social and political justice both within literature and society at large. Inevitably, critiquing the scholarship that constitutes feminist traditions—in their varied manifestations—involved delving deeper into concepts such as race, sexuality and gender constructs.

May (2016: 53) argues that historical intervention within intersectional scholarship raised the issue of “disremembered subjects”. These relate to parts of history and present times that go unrecognised or hidden from common knowledge due to multiple forms of oppression overlapping with one another. May (2016) further adds that creating a space of resistance within historical literature allows for the deconstruction of existing systems of categorisation that inhibit disremembered subjects within the existing body of literature.

Of particular importance is the value of time, place and circumstance. According to Collins (2015), intersectional power relations often differ depending on the location and various social circumstances of an individual. The historical archival work of Smith and Marmo (2011) on discriminative medical practices of immigrant women in Britain unravels this complexity of race, gender and nationality within the British context. Immigrant women were subjected to virginity testing prior to getting approval for residency in the country. Smith and Marmo’s (2011) archival work identified the gap of the 1979 UN Commission judgement of medical test being predominantly race based. While the majority of immigrants who were subjected to virginity testing were of a different race from the British citizen—who is *sine qua non*—white, Smith and Marmo (2011; 159) emphasise that other factors that have bearing on an intersectional understanding of these medical practices; these being age, gender, marital status and social economic status. This revealed the complex nature of power and the multiple levels of inequality that lie unexamined in society.

The Complexity within Inequality

According to Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) the introduction of black feminist theory and intersectionality reversed collective theoretical views from gender equality to social justice. The

prerogative had shifted from gender inequality to inequality caused by social stratification. Samuels and Ross-Sheriff argue that the transcendence from gender to race and class created a space to question and further challenge the notion of complexity. Rather than theorising inequality under one banner intersectionality called for a more inclusive system that accommodated multiplicity and inclusivity. Mazur and McBride (2008) maintain that the complexity within inequality dates back to the core concepts of feminism where issues of representation, democracy, welfare and state governance were dominated by the plethora of theoretical issues that needed to be dealt with.

According Collins (2015; 92) traditionally inequality was solely based on the class stratification, where individuals were classified based on their occupation. This type of structure was developed from Weber's theory that approached stratification on the basis of status, power and the individuals economic standing (Collins, 2015;92). The cultural turn towards other axes of power that influence an individual's social categorisation in society was highlighted by Bourdieu, who emphasised the different types of power whether it be from a social, economic, political or cultural perspective. Bourdieu, through his contribution, pointed out that much of the analyses in literature should focus on the importance and significant impact of symbolic power. This, it can be suggested was another component that suggested the importance of intersectional analyses.

While the consensus of power was clear in terms of the effects of power and its ability to permeate multiple social categories, the consideration of which social categories of inequality are more important than others had always been a topic of debate. Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) argue that this topic of debate highlighted the importance of an intersectional understanding of inequality. The hybridity and co-constitutional understanding of power and inequality amongst scholars shifted the debate from which forms of inequality are more important than others, to the multiple axes of power within inequality.

Collins (2015) suggests that what differentiates intersectionality from the previous studies conducted on inequalities is the fixation on identity politics. While previous scholars tried to unravel the complexities within identity politics, intersectionality took it a step further by incorporating a holistic view. May (2015) adding to Collins (2015) argument states that when viewing intersectionality, one must account for its ontological framework, its political and

structural orientation, factors that focus on resistance and counterhegemonic operations of power, its epistemological dimension and its heuristic framework of accounting for multiple forms of disciplines in one theoretical articulation. She further adds that “[an] intersectional justice orientation is thus wide in scope and inclusive: it repudiates additive notions of identity, assimilationist models of civil rights, and one-dimensional views of power” (May, 2015: 3).

Ferree (2009) suggests, when looking into the argument of inequality within an intersectional framework that the majority of considerations in the literature set out to identify the points of intersection within inequality. However, Ferree (2009: 85) takes a different perspective by looking at the intersections themselves as dynamic, changing and mutually constitutive. She (Ferree, 2009) further adds that it is only then—with this conception in mind—that we can come to understand that intersectionality has resisted one dimensional categorisation, be it in relation to the individual or the institution that is under analysis.

While intersectionality is broad as a theoretical tool of analysis, the concept of inequality within the matrix domination brought with it a number of analytical concepts with which to distinguish inequalities. For instance, Choo and Ferree (2010: 130) broke down the theoretical tenants of distinguishing inequality within an intersectional framework. They identified three main concepts that include, group-centred, process-centred and systems centred intersectional practice. The first concept of group centred analysis places the marginalised groups at the centre in order to determine their complex forms of inequality. The debates that make up these theoretical considerations, to date, on intersectionality use ‘group centred analysis’. Bilge (2014) explains that due to its origins of intersectionality, that solely focused on the relationship of the interconnections between the social categories of race, gender and class and its popularisation through feminism, theoreticians use the method of group centred minority groups who experience multiple forms of inequality when developing their analyses. The latter two concepts of process-centred and systems centred analysis focus on the structural levels of power and its processes that are multi-layered.

According to Yuval-Davis as quoted in Ferree (2010: 84) what is at the core of the debate in intersectionality is the conflation and separation of analytical levels in which intersectionality is located. As Roth (2013) explains, the idea of multiple forms of inequality is not a new phenomenon — it is the intermeshed and co-dependant forms of power that play out in different forms of

inequalities that is new. This observation has caused a fixation on the analysis of data to be oriented towards a methodological approach that aims to merely identify inequalities. It can be argued that this approach is what has limited the potentiality of intersectionality—as a theoretical tool. Scholars such as McCall (2005) delve deeper into the concept of intersectionality being a methodological approach and an analytical framework. By clarifying different analytical levels that are anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical using intersectionality, this conceptual move sheds light on the different ways one can interpret the multiple levels of analysis. In terms of intra-categorical McCall (2005) places special attention on the inequalities that remain hidden and neglected as points of intersection while inter-categorical analyses use the existing social categories as a means of explaining the relationships that form part of these inter-categorical intersections (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012). However, McCall (2005) does explain that in many cases scholars use these analytical methods simultaneously and interchangeably. May (2015) adds that it is within this context that we come to understand the multidisciplinary approach that focuses both on micro and macro processes within an individual's experience while working on uncovering oppressive patterns. As indicated in the previous section, the complexity of inequality is often met with hidden forms of oppression that are often intermeshed within micro and macro processes. The incorporation of McCall's (2005) analytical approach creates a pattern that moves in between macro and micro processes.

Simultaneity of Advantage and Subordination

Intersectionality understands individuals as having complex subjectivity, in that they live both within the confines of privilege and oppression simultaneously. According to Bilge (2014), part of the problem with intersectionality studies is the transparency that is afforded to one aspect and the privilege that is given to another¹⁰. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) add that power within the matrix structure works best when the operations of privilege and oppression operate silently in the background without being detected. In most cases it is the aspect of oppression circulating around social hierarchies that goes unnoticed, thus obfuscating a clear understanding of the power matrix at play, substantiation of this claim is found in footnote 6. In order to clarify,

¹⁰ We come to understand transparency as an oppressive system that allows certain identities and social categories that help enhance systems of colonialism, patriarchy and whiteness amongst others, to gain further ground in this work of oppression. These social categories often determine social hierarchies. Due to their high status and their assimilation as social norm, they are often left unquestioned thus understood as transparent.

intersectionality becomes a useful conceptual and theoretical tool to deploy. According to Lutz, Vivar and Supik (2016) feminist scholarship has always worked around the concept of privilege and oppression. By selectively categorising which forms of oppression best serve the movement towards the universalisation of gender oppression, they were able to carefully push the narrative of their form of oppression while simultaneously using their whiteness as a tool to push their own agenda forward. Mohanty, Russo and Torres's (1991) study of third world women and the politics of feminism questions the commonality of liberal feminism and its gender primary struggle. They argue that the foundation of transnational feminism that seeks to universalise all women, does so on the basis of white middle class interests. Similarly, in the case of Barbara Smith (1982) work on racism—in women's studies—speaks to the taboo of race as a social category in feminist literature. According to Barbara Smith (1982) while social movements often deflect when race arises during social movements, race plays an important role to both black and white women. She argues that for white women, race stands as a privilege that often serves them both within the interests of the movement and their social lives, while on the other hand – for black women race serves as an intertwined form of oppression that connects with other social categories in their lived experiences. Grzanka (2018) adds that the system of privilege and oppression is often aided by the fluidity of power. The one who has access to more power is able to dictate the narrative of which forms of oppressions and disadvantage are more important than others.

According to Ramsay (2013) the construct of privilege and oppression used in unison, works best as a methodological approach that analyses how power uses opacities within literature and social categories to disguise advantages that are given to certain groups. In other cases, privilege is oftentimes presented as neutrality, with Verloo (2013) using the example of masculinity and how it functions as a neutral societal norm as opposed to sexism which is overtly discussed as a hegemonic social inequality. She further notes how the separation of masculinity as sexism helps to inscribe traditions of heteronormativity in society.

Structural levels of Inequalities

According to Yuval-Davis (2014), McCall's (2005) concept of inter and intra-categorical analytical approach opened up the conversation of structural institutions and how the individual interacts with these various concepts. McCall's work on inter-categorical analysis places emphasis on the organisational structures that overlap to create multiple inequality. The detailing of the

macro and meso- structures and the relations between them placed emphasis on the structures of power and how they interplay with one another.

Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) argue that in intersectional scholarship there should be clearly defined lines between structural intersectionality and political intersectionality. Structural intersectionality speaks to the integration and overlap of social groups causing multiple inequalities and their alignment with power structures, while political intersectionality speaks to political projects that often show the intersections of power whilst simultaneously bringing minority groups from the margins to the centre (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012; 226).

Choo and Ferree (2010) extend on this idea of structures and its relations with different social groups and lived experiences. According to Choo and Ferree (2010), structural inequality alerts us to the idea of existent social categories that have been a stable part of society for many generations; structural intersectionality subsequently highlights the dimensions and the variations of these structures across the lived experiences of individuals. It is within this framework that we can then speak about the role of agency in the micro and macro processes of social categories. According to McCall (2005:1785) the changing dynamics of relations of inequality between social categories makes one question the nature of the relations themselves, which ones are considered more meaningful than others and which ones were once smaller then became larger. Expanding McCall's argument, Choo and Ferree (2010) speak to the role of social construction in analysing intersectional dynamics. While intersectionality brings us to the knowledge of multiple levels within structural inequalities, Choo and Ferree (2010) believe it accommodates and facilitates a level of confusion about the different planes that social categories play out on. For instance, Ferree and Hall as quoted in Choo and Ferree (2010) speak to the different levels that race and gender function on, the former being in the macro and the latter being in the micro level.

These different levels inevitably lead academics to subcategorise them from the macro level down to the micro level. Yet Crenshaw (1991) speaks of structural intersectionality in the form of routinised forms of domination, drawing the conversation particularly to the violence against women of colour. However, Choo and Ferree (2010:135) argue that Crenshaw's (1991) work on the justice system against black women – worked primarily because it spoke to the race and gender components, being “primary forms of oppression” in particular on an institutional context. Insofar

as one can argue that race and gender were the predominant factors in Crenshaw's (1991) study of black women's incarceration, May (2015) reminds us of intersectionality's concept of one social category not being subordinate or diminutive to another.

Slippages and Unmarked Categories

Inasmuch as the concept of primary and secondary oppression may lead to the conceptualisation of how social categories intersect, causing multiple forms of inequality, it does form various contradictions with intersectionality's non-hierarchical forms of categorisations. Put simply, such an approach diminishes the veracity of using intersectionality as a theoretical tool of analysis. The separation of political intersectionality and structural intersectionality often plays an important role when delineating certain arguments around the intersections of social categories. Choo, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) remind us of the ways in which structural intersectionality speaks to inequality's peculiarity with routinised forms of domination whether in the macro level or micro level. The thrust of such a proposition is to illumine the fact that the main focus—irrespective—is on how power operates. Furthermore, May (2015) explains that although intersectionality has a structural element in it, its central focus is on lived experiences, thus inequalities may differ depending on one location. The focus on processes and mechanisms that are used means that resistance and transformation can often be mere demographic descriptors that are devoid of ontological meaning and epistemological insight (May, 2015: 143).

According to Bilge (2013) power also plays an important aspect in knowledge dissemination and academic culture. For instance, while intersectionality has become a common concept that has been used in various studies, the majority of literature is solely fixated on categorisation and identities. This is to say that this is an important aspect of identifying inequalities, as MacKoon (2013) quoted in Choo, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) reminds us that identities are often instruments of inequality. In intersectionality scholarship, the focal point has always remained on power and its fluidity and changing dynamic. Identities have always remained a permanent feature within society, bringing about social order and social categorisation. Dhamoon (2015) adds that it is therefore important to distinguish between social identities and the processes of differentiation such as racialisation and gendering and the system of domination that could either be racism, colonialism and / or patriarchy, which all inform intersectionalities of oppression. It is only once we have come to these realisations of the different factors at play that one could be able to identify

the intersections and multiplications that inform inequality as it interchanges in different structures and levels. The clarificatory work done by such a focalised system of analysis shores up the importance of intersectionality as an analytical tool.

It is within this complexity that one experiences slippages where some social categories remain unmarked and transparent while others remain important and recognised socially within the matrix structure of privilege and oppression. According to May (2015) the slippages of social categories happens in instances where power and privilege constellate. Insofar as the debates in the literature have set out to unravel the transparent categories in society that sustain social hierarchies, oppressive systems and social norms that maintain privilege or oppression. It is the unmarked categories within identity politics that has concerned most feminist scholars. For instance, May (2015) points out that the majority of intersectionality critique often ranges from the issues of overt concentration towards marginalised groups and their racial or gendered categories that remain dismissed. However, the contextualisation of intersectionality also has a major effect on how one interprets slippages and unmarked categories. In order to fully grasp the concept of unmarked categories and slippages within an intersectional framework one would have to fully understand the concept of intersectionality. While Crenshaw's work on violence against women clearly showed the violation of black women's rights whom the system refused to recognise as individuals who experience racialised gendered oppression, it was the occurrence of white privilege in conjunction with masculinity and racialised oppression that perpetuated injustice in the justice system. This was evinced in the interplay of privilege, stagnant social categories that have been passed down as ideological norms throughout history and the structural forms of power, that all interplayed at once and caused intersectional forms of oppression. While identity played a huge factor in slippages, this was only a mere outcome of the intersectional matrix pattern.

According to May (2015), the relationship between transparency and non-transparency is complex in that it relies on the individual's relation to power and where one is situated in the matrix of power. Although intersectionality sensitizes us to the fact that no one lives outside the confines of privilege and oppression, May (2015) believes that transparency plays the role of unstated privilege. In the matrix structure, transparent social categories are deemed of high prestige. Elevated by social hierarchies their status of unmarked categorization is a result of power

overlapping to meet at one nodal point which then transpires into privileged unmarked transparency substantiate the claim elucidated in footnote 10.

Yuval-Davis' (2006) work on policies that set out to eradicate inequality through campaigns, raised this issue of focusing solely on identity politics rather than looking at systems that maintain advantages and disadvantages, which often requires a reflection on society's traditions that have been assimilated as the norm. According to Yuval-Davis (2006), European policies on equality, which place emphasis on accommodating differences, do not question the additive nature of identities that are to be considered when accounting for equality. To elaborate, Yuval-Davis (2006) uses the Working Group on Women and Human Rights in the UK that asserts the invisibility of marginalised women and the structural system(s) at play such as race and gendered oppression, yet the same system conflates the multiple forms of oppression as identities, to argue the point made above. Within this context, unmarked categories of privilege, patriarchy, and colonial historic influences can easily become unnoticeable.

Squire (2008) as quoted in May (2016) adds that the use of intersectionality in policy often serves the interests of government institutions rather than the objective of eliminating inequalities and facilitating structural change. More often than not intersectionality concepts as they are deployed in policies, take a neoliberal form that seeks to assimilate into existing governmental policies that emphasise on "diversity", which equally fails to bring about proper reform (May, 2016: 142).

The application and conceptualisation of intersectionality have thus become an important aspect in the process of grappling with issues of social justice. Guided by the tenant of critiquing elements of social hierarchies that have become transparent and socially accepted in society and dismantling single axis thinking where social categories are assumed to be indivisible, asserting this view of denouncing single axis thinking and deploying the concept of privilege and oppression simultaneously, that is the importance of intersectionality in grappling with issues of social justice.

Ontological Plurality

Yuval-Davis (2006) work on intersectionality scholarship critically engages with the idea of complex subjectivity and multiplicity. She argues that as individuals living within the matrix

structure, our conceptualisation of political standpoint should be plural. She further adds that the majority of policies that aim for intersectional scholarship do so with the intention of identifying primary and secondary forms of oppression. This places a hierarchical structure on social inequalities thus losing the counterhegemonic constructs that intersectionality strives to engage with and curate society using. Lugonez (1987) adds that as individuals, we lack the ability to see individuals living within an ontologically plural world thus we ultimately fail in understanding what exactly intersectionality means when describing multiplicity.

According to May (2015: 45)

So, the intersectional solution, as Lugonez (1987) delineates it, is not to work, individually, on “her” being or discomfort: this would require that she become more psychologically “at ease” with oppression by adhering (or conforming) to oneness, making herself amenable to dominant logic. To become or to be at ease, she would have to let go of ontological multiplicity and survival rich ambiguity: to become one she would need to self violate and conform her “selves” to the logic that deny, distorts or cannot perceive multiplicity in the first place.

May (2015) describes intersectionality both in terms of an epistemological practice and a ontological standpoint. From the quote above May (2015) explains that intersectionality’s understanding of ontological plurality engages with the self and the world around us. It probes the constrained relationship between progressive thinking, transformation through resistance and what transformation looks like in relation to one’s identity. May (2015) draws from Lugonez (1987) work in an attempt to shed light on the difficulty of adapting transformation from an ontological standpoint.

Dominance and Intersectionality

According to May (2015), engaging with politics of power entails analysing epistemic practices and conventional frameworks in order to unpack and unravel systems of domination. Intersectionality serves as a critique of daily epistemic practices within everyday life in order to decipher systemic patterns of oppression – both within society and academia. Grzanka (2018) explains that epistemology deals with the theory of knowledge and the manner in which we acquire knowledge and how we come to know what relates to truth. Within the field of social science

Grzanka (2018) believes that we have dominant imaginaries, which we understand as truth and as the only form of knowledge that scholars and academics can refer to. Intersectionality breaks away from this type of thinking by referring to multiple registers of knowledge that account for more than one perception. Collins (1989) adds that looking to multiple registers allows for other scholars and individuals who were previously excluded from knowledge production to have a space where they can add their form of knowledge. She further argues that critiquing spaces of knowledge production interrogates the very process of knowledge-making. By viewing experiential knowledge as philosophically relevant, such a move accounts for a wider context of knowledge production. Collins (1990) adds that knowledge constitutes a large part of social relations and domination, thus whatever we come to know as truth and fact is always politicised in that it is imbricated in power. In order to combat this, Grzanka (2018:31) believes that intersectional scholars have the responsibility to not only cultivate new knowledge but to also combat colonialist epistemologies that have produced oppressive knowledge(s), social structures and institutions.

The Politicised Nature of Institutionalised Knowledge

According to May (2015) when dealing with the workings of domination one must critically analyse knowledge from the perspectives of knowers and their operations and systems of power. To substantiate this claim, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 38) quotes Anibal Quijano (2007) who asserts that,

At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later they taught them in partial and selective ways, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) knowledge has always been politicised through power and control. The manner in which we have come to understand western knowledge as hegemonic and other forms of thinking as subordinate, has always been through coercive measures. Fairclough (1990) adds that it is not so much the knowledge that is produced more than it is about the control of information and its distribution, one who has power has the ability to shape the order of discourse and its level of domination. Ndlovu- Gatseni (2013) explains that dominant knowledge systems have always operated under social ideologies that have been normalised and universalised.

He suggests that by endorsing liberal notions of development and global power through capitalism, this created ideologies that forced one hegemonic type of thinking that in turn subordinated other forms of knowing. In agreement with these assertions, May (2015) explains this pattern as epistemological oppression. Through asymmetrical cognitive authority that is selective in granting individuals equal political, philosophical and experiential authority, the intellectual space remains gated for a select few. Thus Code (2011) as quoted in May (2015:190) suggests that it is within this context that we come to experience epistemological ignorance, the hidden opacities and historical knowledge that goes unquestioned filtered through power and hegemony enable “conditioned perception” that is institutionalised and granted privilege within and by social norms.

According to Code (2011) intersectionality plays an important role in creating spaces for epistemic defiance. By attending to the complexity and multi-layered versions of power that are intertwined with privilege and structural epistemic inequality, one can destabilise or rather open gaps for critique within literature. In the African context, several intersectionality scholars have attended to these gaps within the literature. For instance, scholars as Ndlovu Gatsheni (2013) have argued that through power, western knowledge systems have decentralised African knowledge through coloniality. Similarly, Mamdani (1996) explains how coloniality has changed how we classify the majority as our white ‘suppressors’ and inversely the minority as the black native inhabitants who make up the majority of the African population on the continent. Through institutional and territorial segregation and hegemonic western knowledge, Mamdani (1996) elaborates on the biased nature of knowledge and its dissemination, factors that in turn reveal the gaps between what is factual and what the authoritative knowers deem to be truth. Mamdani (1996) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) both elaborated on the epistemic inequality and cognitive distortions that coloniality thrives on. By questioning universalised assumptions about the perspective of knowers, they (Mamdani, 1996 and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) were able to unmask the politicised knowledge that was considered universal and neutral. Both Mamdani (1996) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) critiqued the unquestioned assumptions that bedevil the literature, the authoritative knowers behind that literature and its politicised nature along with its implication on its intended target market.

According to Collins (2015) within epistemic oppression and dominance the use of power often succumbs to intellectual dependency, one to facilitate intellectual dependency is through the

dominance of language. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) explains that within the matrix of power, post colonialism and modernisation have become a breeding ground for intellectual dependency where the “Naked emperor” is often hidden under global development and universal language that advances western philosophy. Fairclough (1989) adds that language is one of the most powerful social tools that help advance epistemic oppression. By advancing a certain language this affects social discourses, ways of thinking and interpreting, ideological practices and intellectual positions of analysis.

Language Discourse and Social Identities

According to Fairclough (1992) language operates through intersections where power, language and ideological structures operate in multi-layered complex circulation(s). He (Fairclough, 2001) suggests that because language serves as a social practice system of orderliness, naturalisation and identity construction are easy to formulate. Fairclough’s (1992) analysis of language and power centrally focuses on ideologies, the construction of ideologies and how language is used as a tool to construct and maintain said ideologies. While he makes us aware of the different social institutions, which depend on the environment and the different speech communities that are constructed, he also conscientizes us of the manner in which language discourse is used to naturalise and denaturalise various social components to make space for hierarchies and dominant ideologies. He (Fairclough, 2003: 29) argues that

Discourse refers to discursual action, to actual talk or writing [...] discourse and practice are constrained not by various independent types of discourse and practice but by the independent networks which we can call orders – orders of discourse and social orders. The social order is more general of the two. We always experience the society and the various social institutions within which we operate as divided up and demarcated, structured into different spheres of action, different types of situations each of which has its associated type of practice.

By breaking down discourse from texts to processes of text production, consumption and distribution Fairclough and Wodak (1995) delves into the ontological basis of language and power. He argues that language is a social process that is intricately intertwined with social institutions and power. He explains that there is no singular conceptualisation of language and power due to

the complex nature of power and the different spheres and environments it infiltrates. The various accounts of multiplicity and complex subjectivity within myriads of language and power exerts ontological plurality. Sandoval (1990) as quoted in May (2016) describes intersectionality as ontologically plural. As individuals who are situated within power, we are constrained and able to resist the myriad forms of power in the same ways in which we come to find complacency with being dominated (May, 2016: 39). Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) define the intersection of language and power using socio-cultural linguistics. The term encompasses the intersection of language, culture and social norms, which intermesh in multiple and complex ways (ibid). They believe that language should be analysed within the context of intersections as this would allow all interactions of language whether from a social, political and economic perspective to gain meaning.

Intersectionality scholars have long debated the power of language and its affect on social institutions and dominant discourses in society (Collins, 1990; Coogan-Gehr, 2011). bell hooks (1992) elaborates on the power of discourse and ideologies within the representation of black and white women. She argues that European philosopher's use of binary discourse, which distinguishes between blackness and whiteness, forces one to view black women and men as the subordinate group against whites—otherwise viewed as the dominant. This argument takes us back to Fairclough's (1992) perception of discourses being subverted with the use of power to naturalise and denaturalise certain things, people and experiences.

hooks' (1990) description of discourses in the postmodern era mounts a critique of the “common language” used to destabilise the master narrative, while simultaneously using the same narrative it claims to challenge. By using master narratives to destabilise oppressive texts and language norms hooks (1990) believes that black women's identities remain essentialised, while white supremacy dominates society and institutions without being critiqued. Collins' (1990) work on the black feminist movement voices a similar concern on the interlocking systems of oppression within black feminist thought. She (Collins, 1990) subsequently questions the conceptualisation and understanding of black women's identity within postmodern theory. In her chapter on black women's liberation through self-definition she critiques the language that has been used to identify black women as mummies and matriarchies, a discourse that underpins domestic workers and caretakers for the “privileged white man”. Both hooks (1990) and Collin's (1990) arguments are

based on the interconnected nature of social categories that are dynamic, irreducible and forever changing. Edwards (2009) aptly describes the relationship between language discourse and identities as a complex scheme wherein identity categories are viewed as social discursive constructs that are shaped by macro-political ideologies and social structures. May (2015) adds that in most instances social identities are viewed through a perspective of sameness rather than differences thus the importance of creating spaces of epistemic defiance where individuals reject single axis thinking in order to allow for coalition through differences.

Singular Common Denominator Logic

One of Kimberle Crenshaw's concerns in her analysis of the American Justice system in the fight for intersectional forms of understanding oppression, is the method of analysis used to denote oppression. The American criminal justice system's singular separation of oppressive struggles not only excluded black women but also inhibited them from receiving proper appeals processes during court cases. According to May (2015) transformation and social justice cannot occur under single axis logic. She describes single axis logic, as it informs theory development, as a process of study that adheres to separation and split categories rather than intermeshed and interconnecting systems that give the student of social phenomenon—as it affects black women—a better understanding of this groups' oppression. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) suggest that as individuals we have been socially conditioned towards grouping individuals who have similar or same components rather than distinguishing the differences that constitute said groups, thus our logic gravitates towards universalising that singular component in order to allow space for categorical hierarchy formulation rather than coalition within our differences.

The universalisation of a single category is one of the common causes of social exclusion and oppression (May, 2015). By focusing on one social category, such an approach automatically places other social groups as subordinate or of lower value than others. Gouws (2017) explains that within social groups, especially amongst political organisations, heterogeneous commonality is often considered as a difficult and complex approach that derails the attainment of social justice or equality. According to May (2015) single axis thinking has become a norm in methods of analysis both within intellectual spaces and society at large. She points out that in institutional structures, epistemological practices of single axis thinking are especially difficult to point out due to their inability to see their own blind spots. Dhamoon (2015) agreeing with May (2015) adds

that as individuals living within a settler colonial state, social justice movements always tend to forget that they are living within an ongoing colonial project – thus, constantly perpetuating tools of the master narrative whether as a form of resistance or sense of agency.

The Binary Form

As explained in the preceding section, intersectionality as opposed to other theories accepts complexity as social a phenomenon that all individuals are subject to, because we are constantly presented with a complex history of colonisation, oppression and domination. Intersectionality, therefore, understands all individuals as socially complex with oppression and disadvantage varying depending on where one is placed within the matrix structure. Lugonez (1987) as quoted in May (2015) explains that this form of complexity brings us to the ontological question of plurality and multiple registers. Lugonez discussion of the world and self tries to find meaning using multiple complexities in a world of singular construction. She argues

The cognitive shift towards multiplicity permits one to perceive and keep hold of the divergent premises: it also reveals gaps in conventional logics, allowing one to understand dominant worldviews as non-totalising, even as incorrect. This, in turn creates space to inhabit more than one “world” and to “be” more than one- self, at once, a self who exceeds what those with conferred dominance may perceive or imagine (May, 2015: 44)

Intersectionality rejects the notion of living in binary form, which prefers to style individuals as a singular coherent entity. Instead, it allows for contradictions and a form of “survival-rich” ambiguity (May, 2015: 45). Yuval-Davis (2006) extends this idea of a non-singular conceptualisation in her critique of triple oppression, with her previous analysis that sought to confine black women’s oppression into three stagnant forms of social divisions as opposed to understanding social divisions as having different ontological bases that are interlinked with other social identities. She further highlights the struggle of intersectionality—as theory—constantly having to compete with identity politics that—itself as theory—views oppression from a singular lens.

According to Yuval-Davis (2006) the struggle to move away from single axis thinking is due to society’s obsession with identity politics. From the beginning of the feminist movement Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that scholars have always been fighting against this false dichotomy between

race and sex. Analyses of gender-based frameworks always create a rift between race and gender. Williams and Mohammed (2010) perfectly phrased this reality as the “race versus gender” war, where white women occupy gender oppression and black males are subjected to racial oppression leaving black women in-between the two. The use of single axis thinking when conceptualising identities often creates conflict and enforces divisions in places that may not particularly have divisions to begin with. May (2015;75) elaborates on the history of the civil rights movement in America where black women and men were subjected to mind-body splitting, with black women being renegades of body oppression and exploitation and black men being associated with the elevated hierarchy of the mind and black culture. This conception of blackness—as social identity—created a hierarchy between black women and men, with men being more important than black women. Granted – and in agreement with Caputi (2010), as quoted in May (2015), the phenomenon of black women being subordinate to black men can be traced back to patriarchy and America’s history with colonisation, however, it is the analysis from a single axis logic that places individuals in split categorisation.

Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism

According to Yvette Abrahams (2003) one of the ways in which slippages occur within social justice scholarship is through the process of essentialism. Grzanka (2018) explain that essentialism is the process of reducing one’s experiences of inequality into one concrete form of oppression that can be universally applied to all individuals. Carbado and Harris (2018) add that solving issues of social justice becomes more difficult causing confusion and misinterpretation of people’s oppression and lived experiences. Using Mackinnon’s (2013) example of the “the black male rapists stereotype gender essentialism”, Carbado and Harris (2018) highlights the difficulty that comes with the racists stereotype of black males being synonymous—or less pretentiously, considered—with rapists. Extending this argument, they demonstrate the hidden and often obscured privileges that their white counterparts enjoy. Mackinnon, (2013) as quoted in Carbado and Harris (2018), argues that the stigmatisation of black males as rapists, forms part of gender essentialism wherein white women are seen as the victims of black male violence, while white men are excluded from the notion of violence, brutality and toxic masculinity that becomes synonymous with black male rapists. This distorted depiction of rape culture elides racial factors that inevitably illumine issues of white privilege.

According to Grillo (1995) essentialism and intersectionality should be studied as two different entities. As May (2016) notes it, intersectionality explicitly focuses on issues of anti-subordination where individual experiences of oppression should not be read or analysed in a reductive way. Both Grillo (1995) and Carbado and Harris (2018) highlight the issue of essentialism and grouping people in terms of social categories. Carbado and Harris (2019) inquire as to whether the classification of individuals through race or gender should be considered as a form of essentialism that reduces or conflates an individual's social identities, a conflation that is considered as a negative trait in intersectionality scholarship. In addition, Carbado and Harris (2018:2201) maintain that Crenshaw's work, on intersectionality and black women's experiences, isn't explicit on the matter of essentialism, rather it focuses on the reductive nature of feminist experiences that called for a de-essentialised white centred representation of gender. Both Grillo (1995) and Carbado and Harris (1995) understand intersectionality and essentialism as separate entities.

Carbado and Harris (2018) take it further by critiquing the ideas of anti-essentialism. The argument of essentialism based on social categories creates a controversial stance on equality and social justice. Carbado and Harris (2018) believe that black feminism and intersectionality's view on social justice are based on social categories such as race and gender, and regarding them as reductive to the point of removing social categories completely is futile. It should be noted that Carbado and Harris do not account for circumstances that often lead to gender essentialism and racial essentialism, however, use Crenshaw's argument on "vulgar essentialism" to argue, "[that] since racial categories are not real or natural but instead socially constructed, it is theoretically and politically absurd to centre race as a category of analysis or as a basis for political action" (Carbado and Harris, 2018: 2211). In what can be considered an objection, Crenshaw (2015) argues that this form of radical thought sets a negative precedent particularly towards critical legal theory that advances the position of integrating an intersectional form of thinking that interlocks race, gender and other social categories simultaneously.

May's (2015) work on essentialism in intersectional scholarship does not speak directly to essentialism, however, offers insights into the reductive nature of black feminist and intersectionality scholarship and how this in turn affects any advances towards social justice. The suggestion in this regard contends that the heuristics of essentialism divert the conversation from identity politics, which focuses on essentialism and anti-essentialism of social categories to

broader epistemological and ontological conversation of essentialism. Similarly, Mahalingam and Leu (2005) speak of social essentialism that is influenced by power relations which are then guided by motives and cultural context. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) elaborate on the need to examine the ideological basis of essentialist representation. Carbado and Harris (2018) allude to the epistemological basis of essentialist content, and question the context behind essentialism's use and how it is being deployed and what effect it has on individuals. Carbado and Harris (2018; 2204) further state that "[judging] a particular analysis to be essentialist does not settle normative questions; rather, the important consideration is whether the deployment of essentialism is justified empirically and normatively in a particular context."

Carbado and Harris (2018; 2204) use the example of the social category, i.e., "African American" which can be used both in a reductive manner and as a form of social categorisation. In the former conception, African American can be used to denote the group as a singular, homogenous group, yet in the latter move – it can be used to identify patterns of systemic racism and hierarchies that are historically embedded. What is of importance is the workings of power and how words are used in certain context. May (2015) explains that intersectionality scholarship sets to critique these workings of power in order to identify systemic patterns of oppression.

Conclusion

From the different and, at times, opposing views of what intersectionality is – one can contend that intersectionality serves more as a political commitment that sets out to analyse and contest hierarchies, traditional norms and systems of oppression. As a methodological approach it operates by way of breaking traditions not only in terms of methodology but also epistemology and ontology. By calling for multiplicity it aims to disrupt research norms, public discourses, historical frames and traditional philosophical predispositions. Intersectionality's open-ended nature analyses power, identities and social categories, while breaking from analogical limits whilst simultaneously promoting social and epistemic justice through coalition politics that value difference over sameness.

Chapter 4: Methods

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach in answering the question that is treated by this study, i.e., “what are the pertinent intersections in the lives of black women at Rhodes University?” The study employs narrative research in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of black women at Rhodes University. According to Conle (2000) narrative research is used to understand individuals and the events that constitute their lives. Connelly and Cladinin (1990) add that narrative research places emphasis on how individuals experience the world. Each individual’s experience is therefore considered valuable to the study.

What initially drew me to narrative inquiry is the holistic approach in storytelling. Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013: 1) explain that unlike other qualitative approaches narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing point. The theoretical approach offers a holistic view that does not constrict or essentialise the experiences of the participants into concrete and stagnant categories of narrative inquiry, which is to say that this methodology offers the researcher flexibility that allows the participants to explore their complexities and multi-layered experiences. Such exploration takes whichever direction is intended by the participant, in answering the broadly framed question. Andrew, Squire and Tamboukou (2013: 2) argue that

We frame our research in terms of narrative because we believe that by doing so, we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other and to understand more about the individual and social change. By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; how narratives are silenced contested or accepted and what if any affects they have.

Andrew, Squire and Tamboukou (2013) speak to the power of narrative research and its ability to create new knowledge while simultaneously challenging social norms by using the participants lived experiences as a tool to investigate the structures, hidden opacities and system(s) that makes up their social environment. They describe narrative research as a means to discover people’s form

of truth. According to Josselson (2011) as quoted in Wertz (2011) narrative truth involves how an individual structures and understands events surrounding her lived experiences. She (Wertz, 2011: 225) further argues that “[narrative] research eschews methodological orthodoxy in favour of doing what is necessary to capture the lived experiences of people in terms of their own meaning making and to theorise about it in insightful ways.”

The study sought to explore the stories of black women experiences within a Historically White Institution, so as to understand the intersections and power relations that play out in their experiences. Such an exploration was aimed at understanding the differences and complexities that black females encounter in a Historically White Institution. This was done with the intention to understand the meaning these black women attach to these experiences. Having conducted a qualitative study, inductively using theory both as a method of analysis and as a conceptual framework, the goal was to allow the participants’ stories to speak for themselves without creating false dichotomies, additive frameworks and hierarchical forms of oppression, but to allow them to move in-between spaces of privilege and oppression however they saw fit.

According to Holloway and Jefferson (2000) narrative interviews can either be done in a structured manner or using an unstructured format, depending on the aim of the research. Structured interviews often come up with an agenda that is then compressed with various questions for the participants to engage with (ibid). This study found this method problematic in that it imposed information on the participants by ordering and wording questions in a format that will inevitably limit the interviewees in an attempt to answer the question in a coherent manner. Unstructured interviews, however, rely on the participants leading the conversation, which allows them to place their human experiences into meaningful and selectively organised episodes. Inasmuch as the study was based on the participant’s experiences at (and of) Rhodes University, many of them gave context to their narratives using their backgrounds and previous experiences, prior to studying at Rhodes University. This allowed for a deeper understanding of their experiences.

The pattern of selecting the participants in this study was based on the recruitment of students who were registered as black female students at Rhodes University. Understanding that one of the participants, respectively and, socially views herself as an individual who does not use her gender identity as a means of interaction, she acknowledged that under the academic space—for

demographic purposes—she identified herself as a black female. Similarly, the cohort of participants had one foreign national student who indicated that she only understood herself as a black person when she entered the university space in South Africa. For the purpose of the study, participants were approached from different departments in order to acquire a diverse pool of experiences based on the different departmental environments. The participants ranged from second year students to post-graduate masters and PhD candidates. The majority of the participants were approached at random outside the Rhodes University Main library. A method of snowballing was used with two participants. According to Streetton, Cooke and Campbell (2001) snowballing is the process of using your current participant as a reference point for other participants. They further argue that in order for this process to be effective the researcher has to understand the social situation they wish to study. As explained in the paragraph above the study solely focused on black female registered students at Rhodes, however, for the purposes of acquiring interviewees from diverse backgrounds the study was designed purposefully to incorporate two black female foreign national students. Eleven (11) participants were approached in total, of which, ten agreed to be interviewed, of the 10 only 9 interviews were transcribed. One of the participants asked for her information to be retracted due to legal issues with the University and the Naked protest¹¹.

Fusch and Ness (2015) argue that failure to reach saturation in a study may impact one's research negatively. However, reaching a point of saturation may often become difficult depending on the study design, thus Fusch and Ness (2015: 1409) argue that researchers should focus more on acquiring rich and thick data rather than a large sample size. For this study, the sole focus centred on the participants' lived experiences in a Historically White University. May (2015) explains that because intersectionality serves to explain social action, it is important to find meaning in the overlooked (individuals and their narratives) by being attentive to the participants' experiences as a fund of knowledge. Placing emphasis on the participant's different experiences with a qualitative research design led to rich quality data content rather than a large sample size.

¹¹ The naked protest refers to the female student revolt that took place during the fees must fall movement. Women from various universities protested naked, symbolising against the sexual harassment and violence that had been occurring both within the protest and Higher education institutions at large (Gouws, 2018). At Rhodes University a list pertaining several sexual perpetrators was public released, at which the university responded with various legal actions (ibid).

List of my participants in the study

Pseudonym	Degree of study	Level of Study
Donolo	Politics and International Relations	PhD
Sive	Accounting	Postgraduate Diploma
Thuliswa	Law	Second year
Sihle	Sociology	Masters
Sange	Economics	Masters
Vatiswa	Politics and International Relations	Masters
Lira	Journalism	Second year
Fundiswa	Botany	Third Year
Luleka	Arts	Third Year

The duration of the interviews, across all the participants interviewed, ranged from forty (40) minutes to an hour (1) and fifty-six (56) minutes. All the participants were presented with an ethics form explaining the purpose of the interview and their rights to withhold any information that they did not wish to share with the researcher. For the purpose of protecting the participants, the ethics form clearly outlined the protection of their identities through pseudonyms. Building trust between the interviewer and the interviewee forms as an important aspect of accomplishing integrity within the qualitative research process. According to Watts (2008) the ethical practices within qualitative research underpins honesty and openness towards one's research. This places emphasis on moral principles and rejects deceit and duplicity (Watts, 2008), as such confidentiality and anonymity played an important aspect of the data collection process. The participants were all made aware of their voluntary participation that would require audio recording for data collection. In ensuring no direct link could be made from the study to trace the identities of the participants, some aspects of

the interviews that could possibly lead to the participant's identities being revealed were altered. These included lecturer names, dates, venues and names of residences.

Eight of the interviews were conducted face to face in spaces where the interviewees felt comfortable, these ranged from the comfort of their residences, the library and their places of study. One of the interviews was conducted electronically via zoom due to distance. What informed the interviews was the intention to make the participants as comfortable as possible. This was done by starting the interview with a casual conversation ranging from a heavy work schedule or plans for the weekend. Thereafter, the researcher dove into academia either by asking the participants to speak about their first-year experience or what they were currently working on. The intention was to afford the participants the freedom to lead the conversation into whatever parts of their University experience they felt comfortable with sharing. Holloway and Jefferson (2000:32) explains that "narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful [...] it organises human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes [...] thinking, perception, imagination and moral decision making are based on narrative structures. More recently, self-identity has been seen as being achieved by narratives of the self."

Josselson (2011) adds that when conducting narrative research, meaning is not acquired solely through experience but constructed through social discourse. She (Josselson, 2011) further adds that the relationship between the researcher and the participant plays an important role in how information is interpreted and understood. She (Josselson, 2011) believes that meaning is generated by both the linkages the participants and the researcher make, thus she (Josselson, 2011: 225) argues that narrative research is an interpretive method that equally respects relativity and multiplicity of truth. Understanding that the study was conducted inductively through the guidance and theoretical framework of intersectionality, the analysis and interpretation were based on the assumption that

1. All the participants live within the confines of the matrix structure that operates on multiple levels, thus bringing about intertwined and irreducible social categories.
2. This inevitably dissociates with binary forms of thinking and applies itself to multiplicity and discourages hierarchies in social categories.

3. By living in multiple registers, intersectionality thus helps one understand that we live both within the confines of privilege and oppression.

These assumptions were the guiding principles throughout the data analysis process of the study. During the preliminary phase of coding, there was tension in terms of how to go about using thematic narrative analysis. Using intersectionality as a scope in analysing the data gathered, coding and categorisation played an important role. In order to avoid having additive and essentialised categories, intersectionality warns against placing themes and categories only to re-insert hierarchies and social inequality. Saldana (2008), however, reminds us that coding in qualitative research is an interpretive act with the sole purpose of summarising and reducing data without losing the meaning(s) inherent therein. This study used three phases of coding which included, precoding that required underlining important words and sentences identified by the researcher. The second phase was split between an elemental and affective coding method which was derived from the initial coding phase, and included values coding using *Invivo* and *Versus* coding. According to Saldana (2016) the selection of a coding method depends on the ontology that your questions align with. When looking into the lived experiences of individuals, Saldana (2016) suggests using coding methods that look to the exploration of one's personal experience. Saldana (2016) explains that initial coding aims to break down the data in order to closely examine and discern similarities or differences. This aspect played a key role in identifying the differences amongst the participants of the study. With regards to values coding, the aim is to discern the participant's beliefs, attitudes and perspectives with respect to social matters. The entire coding process was done manually.

These three forms of coding were used with the intention of allowing the data to guide the researchers in' understanding vis-à-vis "what my data is telling me". Using various coding techniques was important in order to try and connect to a larger context of where the participants are located within the matrix of power and structural inequality. Josselson (2011:226) explains that narrative analysis is conducted in two hermeneutic traditions, hermeneutics of faith and hermeneutics of suspicion. In the former, emphasis is placed on the restoration of meaning through text, while in the latter the researcher concentrates on finding hidden and disguised meaning within texts. The study used both these traditions interchangeably in order to retain the meaning of the personal experiences of the participants while scanning the data to unravel the slippages and hidden forms of power embedded in the participant's experiences.

Throughout the coding process, the researcher made memo notes to document the coding process and keep record of coding information such as colour schemes that align with different codes, and potential patterns and ideas that come up throughout the process. These memo notes essentially became very useful in the third phase of coding.

According to Chadwick (2017) when using narrative inquiry as a method in conjunction with intersectionality, one needs to take an epistemological stance. Using Mishler's (1995) work on narratives, he explains that there are three broad epistemological perspectives in narrative research; a realist approach that focuses on the content of the story and its version of reality; a structural approach that places emphasis on the language and the manner in which stories are produced and a functional approach that aligns with discourse analysis and the participants' relationship with power and how they are implicated in the structural framework of inequality (Chadwick, 2017: 11). Chadwick argues that the functional approach to narrative analysis aligns more with intersectionality. In this study all three approaches played an important role. It was the participant's versions of reality that guided the researcher with respect to understanding the intersections that are constitutive of different social categories and the micro-analytics of the participants' ordering of their stories and the language they used. This facilitated an understanding with respect to the workings of domination. In this framework May's (2015) argument on multiplicity of disciplines and ontological plurality worked best in the methodology and analysis part of the study. The traditional approach allows the researcher the ability to discern between concentrating on the micro processes and the macro processes. However, intersectionality plays the role of hybridity that forces the researchers to move between disciplines.

Saldana (2016) argues that finding a pattern in one's coding process displays trustworthy evidence for one's findings. She further argues that "[qualitative] researchers seek pattern as a somewhat stable indicator of human ways of living and working to render the world [...] the evidence is found in habits, rituals, rules, roles and routines" (Saldana, 2016: 6).

Chadwick (2017), countering this argument states that within cultural narratives "cultural" common sense often depicts ideologies that re-inscribe master narratives. While she acknowledges the underdevelopment of methods to decipher the connection between stories and ideologies, she equally points out the overwhelming evidence of structural power at play in "socially shared

understandings” (Chadwick, 2017: 11). These contending arguments placed the study at a crossroad in the third phase of coding. Insofar as the aim that the second cycle of coding was to find patterns and themes that are most common, the researcher was equally cautious of not falling prey to common sense, which has an underlying pattern of ideologies and structural power. Concurrently, it was important to pay attention to the data so as to decipher the intersections in the stories of the participants. McCall, Crenshaw and Sum Cho (2013) as quoted in Grzanka (2014) argue that when dealing with a methodological approach of analysis, using intersectionality as a theoretical tool, it is not the use of the term that gives the research intersectional content but rather the analytical disposition the researcher takes when thinking and conducting their analysis. According to McCall Crenshaw and Sum Cho (2013) analytical sensibility is

The adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and differences and its relations to power [...] the understanding that categories are not distinct but always permeated by other categories fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamic power emphasising what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is (Grzanka, 2014: 304).

The second cycle of coding was broken into two parts. The first consisted in looking at emergent themes and pattern that are common in the data set. Which is to say that from the first cycle of coding there were hundreds of codes from the different coding patterns used. The aim of the second cycle was to reduce the codes into themes and umbrella categories while showcasing the intersectionalities inherent in the data set. Throughout the process, the researcher attempted to split the focus between the dominant codes that came up frequently and the salient codes that are often overlooked. From this process the themes that emerged most commonly were the “master narratives” of race, gender, class and sexuality. With these emerging themes, the researcher subsequently went into the second process by viewing these master narratives using a multidimensional perspective. Using the intersectionality perspective of analytical sensibility, the objective was to unravel the intra-action between ideological and material “master narratives” and experiences and events. Chadwick (2017: 11) explains that when analysing narratives for traces of ideological influence, various modes of analysis are used to depict contradictions within texts and discontinuities and absences. May (2015) describes this method as the negative space approach. According to May (2015: 228)

The negative space approach focuses on the interrelationship and dynamism between different objects and placements in space and approaches the edges of something from its peripheries and beyond. A focus on the interstices, on context and on interacting forces renders meaning and crafts renderings at the boundaries where opposites meet: it also requires that the background be brought to the foreground.

The focus then, lay in using the participant's stories as evidence of multiplicity and multivocality of intersecting forces of individual experiences, cultural ideologies, discursive framings and material realities of existing between the two worlds of privilege and oppression. By viewing the data set in this way, the focus was on how the participants understand their narratives and how they produce and subvert normative relations of power. This approach allowed for a deeper reflection on the ontological and epistemological substance of the participant's narrative and their socio-cultural background(s). By intermeshing both narrative analysis and intersectionality into the method of analysis used in the study, the majority of the themes were derived deductively through the use of the theoretical framework developed in the study.

Taking into consideration that the analysis was based on interpretive questions, their reliability and trustworthiness are prone to be opened up to questioning. According to Webster and Mertova (2007) reliability in narrative research can be reduced to the dependability of one's data set, the ability to trust one's notes and transcripts. As stated in the preceding analysis, hermeneutics of faith plays an important part of a narrative research study. The researcher has to trust that the information that is given is a representation of the truth. The relations between the interviewer and the interviewee intersect during the analysis and the interpretive phase. It should be noted that as a researcher, the interpretation developed could be subjective, based on the researchers' current social standing and background knowledge. However, Webster and Mertova (2007) reminds us that by supporting one's research with well-grounded and a coherent data set that provides credibility through a rigorous method that shows clearly defined steps of how one got to their findings, with the intent of showing that your data is consistent and can be repeated, the research can be viewed as both valid and as making worthwhile theoretical claims about phenomena studied.

Conclusion

By using qualitative narrative inquiry and intersectionality together, as a method of analysis, this study was able to avoid using traditional patterns that employ methods for the purposes of reducing or discrediting black women's experiences into assimilative patterns that award conformity rather than complexity and difference in the study of black women's lives and their experiences.

Chapter 5: Not an Additive System but rather a Matrix System

Introduction

This chapter looks at the lived experiences of the participants, of this study, from an intersectional perspective using the matrix structure that highlights their experiences from an angle of multiplicity, which shifts and changes dynamically and interchangeably. The argument advanced here, is one that demonstrates how their inequalities are intermeshed, causing a co-constructive pattern where they live both within the constructs of privilege and oppression. This chapter subsequently argues that the participant's inequalities vary depending on the social background of an individual and the environment in which they are situated. Using May's (2015: 23) argument of the matrix philosophy, this chapter further highlights the operations of power and its level of fluidity that cuts across levels of experiential, epistemological, political and structural domains of meaning making. By linking these different levels of analysis in one matrix structure the chapter further probes the constructs of agency and resistance imagery.

As a heuristic framework, intersectionality sets out to highlight what it can do rather than what it is, this chapter embarks on a reflective path using gaps and opacities that go unnoticed both within the lived experiences of the participants and the literature, as a means to identify and unlearn prevailing social imageries. This approach inevitably dispenses with social categories that are based on hierarchies, which is to say that the study disavows identity construction that is based on adding one social identity on top of another and universalising experiences for the sake of sameness rather than differences.

Intermeshed Inequalities

I mean I can't generalise my experience too, to suggest that it is denotative of the whole entire university. I've always had a very particular kind of experience [...] socialisation forms an important aspect of my university experience [...] also my sexuality means something [...] I am born in a body that is feminine [...] I am short that means something to do with my safety or being conscious of my safety [at all] times [...] my hearing then excludes me from a space [...] those things pepper my experience (Thuliswa)

According to Ferree (2009: 85), rather than viewing intersectionality with master categories that interlink with other smaller categories, the theoretical predisposition should be viewed in light of the matrix wherein inequalities are fluid, interchanging and mutually constitutive with one another and cannot—of necessity—be separated. By disregarding the singular connection between the individual and their relation to a social category, Ferree (2009) views social categories as a process that informs multiple meanings depending on the historical context of the individual and their social, political and economic standing as it informs a particular framework of analysis. Above here, Thuliswa asserts that her differences, which are constitutive of her sexuality, height, socialisation and her hearing disability, inform and define her experiences. While her main point remains one of heterogeneity, she carefully outlines her social experiences in a non-hierarchical form – showing how each social category intersects with another and is equal or co-dependant on bringing about multiple-forms of inequality.¹²

Traditionally, the intersection of categories outside the race, gender, and class paradigm, was seen as an addition to the main three master categories (Yuval Davis, 2006). However, Yuval-Davis (2006) reminds us of the fluidity that makes up women’s experiences and how black women’s experiences cannot be conflated into three concrete forms of oppression. This is where intersectionality, as a theoretical tool of analysis, becomes important in revealing the multiplicity of identities that constitute the experiences of black women.

Martinez (1993) quoted in Ferree (2009) asserts that the infinite number of differences among individuals generates a long list of intersections that compete with one another for scarce resources and attention from a marginalised perspective. This creates what Martinez calls “Olympics of oppression” at which, each marginal group competes for attention. In the higher education system in South Africa, attending to the differences highlights instances of the Olympics of oppression. According to Walker and Wilson-Strydom (2016: 125) inequality in the South African higher education system often relates to unequal resources. Resource inequality as understood to be inclusive of both financial resources and existential recognition, association, status and power (Walker and Wilson-Strydom, 2016). The recent #FeesMustFall protests, where students took

¹² We understand Thuliswa’s social position as a form of inequality, in that she describes her experiences in relation to how she felt like an outsider for the most part of her academic journey at Rhodes. This is to say that while Thuliswa believes herself to be an outsider, she acknowledges her privilege and advantages as a student. Thus, her social position of being an outsider does not necessarily correlate with absolute Otherness.

issue with the high increment in fees, attest to this dilemma. For some, the recent #FeesMustFall protests represented fee increments and financial aid, whereby students who are part of the previously disadvantaged groups were excluded from financial aid and struggled to pay fees.

This phenomenon was described as the ‘missing middle’ (Gouws, 2017). However, the protest was also driving other pressing issues. As example, the marginalisation of black women both in the social construct of the protest and higher education—as a sector—came up as serious areas of concern and consideration. Similarly, the exclusion of the LGBTQI+ community in the protest and higher education system, were also considered (ibid). This instigated a form of rivalry amongst socially marginalised groups. The question that emerges is one concerning how we can move away from this additive notion of viewing different marginalised groups, as a way of creating a system wherein one group doesn’t have to compete with the other?

Yuval-Davis (2006) believes that the answer to this question lies in how we analyse intersectional texts. By analysing social categories from one point, in most cases – this being the point of identity politics, one tends to miss out on the other levels of analysis. According to Yuval-Davis (2006: 198)

Social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual concrete people. Social divisions have organisational, intersubjective, experiential and representational form, and this affects the way we theorise them as well as the way in which we theorise the connections between different levels. In other words, they are expressed in specific institutions and organisations, such as state law and state agencies etc.

What is of particular importance is the context in which an individual exists and what makes up their social conditions. Yuval-Davis (2016) reminds us that the notion of multiple groups competing with one another for attention, causing what Judith Butler (1990) describes as an illimitable process, is only relevant in identity politics. However, May (2015) reminds us that the matrix structure is unique in that it views the ontological basis of each social category, thus expanding the categories of analysis. Prins (2006) adds that the focus on identity politics from an intersectional perspective is not the multiple forms of identities that intersect, but rather the social inequalities that cannot be captured in arithmetic form.

I think firstly for me as a black woman, ... And 'as a black woman', would be a South African term that I did not understand until I came to South Africa because where I come from, being a black woman, you have other problems, which are not necessarily race based, not even necessarily [...]. I was in a school, which was, which had white people, Indians because it was the most affluent school in, um, Dwebesa. And there was nothing fancy about them. They're the ones that would stand at the back.....so now imagine what that does to the psyche of a young black woman. (Donolo)

Donolo expresses her social circumstances from her background, by showing the drastic differences that make up social organization in the two contexts of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Her statement firstly dispels the notion of standard social category constructions of black women's experiences, which conflates said experiences with racial, gendered and class categories. Her lived experience which informs how she identifies and understands the terminology of being a "black woman", was influenced by the institutions and the state to which she belonged, thus she conscientizes us about the different psychic conditions under which she grew up as a child. Yuval-Davis (2006) simplifies this by explaining the concept of different kinds of differences. Traditionally the main focus was on a hierarchal form of social divisions, where gender or race were placed at the top of the hierarchy, indicating that one has more power or influence than the other (Creshaw, 1990). Donolo's lived experience affords us the ability to focus on two important factors, these being the complexity that each individual brings in their interpretation of social categories – depending on their set environment. Lugones (2010) work on decolonial feminism reminds us of the importance of understanding the connection between the colonizer and the colonized. That is to say that while both South Africa and Zimbabwe are colonial states, the history of colonisation differs drastically between the two; Donolo explains that

So you can't imagine such emancipation, my friend but it comes with a price. We are paying the price. But, um, let's say, if you go to Zim, because Zim had educated black people, very educated people [...] who remove white people from the core businesses. So, you know how, um, yeah, white people are out, but they still have a hand in the jar there's no hand there. There's no hand. They were wiped out. And they were replaced by black business, such that we don't have shell, total, BP. We don't have all of that. Uh, not because they didn't want to stay, because they were pushed out by this nationalisation policy, they

were pushed out, which is good, no matter what happens in Zimbabwe now they can't reverse that and I think that's why they are frustrated [...], so yeah, so now coming to South Africa, I didn't know, I just and remember at school I was a cool kid, so I didn't know, I didn't expect much. I was so confident, very, very confident I had nothing. Like I had really the transition. I didn't have any problem at all until I started realising. This white thing, they realised that no, no, no, no, no white people are in power here. We are not saying white people, know their place. We are saying white people should give black people a place. Now that's drastic are you getting me, so it's not white people should know their place, it's more like white people should give black people a place that's the fight in South Africa, how sad is that. So, um, from a, from when I was in undergrad, I saw that there is a big problem and I felt pushed into it, like I have to understand it. (Donolo)

Yuval-Davis (2006) work explains that in order to understand the complexities of inequality, one has to be conscious of the ontological basis of each social category. Donolo's social background reminds us of that complexity and difference in that she explicitly takes us through the complex and intersectional dynamism that seem to be overlapping in her lived experience at Rhodes University. By making a comparison between the colonial histories of South Africa and Zimbabwe, she breaks down the social construction of race, using both her social background and her transition into higher education at Rhodes University. The intersectional overlaps appear when she becomes aware of the inequality and the domination of whiteness in South African institutions. The transformation gap in South Africa and her psyche, each of these factors places her within a socially different position in the matrix structure.

Dhamoon (2011:231) asserts that when thinking about the concept of intersectionality, one needs to understand the dynamic relationship between the individual and institutional factors. Choo and Ferree (2010) add that the core tenants of intersectionality illustrate how each individual experiences inequality in a qualitatively different way. Mihle and Donolo's lived experiences demonstrate May's (2016) use of complexity in intermeshed inequalities, which in itself, highlights difference(s). It is within such differences and not sameness that we should find simultaneity.

McCall (2005) explores the differentiation of inequalities among groups, by analysing the dynamism of change in inequality that makes some categories and the interactions and points at

which they meet, more apparent than others. McCall's (2005) inter-categorical approach aligns these changes by showing the differentiation among individuals, across cultural and historical boundaries. While exploring the changing nature of inequality among groups, she poses a question of whether the traditional approach of categorisation has the ability to show the complexity of inequality. Donolo's experience of racial categorisation, shows us the complexity that ensues when grouping individuals by way of suggesting that they experience the same form of racial inequality. However, as McCall (2005: 1787) argues, our limitations are always set by our approach to understanding inequality. If we are to analyse categories and their differences, that would mean that we are singling out specific categories to understand how they differ from other groups. She further argues that when using intersectionality, the study focuses on multiplicity, which signals the need to

Analyse the intersection of the full set of dimensions of multiple categories and thus examine both advantages and disadvantages explicitly and simultaneously. It is not the intersection of race, class and gender in a single group that is of interest but the relationship among the social groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category (McCall, 2005: 1787).

Simultaneity of Privilege and Oppression

But then what that means is that people bracket you with everyone else. Right? So I've had people say things like all these ones, they stick with Casandra [...] they say things like, Oh yeah, they say anything they are Zimbabwean they are this, that, but my experience is different. I'm here by choice. By choice. You see, even in this year I'm here by choice to say, I want to continue because I had said that after my PhD, I'm going to go back home. So, to find this job and then, stay in continue to do this is because I'm in love with what I'm doing. And what I'm doing is about South Africans you get me. So, my story is different. It's not about, I have nowhere to go. I think there are people at home, struggling people will, will [...] are relying on me. I know there are people with that story. That's fine. That's not my story. You get me, I do this because I love it. So, it hurts me. And it makes me sad that South Africans don't realise that whether they're doing it because it's a foreigner doing it, because they love it like me or the foreigner doing it. Because, you know, obviously they can't go back home or whatever. But at the end of the day, they end

up loving it, let's say with Sue and with other people, um, that whole thing they adding value to you. (Donolo)

Intersectionality's equation of irreducible social categories operates on the understanding that individuals live in the confines of both privilege and oppression. McCall's (2005) description of understanding multiplicity, rests on the appreciation that inequality relies on both underprivilege and over-privilege. One doesn't exist without the other, thus it is imperative, when addressing inequality, to look at both. Lugones (2008) emphasises unravelling the role of colonialism in gender, in order to disprove the idea that gender is universalised she first exposes the patriarchal and heterosexual society and how it sets out to benefit the white majority while oppressing men and women of colour. By placing the past in an intermeshed structure with the present and future, she unravels the assumptions and social imageries that were consumed and understood as fact and truth. Grzanka (2014) agreeing with Lugones (2008) adds that the problem that modern society faces when, approaching social justice and inequality, is that they analyse privilege oppression, leaving out privilege that often incubates power and the institutions that inhibit equality.

Crenshaw (1990) extends this notion of privilege and oppression in her work, when she analyses litigation of black women's cases in court. She argues that white women were given the right to argue their cases when more than one social category intersected with the other. She uses the example of a white women in court who used the fact of gender oppression as a defence. In this instance both her privilege of race and under-privilege, i.e. her gender worked in her favour. Crenshaw (1990) reminds us that in this context, the understated privilege (that being whiteness) was regarded as transparent, therefore the court ruled in favour of a singular understanding of oppression, which in this case was gender.

Donolo's lived experience traces both her privilege and oppression as an intermeshed cycle that operates concomitantly. As a foreign national student studying in South Africa, she expresses her concerns over xenophobic backlash with respect to higher education funding and producing academic work for South African universities. Her initial concerns begin with the universalisation of foreign national students having the same struggles. She distinguishes herself by articulating her differences, being from a fairly privileged background, she understands her experience as being driven by choice rather than circumstance.

According to Mupotsa and Kreutzfeldt (2016), the discourse surrounding foreign nationals in South Africa often traverses the lines of nationalism, the individual, and their actions. In the context of the individual, they quote Ndinda and Ndlovu (2016) explaining that “categories of differences like gender and class shape or produce techniques of differences, as they argue that attitudes about who is foreign are dynamic, often fashioned by interconnections and kinship ties between citizen and foreigner” (Mupotsa and Kreutzfeldt, 2016: 16)

Studies conducted on xenophobic issues in South Africa speak to the differences between South Africans and foreign nationals (Qambela, 2016; Mupotsa and Kreutzfeldt, 2016; Neocosmos, 2010; Gqola, 2010). Qambela’s (2016) intersectional study of xenophobia in Grahamstown draws a link between the decolonial project centred on #RhodesSoWhite and the xenophobic attacks in the local township. Using the example of South African and international students fighting against minimum initial payment at Rhodes, he argues that it is only through solidarity within differences that progress can be made. According to Qambela (2016: 42) the climatic shift of political uprising at Rhodes University was rooted in institutional and hegemonic practices that were seen to oppress a certain group. In a holistic sense, students engaged in the political struggle of decoloniality to suppress otherness while equally contributing to the fight for the recognition of differences.

Donolo’s extract takes it a step further by speaking to the context of in group differences. May (2015) explains that during accounts of inequalities, studies often look at issues on the basis of traditionally constructed categories. In this case, South Africans who are viewed as insiders and foreign nationals who are depicted as outsiders. Donolo breaks down her experience differently.

“It’s not that I feel any, alienation per se. I think I feel sorry. What makes my case, I think, a bit more distinct is that I don’t need to be here, I could most probably live my best life in Zim” (Donolo)

Donolo’s case serves as an example of Crenshaw’s (1990) work, in unrepresented transparent privileged categories. Her social standing of privilege intersects with her immigration status of a foreign national student. In the matrix structure, both of these factors are of crucial importance, however, in society – which often opts for a singular categorisation, her citizenship status takes precedence.

According to Dhamoon (2015) settler colonial states that are hidden in deeply embedded colonial history, often present peculiar representations of intermeshed inequalities. The relationship between the structural, political, economic and social planes often plays out with varying complexities. The complex relationship is often fuelled by structural patterns embedded in Africa's colonial history and the space of social transformation where individuals try to engage with their newfound liberties and privileges while dealing with the oppressive system of the present and the past. This dance of intermeshed privilege and oppression demands a confrontation of the colonial history, while equally demanding that attention be given to the lived experiences in the present – so as to discern the gaps and hidden dualisms of privilege and oppression.

Intersectionality traces the intersections by way of accounting for historical context, in order to identify the formation of overlapping inequalities, the hidden forms of structural powers that inhere in social norms and the location of participants in the present axes of power. According to Yuval-Davis (2006: 199), we all have dissimilar differences, however, what seems to be common knowledge are the assimilation of social divisions derived from biological destiny. This assumption is then taken as the norm and passed down from generation to generation. The problem, however, comes with the structures of inequality in social divisions that remain normalised in society.

Over the past decade several scholars have contested this taken for granted historical knowledge. Oyěwùmí's (1997) work on gender discourses not being relevant in the African historical context of the Yoruba tribe, served an important role – not only in gender studies but in contextualising and understanding alternative social constructions that were used in Africa outside the western cultural understanding. We as human beings are intricately linked in our historical past taking social norms from the past as truth, without analysing and contesting them, which signals a limitation with respect to understanding and breaking patterns of structural power. Oyěwùmí's work on the colonality of gender demonstrated the importance of tracing the ontological basis of social categories as a way of understanding its impact on how we interact with one another in terms of gender and how we come to redress the historical factuality of colonality of gender. May (2015: 53) further adds that engaging in intersectional historical memory work, serves as a tool in the process of unlearning prevailing social imaginaries. By analysing historical texts through an

intersectional framework, intersectionality helps us to better understand disremembered subjects (ibid).

Social Background vs Historical Social Imaginaries

When engaging with the lived experiences of participants' lives, as black women living in post-apartheid South Africa and studying in a Historically White University, some of the participants engage with their lived experiences on the basis of their social background and where they are located, socially. To elucidate, Thuliswa states that

I grew up in the township and so I see myself in a certain way with respect to whom I belong with socially [...] I'm not socially cultured in a certain way and I think it's in part because my upbringing, who my family are, is very much like to me, my perception of myself, I'm just like a kid from the township (Thuliswa)

Similarly, Sihle responds in the following ways, when asked about her lived experience in academia. She immediately reverts to her socio-economic status and the environment under which she grew up. She states that

So, I will give you the answer to this question, sort of like in a chronological manner, right back dating myself to when I was an undergrad living in the city. So, I'm from the northern side of Johannesburg right, and obviously the north is associated with a particular kind of lifestyle such opulence right. And I think being in that space, because I grew up in Mthatha right. And like the early childhood until I was like 15, I stayed in Mthatha no 13 and even in high school when I moved in with my dad, like I'd go to Mthatha every holiday right, I'm a person who speaks Xhosa like natively it's my first language (Sihle)

Both Thuliswa and Sihle use their social background as a means of understanding their privilege and / or underprivilege. Reference to socio-economic status and environmental upbringing, as a central component to the participants conception of themselves and their experiences, is understood when the reader looks at the history of coloniality in South Africa. The historical context of South Africa, in relation to (pre) and (post)-apartheid eras, is of great importance in locating the participants in the matrix structure. As Mamdani (1996) argues while the era of apartheid is behind us, the institutional apparatus of colonisation is still evident and intact in

today's society. According to Mamdani (1990) the foundations of the apartheid system go back to the principles of Jan Smuts and his vision of Africa under the distinction of institutional segregation, in an effort to maintain white supremacy. From the early era of the 1800's we see traces of the axes and fluidity of power being as these influence the social, economic and political spheres of South Africa—as a country. The growing interest of modernisation in conjunction with capitalism spread across the African continent creating a need for cheap labour (Marais, 2013). With a large population of black Africans with, their rights confined under colonisation, cheap labour presented an opportunity for capital gain and tactical territorial segregation under white colonial domination.

Marais (2013: 6) asserts that it was a means to preserve native institutions while simultaneously meeting labour demands of the growing economy. This path ensured a clear trajectory of white minority rule vis-à-vis the political, economic and social aspects that defined the lives of both black and white citizens of South Africa (pre) and (post)-apartheid. The migrant labour system in conjunction with territorial segregation instilled a hierarchical system of superiority and inferiority. The white minority—perceived as majority as per the argument presented above in Chapter 3)—that claimed land using the Land Act of 1914, legitimised their ownership through the authority of legal citizenship which gave whiteness—as a social in our context—both political and economic rights (ibid), while undermining the rights of the black population(s) in the country. The black population were pushed to the hinterlands, spaces that were formalised as Bantustan countries. These spaces were often poorly undeveloped consisting of rural areas with little resources (Marais, 2013).

The separation between Bantustan spaces and mainland South Africa created institutional structures that are still evident in today's society in several ways. Firstly, the creation of 10 Bantustan native lands instituted fissures predicated on ethnicity, which broke the possibility of black solidarity in the country; a fact that created smaller manageable minorities (Mamdani, 1997) for the even smaller white minority that insisted on political subjugation. Secondly, the divide between rurality and urbanity created a structure of hierarchies, wherein whiteness maintained the upper status through political sanctions created by the law and strategic control of the economy and labour in the Bantustan lands (Mamdani, 1997). Native workers who worked inside the

urbanised areas were secluded into smaller confined township areas that were often close to the areas of labour such as the mines (Mamdani, 1997).

The political discourse of laws that preserved the rights of ownership for the white minority working in consort with the monopolisation of the economy through the migrant labour system and the hierarchal institution of Bantustans, further segregated native South Africans, creating a disparity between whites as superior and natives as subordinates (Mamdani, 1997:14) of a limited minority.

According to Choo and Ferree (2010), constellations of multiple oppressions play a crucial role through the complexity of co-construction and co-dependency of social divisions. In the instance of the South African history, social categories were placed strategically, enabling each social category to be dependent on the other in order to thrive. For example, Marais (2016) asserts that the growing global market placed emphasis on the need for migrant labour. In order to maintain superiority and meet global market demand, the apartheid system placed natives under the migrant labour system while creating laws of territorial and institutional segregation against the natives. This created a chain of co-dependency and co-construction between the political, economic and social spheres.

When engaging with their lived experiences, both Thuliswa and Sihle place themselves within the context of this socio-historical background. This seems to have an effect on their socialising skills among their peers. According to Thuliswa

Growing up in the township was just like one of those things where I'm just like that's my environment. That's where I come from and I think that certain ways with respect to how I took to my studies with school like. I was genuinely like I didn't keep to myself, but I've come across like very weird. (Thuliswa)

Literature suggests that socialisation amongst peers in higher education systems is based on racial and class intersection(s) (Soudien, 2008; Mophosho, 2013; Cole and Omari, 2003; Mabokela and Magubane, 2005), while recognising the influence of the historical past of the country, i.e., apartheid (Mophosho, 2013). The intersection of race and class is regarded as being of particular importance. Reference to the environment is often aligned with the historical context of a

Historically White Institution (Soudien, 2008). Similarly, in Thuliswa's, case we come to understand the complex nature of intersectionality when analysing through inequality. Evidently the literature highlights the intersections of race and class in her example, however, the unrepresented transparent social inequalities embedded in the colonial history point to ideologies that were internalised as normalcy to influence her position in the matrix structure.

According to Amanda Gouws (2017) even though intersectionality has the ability to show the connections between interstices and complexities within inequality, there is a paucity in the literature on how essentialisation of women's identities and lived experiences can be a result of praxis. She argues that more work needs to be done in order to understand the relationship between settler colonial states and inhibiting oppressive patterns. Collins (1990) suggests that we often cripple ourselves as individuals because of this dichotomous relationship we have adopted, of one side being privileged with the remaining denigrated. Soudien (2008) suggests that racial factors play an important role in how students socially integrate in universities. He (Soudien, 2008) further argues that Historically White Institutions in South Africa are commonly known for alienating black students from previously disadvantaged groups. While our colonial history provides an explanation of how we come to use our social background as a means to explain our social standing in the matrix structure, contemporarily, it doesn't explain the heterogeneity of how we experience inequality. May (2015: 39) explains this as a space of intersectional ontological plurality. As individuals who straddle multiple identities, these identities filter our location with respect to power and how we experience it. She argues that it would be futile to have a single conceptualisation of oppression in that "[we] are situated in, constrained by, and able to resist within, myriad forms of power: at the same time, we are capable of complicity with dominance on various fronts" (May, 2015: 39).

Participants such as Lira give us an indication of the broad spectrum and the fluidity a person's subjectivity when engaging with power from one's social location in the matrix. She states that

I'm fairly privileged, I'm from a privileged school. [...] I'm a fairly cultured person just in terms of like being able to adapt with different groups and circle of people, you know what I'm saying...that may be in this circle I'll be black enough that's maybe you know like I've been afforded the agency that I've had the educational privilege [...] there are different

ways to be black enough based on the context that you are in. So, I think there is black enough ghetto right [...] and there is black enough woke [...] so I think that there are pockets of being black enough and in this space at Rhodes, it's mostly black enough woke. (Lira)

In this instance, Lira also points out her social background, which situates her in her present lived experience. Lira engages with social spaces by viewing things both from the angle of her privilege and oppression. Even as she might be from a privileged background, her privilege limits her in certain spaces, while affording her latitudes in other spaces. Nancy Fraser (2000) terms this dilemma the “politics of recognition”. As the world tends to progress, a multiplicity of identities also advances. Historically, human rights and equality were all intermeshed in the ideology of universalism, mutual respect, and recognition. However, with multiculturalism, growing capitalistic states, and ethnicities individualisation and recognition are becoming aspects of great importance (Fraser, 2000). The advancement of recognition creates spaces of manoeuvring for a larger pool of social groups that are able to thrive, irrespective of their differences. Yuval-Davis (2011) adds that the dichotomy between recognition and redistribution often causes confusion. The larger the scale of individualisation and recognition, the more complex the relationship of privilege and oppression becomes. Yet it is this complex dynamic that May (2015: 102) calls us to embrace. According to May (2015) in most cases when viewing differences and complexity, we tend to approach them with fear – thus, we either opt for suppressing it if we think it can be subordinated or coping it if we believe it to be dominant and imposing the idea of an either/or binary position.

Mophosho (2013) argues that in Historically White Institutions, the black female majority are a mixture of previously disadvantaged and class privileged communities, thus social mobility and cultural capital becomes of particular importance. In both instances, cultural capital and social mobility are conceptualised from a perspective of one's subject position. According to Mophosho cultural capital is a combined source of social class and identity. Mophosho (2013: 34) argues that

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of Cultural Capital is one avenue of how social class can be incorporated into identity. Firstly, capital is understood as the power that a particular group holds in society (Bourdieu, 1986). The combined sources of a group's capital make for the strength of their status in society. In addition to Cultural Capital is Social Capital,

Economic Capital and Symbolic Capital. Social capital is generated socially within the networks between family and society. Economic capital is wealth, and Symbolic Capital is individual status and prestige through personal qualities. These are therefore the various aspects of the group's status, which make it above others, combined.

Although Mophosho recognises the fluidity within power, with said fluidity embodied in the economic, social and cultural sphere's, she bases her argument on class, with this component as the dominant factor. Mophosho (2013: 34) asserts that while her participants are all members in an education system, some have more access to educational attainment through social capital or having family connections and capital. Social capital on the other hand is largely inherited, subsequently acquired through family connections. With Lebo coming from a privileged educational background, this reveals that social capital is dependent upon the space that you're in. If you're black enough 'ghetto', there are spaces in which you can thrive, socially. Being from a privileged educational background, she understood herself as occupying a space of black enough 'woke', where her knowledge was based on the political consciousness of black students by whom she was surrounded.

Yuval-Davis explains this constraint further, when she argues that

I find the Bourdieuan equation between social collectivises and categorical location along the axes of power problematic [...] while the Bourdieuan trade of field, capital and habitus provides an analytical tool in which such a comprehensive and inclusive intersectional analysis can be carried out, at least on the micro level. The original prioritisation in Bourdieu's writing of class differences as foundational in stratification analysis continues to prevail even when culture, and even later, the power of masculinity become part of Bourdieu analytical model. (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 168)

Intersectionality understands social categories that work using hierarchies, which denotes one social group being dominant over another, as a process of power creating an illusion that makes some social groups more important or apparent than others. This distortion is often created through the use of power and ideologies

What is of importance, however, is the influence of territorial segregation in today's current society. Within Lebo's description of the different pockets of socialisation, each group carries a distinct reference to the social background. In many instances, the distinction may carry an element of class and economic social standing, however, class is hierarchically positioned to reflect the most important component. As Lebo explain these instances are subjective and dependent on the environment one places herself in, at Rhodes University.

Each category overlaps with the other and becomes co-dependant. What remains of great concern is the normalization of categorising students according to their social structures whether urban, rural, or from the location. The same structure that was used to separate blacks through the narrative of territorial segregation is still evident in today's society. While racial segregation is of great importance it is structural systems such as territorial segregation from the apartheid era, which are still at play, that reproduce inequality.

Conclusion

The matrix system is by its very nature, a complex structure that is multi-layered with various levels of analysis to consider. What is evident is the intermeshed nature of inequalities and how one social category is always connected to another. It is therefore important to understand that when dealing with matters of inequality there is no sequence, thus accounting for equality by adding one social identity to another does not bring about social justice. Historical memory work also plays an important role when trying to decipher how to address gaps that abrogate social justice and bolster inequality. The participants' lived experiences all show different perceptions of how they view inequality and oppression. The commonality between these different experiences is not their similar social identities but their struggle to find a balance between spaces of penalty and privilege. It is not in their sameness that they find solidarity but in their differences.

Chapter 6: Structural Intersectionality

Introduction

According to Crenshaw (1991), when dealing with issues of sexual violence – traditional methods of identity politics fall short in analysing the constellation of issues that black women experience. In this chapter we look at the issue of sexual violence and mental health among black women at Rhodes University. By analysing the macro and micro processes of the lived experiences of students in a fragmented academic institution that was forced to grapple with rape culture, we uncover some of the hidden gaps that constitute the macro and micro processes. As an intersectional framework guided by the principles of anti-hegemonic social categories, this chapter then treats structural power and questions the structural domain of gender.

It's Not Cultural more than it is Structural Power and Institutions

But I got there, the orientation was amazing. Like everybody was so friendly. Um, there was the atmosphere of sisterhood at res like everyone was eager to help. Like it felt like home. Um, yeah and you were warned, we were warned of all those scary things that could happen to a naïve girl, um starting at Varsity, you know. Um I did not have those experiences in my first year

Researcher: What were you guys warned about?

Um, the rape culture [...] no it wasn't. This is consent. This is not consent. That happened later on in my varsity years, we were warned against like, what could possibly happen to you as a victim of rape in the sense like um, the things like in res, the guys are going to get you drunk in order to sleep with you. Um, there's such thing as it's called wailing and all these different terms that are used, ever been told about that when you basically, I don't know date, okay. I'm not going to use the proper words. That wouldn't be offensive, date a fat girl, just for fun let's see who can date the fattest girl. Let's see who can get a fat girl to lose weight. Let's see who can get a skinny girl to gain weight. Like they did these stupid games that, um, that's how it was narrated in terms of what guys do at res. And those were the type of things that we were warned against, or like, maybe it's a competition where a

group of guys at res would be like, okay, who can get into this girls' pants the fastest or whatever. Yeah. So that's, that was the rape culture that we were told about. (Sive)

Sive, above here, explains her first-year experience during orientation week. She highlights the rape culture that house committee representatives warned the females about during her first year in 2013. As females entering the university spaces, they were instructed to walk in groups rather than alone. In the text above the house committee clearly articulates what the students should be doing to avoid sexual harassment. Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) work on identity politics and violence against women of colour speaks to the structural oppressive system that creates spaces of discrimination and oppression for black women in the United States. She (Crenshaw, 1991) argues that systems of racism, patriarchy and sexism further perpetuate overlaps and interstices of oppression for and amongst black women.

According to Gouws (2018) the colonial discourse of African sexuality and the various campaigns against the phenomenon of rape culture in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa are not isolated incidents. Gender-based violence and sexual harassment have become a common incident in South Africa. Gouws (2018) believes that the rage within these various protests against gender-based violence was further enhanced by management's response towards student's complaints against the rape culture. While there is literature that speaks to the colonial history of the hypersexualisation of black women during colonial times, and its effect on the culture in today's society, there is an evident disconnect between the structural institutions and the normalisation and perpetuation of rape culture. For Crenshaw (2000) this disconnect is aided by the focus on identity politics.

According to Crenshaw (2000) traditional liberal notions of identity politics of race and gender do not adequately account for the background structural inequalities that place women in relative positions of disempowerment. Weldon (2006) speaks of structural inequalities in terms of systemic social norms such as the laws, institutions and practices that privilege certain members of society while penalising others.

In the context above we see an evident perpetuation of normalising the issues of rape culture within society through the conversation and pep talks that are given to first year females during orientation week. Instead of having conversations around consent and legal action that can be taken by women

who have experienced incidents of sexual harassment, they are given guidelines on what not to do to avoid becoming victims of sexual harassment and rape.

We still at Rhodes or rather being in institutions is very difficult because I don't feel like the institution even acknowledges the fact that I've been sexually assaulted. I don't feel like the institution takes it seriously that the person who sexually assaulted me is the lecturer you know [...] is in my class I'm and the person I'm going to graduate with. We are going to walk the same stage. We are going to be in the same program [...] in some cases we had reported these people but you're not listening to us as women. (Vatiswa)

Vatiswa clearly expresses her anger towards the University management for not being able to take women's struggles against sexual assault seriously. Her anger is then directed towards the University. By analysing these two texts above, one can clearly see the political stance of Rhodes University's management in relation to gender-based violence¹³. According to Collins (2011) when analysing structures and ideologies that have been inaugurated through power in relation to black women, race, gender and sex has always been interchanged with racism, gender inequality and sexism. This, however, is an inadequate analysis of the structures of power and its fluidity across multiplied forms of privilege and oppression. As discussed in the previous section above, inequality and oppression work best when one section of privilege or oppression is hidden, and the other is made apparent.

For instance, Macleod, Böhmke, Mavuso, Barker and Chiweshe's, (2018) paper on contesting sexual violence policies in higher education, argue that these are means to inhibit sexual norms that deviate from social behaviour in university spaces, however, when contextualising these policies, they frame it—sexual harassment and violence—as a gendered phenomenon (Macleod, Böhmke, Mavuso, Barker and Chiweshe, 2018: 85). Although I do not dispute that gender performances and social practices do play a large role in the culture of sexual harassment and rape in South Africa, the point is merely to highlight the missing intersections that create social injustice in the course of rape culture in Higher Education Institutions. Sive and Vatsiwa, both centrally locate their experiences around rape culture both in terms of identity categories and outside of it

¹³ The positions developed in this analysis is that Rhodes University adopts a political stance in relation to the institutional policies on sexual harassment and gender-based violence. An explication of this position follows in the upcoming chapter below.

in the larger context of the higher education system. Vatsiwa explains in further detail how there seems to be a disconnect between her lived experiences of sexual assault and the institutional response.

Verloo's (2006) offers a solution to the problem of identifying discontinuities in inequality and suggests how structural intersectionality aids us in identifying the gaps and opacities that create such discontinuities. If one can locate where one social category amplifies another social category in a positive or negative way, then one locates the disconnect in literature with respect to social justice.

Structural Inequality Gap?

According to Macleod, Böhmke, Mavuso, Barker and Chiweshe (2018) in an effort to combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence against women, Rhodes University created a Sexual Violence Task Team (SVTT). The Task Team was appointed with the intention of driving a process that would culminate in women finding a safe space to speak out about sexual violence, review policies at Rhodes with respect to sexual violence and develop systems of monitoring and evaluation (ibid; 87) within the institution and how it addresses issue of sexual violence. The programme officially began in May 2016.

My mental health experience ties in with the rape culture experience, so I can speak about them interchangeably, but mental health wise I was sexually assaulted and I uh went to the Counselling Centre and. Okay. Before I tell you like what went down why I can, describe it to you whatever my experience. Um, I somewhat feel like there's a disconnect between us having these panel discussions and conversations in these, in these spaces, in these societies and, and maybe the Counselling Centre, the institutions you go to, to seek help. You know what I'm saying? Like I feel like there's a disconnect because we're not having the conversations in collaboration with these people, you know what I'm saying. So it's kind of like we're all having these very productive conversations ...but like how productive is that [...] because I definitely experienced that disconnect and that we'll have these conversations and we'll talk about what needs to be reformed and what needs to be changed and what is the right way to go about this and all that jazz and who you need to call, you know um when in distress, whatever and um, it's kind of like, I get this response like I'm

in that therapist session and I'm getting questions like, like I'm being asked question like were you drinking? Um you know questions that kind of like insinuate that um, [...] so I could partially be at fault and its very debilitating, you know what I'm saying because it's kind of like, are we having the same conversation if the help that I should be getting is not the help that I should be getting [...] it's the help that's taking me backwards. So essentially it's not help. (Lira)

Lira, here, expresses her frustration with the system created to assist women who have been victims of sexual assault. She views her counselling session as an unfruitful event that did more harm than good. She further articulates her disappointment in the type of questioning she was subjected to as a victim. Her main concerns centred around the disconnect between lived experiences of sexual violence and the institutions that are created with the intention to assist those who have suffered any form of sexual violation. As mentioned in the previous section, both Vatiswa and Lira, share similar concerns over the disconnect between the institutions that are meant to provide help and the lived experiences of black women. The argument in this respect, seeks to highlight is that it is within these transparent disconnects that the intersections and multiplicity of privilege and oppression lie. May (2015) argues that the structures that provide for penalty and privilege are often are covered with routinised systems that operate through practices of assimilation in society.

Sive's statement showcases a culture of the standard Orientation 'pep talks' that are given to women when entering the university space. When asked about conversations relating to consent, Sive responded as follows:

That was not my experience in first year [...] I think it was because of the awareness created by activists [...] It was the people who were saying why? Let's change the fact that we're always warning females, um to do this, that or to avoid this and that in order to avoid being raped, and then they were like why don't we teach men not to rape? And then it's like, I think it's still the fact that men rape women, it's not, it can't happen with any sex but that wasn't the chat then. (Sive)

In this instance, we see the negligence of not addressing sexual harassment from both a male and female perspective. The socio-political paradigm remains in the realm of identity politics, as they predominantly concern women and women's bodies as objects in a totalising masculinist narrative.

Verloo (2006) explains that anti-discrimination policies in society can often carry traces or patterns of regurgitation of oppressive systems. She further explains the struggle of social categories such as gender that are socially constructed thus carrying norms, symbols, behaviours and institutions. South Africa being an environment with a very violent history with social norms and behaviours around gendered social identities, an appreciation of this history nuances the complexity that makes up the intersectional forms of inequality under analysis here in this study.

Gqola (2015), a prominent scholar on rape culture in South Africa, explains the complex relationship of social norms that are intertwined with gender as a social identity – in her analysis of the Zuma rape case. In November 2005 Former President Jacob Zuma was accused of rape by a young lesbian HIV activist ‘Khwezi’¹⁴. What transpired was a series of events between the court system, the judgment and the media response to the rape trial. There are several points that are worth noting about the rape case. Firstly, although the law clearly states that the identities of women during a rape trial should be kept private Khwezi’s identity was made public by the media (Gqola, 2015). As such a number of attacks were directed toward Khwezi. She was ostracized by public critics, harassed outside the court hearing and on several occasions was physically threatened by the public (ibid).

Gqola (2015) documents the defence plea of Former President Jacob that integrated the constitutional law, Zulu—customary—law, which was derived from status as a Zulu man. Here, it might be useful to focus on the social norms and behaviours of gendered identities that were attached to Khwezi’s case. Gqola (2015) explains that the attire that Khwezi was wearing during the alleged rape transcended two spheres, i.e. the constitutional law of the, to the domain of customary law. As a female body that was wearing a traditional skirt when former President Zuma appeared in her bedroom the performance of the sexual act was supposedly predicated on cultural cues (ibid). During the rape trial, Khwezi was also subjected to questions with respect to her previous sex life. She was portrayed as a loose woman who had had multiple partners in the past. The media, in this context, played a crucial role in this court case by way of styling Khwezi’s

¹⁴ The choice to write the name in this way, recognizes that the name Khwezi was given to the Activist as a way of protecting her identity and her person from victimization. This is to say that we recognize that ‘Khwezi’ is a pseudonym.

image to the public. While this rape case happened outside the context of the higher education system. Vatiswa explains that

And I always felt like, well the University cannot implement a law that the rest of South Africa cannot implement. If a normal South African, let's say I wasn't a Rhodes student then I go to the police station and report a case, if I have 90 % chance of failure there is no way that a university is going to convict a rapist, even if evidence exist in the form of word of mouth, or camera footage. Our law is always the way it works. So, I've never blamed them for that. I never thought that they host rapists (Vatiswa)

Identity politics play a huge role in understanding inequality in South Africa. From the Khwezi case, one can identify how the law, and the public at large, treated this case in accordance with her gendered identity. From the cross examination about her sexual history to the type of attire she was wearing prior to the sexual act, these components all reveal implicit biases that discriminated against her, on the basis of her gendered identity. Such a reality inspires a reconsideration of Lira's testimony vis-à-vis her own sexual harassment case. The therapy session was supposed to provide a safe space in which she could express herself as a victim, however, the line of questioning placed her in an uncomfortable space wherein she was questioned about the role that she played in her assault. Bereswill and Nueber (2011) pose a question as to whether or not gender is a central pillar in the structuration of social inequality. Bereswell and Nueber (2011) also extend this question in relation to women and gender research, and demonstrate how it addresses itself—this question—or the challenge of the universalisation of gender.

Gendering as a Structural Category, Marked or Unmarked?

The literature that speaks about gender as a performance, which is socially constructed (Butler, 1988; Perry and Joyce, 2001; Francis, 2008), has expanded to contexts of alternative spaces where gender is not a social construction (Oyěwùmí, 2002; Amaidume, 1987). The studies conducted by scholars such as Ifi Amadime and Oyěwùmí on African cultures and their social and cultural habits not operating under the traditional European social construction of gender, created a space of alternative thinking outside the colonial framework. This scholarship also reaffirmed Butlers (1988) argument of gender as a performance inscribed with and in social norms and habits. In answering Bereswell and Nueber's (2011) question, using the literature produced in the past

decade, one can argue that women's studies have taken that transcendental leap. However, it is the structural power ingrained in gender identity, which is sustained by colonialism and repetition that seems stagnant. The key component, however, in this present context is the relationship of privilege and oppression working simultaneously to create structural, political and cultural aspects that are transparent on some aspects and dominant in others. From Sive's account, we see a clearly defined pattern of the culture that women live and act in, in the university spaces; modes of living and acting that are predicated on caution. This is not to say that the argument being advanced here is against the idea of women being made aware of rape culture at Rhodes University. It is the manner in which this awareness raising takes place that we take issue with. If women are constantly told what to do in order to avoid being sexually assaulted, it is our view that this contributes to the culture of women falling prey to violent masculinities and masculinity's hierarchy. It is troubling that it was only through aggressive activism and protest, which were later banned at Rhodes University, that men can subsequently be taught about rape culture and consent.

Collins (2017) explains this phenomenon as the structural domain of power, wherein social institutions and policies maintain hierarchies and oppression of a specific social group. From this context, the reader is privy to the fact that gender plays the role of structural power, the maintenance of this power also lies in the hidden intersections and gaps in the literature. For instance, in the Jacob Zuma rape trial, Gqola (2015) questions how Zuma's statement of playing a father figure to Khwezi was not scrutinised or why questions regarding his sexual past were not called into evidence. Similarly, in the case of Lira and the type of questions she was subjected to in the therapy session, this reality makes one question the motive behind said questions and the double standards that they create.

In all these instances masculinity is not called into question, it remains hidden. In the instances where it is called into question, those who call it into question are often silenced by the institutions that ought to be serving the function of protecting women. Bucholtz and Hall (2004:372) argue that the power in structural categories lies in their "supralocal ideologies" that gain special default status that is then covered by multiple levels of inscribed social norms and standards, making them appear less apparent or invisible as appose to other social categories.

The Hidden Interstices within “The Disconnect”

According to Bereswell and Nueber (2011) understanding where structural power lies does not necessarily denote social justice. While structures are considered background social categories that influence socio-cultural behaviours, they exist within the context of power, thus fluid and ever changing depending on one’s relation to that structural power.

As stated in the previous section, unravelling the opacities within hidden structural domains often proves difficult when analysing from the perspective of identity politics. Collins (2017) believes that by analysing these unmarked categories in a multitudinal way, one can uncover the intersections and disconnects that exist in any given system. She describes four modes of analysis that identify the complexity of power that operates in spaces of privilege and disadvantage (ibid). She (Collins, 2017: 26) explains these domains as follows

The heuristic has four main elements. Public policies that organise and regulate the social institutions constitute *the structural domain of power*. Social hierarchy takes forms within social institutions such as banks, insurance companies [... and] government agencies. When people use the rules and regulations of everyday life and public policy to uphold social hierarchy or challenge it, their agency and actions shape the *disciplinary domain of power*. Increasingly dependent on tactics of surveillance, people watch one another and also self-censor by incorporating disciplinary practices into their own behaviour. *The cultural domain of power* refers to social institutions and practices that produce hegemonic ideas criticize unjust social relations. Through traditional social media, journalism and school curriculums, the cultural domain constructs representation, ideas and ideologies about social inequality. The *interpersonal domain of power* encompasses the myriad experiences that individuals have within intersecting oppressions

Although intersectionality warns us about the use of an arithmetic formula that places social categories in a position to add or stir other social categories against each other, these four constructs when combined provide a heuristic framework of understanding intersections that operate within the matrix structure that operates in multiple and shifting forms. Bereswell and Nueber (2011) understand social inequality to be operating both within the macro and micro sphere, however, they also understand the uncertainties that lie between these two spaces. These

uncertainties relate to the silences that exist between the two spheres that go unquestioned. The operations of choice and one's individual experiences creates several tiers that work in-between the macro and micro structures. According to Dölling and Volker (2008) as quoted in Bereswell and Nueber (2011) the uncertainty lies within the gendered habitus and the changing everyday dynamics that contribute to the varied intersections. Dhamoon (2011) explains that one should not view identities in the stagnant social groups in which they function within identity politics but rather as categories of differences. Put simply, race, class or gender are the differences that separate and not the political spaces that categorise us as the same. He (Dhamoon, 2011) further adds that the processes that get us into a space of differentiation are the action of racialisation and gender that are then influenced by the background systems of domination, which include racism, colonialism, and sexism. Collins (2017) and Dhamoon (2011) substantiate each other's argument in how they conceptualise the constellation of the different intersections that operate on different levels. I believe this plays an important factor when considering social categories that intersect with one another, from different disciplines.

I carry a Taser on me because, I live in new street. I come to the library at night. Like a lot of things can happen to me as much as like you know the patriarchy thing. And I'm like oh no you mustn't be afraid of things because the patriarchy told you so. The thing is that the reality is I am more likely, its far more likely for something to happen to me then it is to happen to another group in this university or in this institution or in this country for that matter.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

I dunno. It's racialised and gender specific violence (Langa)

In the context above, Langa tries to conceptualise the structural power at play when considering herself as a student who could fall prey to the culture of sexual assault and gender-based violence, in the context of Makhanda (Grahamstown). She firstly locates herself as a black woman within the structure of patriarchy. In her rationalisation she understands that her fear is forced upon her by the role that masculinity has played in her life. In this instance we see her connecting both with the cultural and structural domain of power. However, as a black female she further places herself within the statistics of people who are prone to violence and sexual assault in South Africa, thus

rationalisation encounters the intersection of her identity, in this case her categories of difference. While she has never had an experience of sexual assault, her environment forces her to be alert and oftentimes fearful of the possibilities of violence.

What brings out the complexity in the matrix structure is not the identities that differentiate us but rather how we conceptualise these different intersections from different disciplinary domains. It is thus important to understand social inequality as a derivative of both in and outside identity.

Hidden Oppression Outside the Structural Domain of Power

Personally, I don't know whether I failed and became depressed or I was depressed and then I failed but like I did not experience Rhodes the way I experienced it in my first year. Like even now I feel like in my first year I was very focused on my academics that I was planning all these things. I'm going to be active. I'm going to play sports, I'm going to join this society or whatever. But, um I did that, but I don't know, I think I overburdened myself with all these commitments (Sive)

I feel like this university is very non-conductive to people having like proper mental health. Like I think I spoke to someone today who was like dude I've had a breakdown twice in the last three days [...] Like it's kind of like you lose your mind and like I think it's just a matter of how academia is [...] but like I also saw someone crying in the library like two days ago. Like he was sitting there at his work and then he cried and then you have to get up and leave and then he came back in like half an hour. Like it's so bad that the thing that it's now normalized. (Langa)

According to May (2015) intersectionality is unique in that it offers individuals the opportunity to operate from multiple standpoints. In the section above, the analysis focused on the hidden power within unmarked structural social categories and its influence on shaping social cultural habits. While this detailed an important part of how structural domains remain powerful and highly influential, it raised the question of other forms of oppression that remain hidden within the background yet continue to influence our daily experiences and how we understand and relate to the world. In the previous section above, Lira pointed out that her sexual experience is intermeshed with her mental health and she cannot separate one experience from the other. Her experience of sexual assault became irreducible and co-dependent with her mental health experience. This

irreducible co-dependency pattern of mental health experiences intermeshing with various other socio-cultural experiences in higher education is not uncommon. Sive points out how her academic experience was in part, influenced by her mental health experience.

According to Schreiber (2018) the surge in mental health awareness in the South African higher education system only began after a rise in deaths by suicide of students. He further argues that of the multiple discourses that have emerged on mental health, the cause of mental health cannot be pinpointed to one event or social circumstance. Thus, he believes that reasoning that higher education is the cause of mental health does not correlate with the factual reality that prevails. Schreiber (2018) believes that in the youth generation of today (i.e. the Y-generation) student life is accompanied with a number of socio-cultural factors. These include but are not limited to gender-based violence, alcohol and substance abuse, social media and its influence on contributing to standards of perfection and political issues of socio-economic gaps that influence student perceptions of their lives. These sociocultural factors contribute to a number of different social behaviours and mental health problems (ibid).

Okay. I just think I should have taken a gap year. I didn't. I jumped right into it and I was exhausted. I was coming from an emotionally abusive relationship, I had problems at home and I was not coping. And at that time, it felt like I could not tell anyone. All I had to do was soldier on. So, I soldiered on. And um, so when I came into my PhD, I had problems. So I did the proposal, and to give context, there was a time now when it was just not working anymore, but I was, I kept on going and by the time I was entering into my third year, um, I suffered physical abuse, uh, you know, and, uh, A bit more of emotional, I think later on, and I think why I'm speaking about my PhD in this way is because those were some of the overarching experiences and intellectually [...] So I'm not per say describing my personal experiences but I'm describing things that were my shadow beast in my PhD experience. The things that shadowed my PhD experience I went into it wrongly and then I went through the experience going through all these other things you know. So, at some point I should have pulled the plug, but then I'm a black child and I was getting funding. So firstly, you can't go to your parents and say, Oh my goodness, I'm so depressed. No. And chances are my supervisor would have paused it and allowed me to continue. But I never thought to do that because I didn't know I was unwell anyways. I would feel things

happening, but I didn't know. And well, so yes, anyway, fast forward so I then quit my PhD. I think that's the best thing I ever did because if I hadn't, it would have been my masters, just doing it to complete. So I, uh, fast forward I did my PhD (Donolo)

In the paragraph above Donolo tries to explain her PhD experience and issues that overshadowed her academic experience. Her first point of reference is contextualising her depression as a form of shadow that does not necessarily account for her personal experience. Although she describes her depression as lurking in the background, she acknowledges its overarching effect on her academic experience and personal life. From the text above we can detect multiple forms of intersections interplaying with one another. However, Larue (1970) poses a question about the possibility of a black woman separating her femaleness from her race. This question takes us back to the long intersectionality debate of irreducible social categories. From this chapter, participants have engaged their lived experience in an interconnected way. Where one social experience is intricately connected to the other. However, from the texts, we have also come to acknowledge multiple experiences – all of which engage with structural and cultural domains of power in different ways. This resurfaces the idea of subjectivity in relation to one's interpersonal experience. Although Lira provides us with an example of how intermeshed her lived experiences of mental health and sexual harassment are, such an account also takes us to the narrative of intersectionality's understanding of ontological plurality. If power engages with individuals in multitudinal ways, how can one express her social experience in a unitary or singular format? Larue's (1970) question of femaleness and race interrogates questions relating to intersectionality. If we are to understand ourselves as living within the matrix structure does our conceptualisation of intersectional social categories living both within the confines of penalty and privilege operate as a singular depiction of our social standing?

May's (2015) research on feminist work and the concept on universalisation, argued that even though white women from middle class backgrounds operated under the universal concept of everyone having the same struggle, they too analysed their struggle in terms of multiplicity, whether they understood that or not. Fighting against patriarchy, sexism and heteronormativity was an activist struggle that was intersectional in nature. The different system of domination that they tackled was based on power and oppression in its fluidity flowing from multiple disciplinary platforms. How we can we then turn around and assume that one can operate, with respect to

defining themselves, under one social standing. Donolo speaks of this complexity in the text above. In terms of her PhD experience, she talks about her battle with abuse, depression, as well her home and familial. She then places her category of difference (race) as her precursor when dealing with her depression and academics.

According to Alcoff (2001), when intersectionality views identities as interpretive acts that are subjective to various macro and socio structures this opens a space for multiple conceptualisations of reality, which are constantly heterogeneous in nature and subsequently providing complex intersections. Hence, Donolo explains her predicament during her PhD in a connected way with each component contributing to different parts of her life. It is within this type of compounded logic that Schreiber (2018) believes that we can combat mental health. According to Schreiber (2018) the different variations of the causes behind depression and anxiety only prove the argument presented by Martín-Baró (1989) who maintains that students should be the active agents of their own mental health. Due to the shifting nature of identities and social circumstances, it is up to the students themselves, who understand their own social positions as varied, to make changes that ensure their mental health. May (2016:43) quotes Audre Lorde's (1994) work on the journey of the self, where she explains the dilemma that she constantly finds herself confronted with when trying to understand herself through traditional theoretical constructs such as feminism, which require her to pluck herself out of some aspects of herself while presenting other aspects all in an effort to present a universal version of herself that is deemed worthy for the world. Audre Lorde (1994) further probes the question of why black women are often subjected to presenting one version of themselves. Donolo cannot describe her PhD experience without engaging with mental health problems, her emotional and physical abuse and her social circumstances, all of which play out in relation to her identity as it relates to her family. Similarly, Lira, cannot express her experience of sexual assault without talking about her issues with mental health. All these social circumstances are interconnected in ones lived experience. However, one is often placed in a position that requires that one pick and choose which element or struggle is deemed more worthy than the other, thus the small opacities and hidden forms of oppression occur. Schreiber (2018) explains that it is only when the bad stigma behind mental health is removed that we can move forward.

The Self versus the World

In the previous section we see the intersecting relationship between structural domains of power and the subjective social categories. This aspect draws from an understanding that knowledge and subjectivity are intrinsically intertwined. If we understand ourselves as individuals living within the constructs of privilege and oppression simultaneously, we are then obliged to think of ourselves in a divergent way. The gaps and opacities within the literature and social structures remind us that we are constantly under a world view, always in conflict between spaces of resistance and spaces of complacency. Kumalo and Praeg (2019) touch on this issue in their work on decolonisation. By questioning the goal behind decolonisation in terms of how this conceptual tool aims at the attainment of justice, they highlight the difficulty of finding a balance between spaces of resistance and cultured narratives of dominant logic. Similarly, Lugonez (2010) speaks of the complexity in this relationship between the spaces of then, now and the future. In her work on decolonising feminism, she understands that although gender is a colonial term that was enforced on the slave, the spaces that we are now in have already conformed to this type of narrative. So how we view the future cannot be the total obliteration of what we have now, but a journey of constantly critiquing spaces as a way of attempting to find a middle ground.

In the section above we see the example of how gender as structural category has the ability to shift certain subjectivities into spaces of advantage and disadvantage. Gouws (2017) inquires about intersectionality's ability to explain spaces of agency that revolve between resistance and conformity. May (2015) believes that the answer lies with the elimination of dominant knowledge patterns that insist on finding resolution between differences. She asserts that disjuncture and conflict are important when building critical theory. If one believes that gender is useful in addressing structural patterns of patriarchy and sexism but equally identifies themselves as cisgender, does that cancel the assertion on gender disparities? May (2015) further probes this idea by questioning whether accepting differences means erasing conflict that works outside the system of diversity? If we understand that hidden oppression and privilege can occur both in and outside structural patterns that define our worlds, then that would require us to rethink how we conceptualise our ontologies.

I think it's about how you look at progress, I think I'm going to keep referring to race because it's all encompassing in the conversation we are having in journalism [...] it spoke

a lot to the faces of blackness and how we are all not the same type of black person [...] it kind of addresses like our cognitive dissonance [...] I think in like learning all of this, it also allows black people to reconvene and kind of call themselves out on maybe the exclusionary nature of blackness [...] I think the problem is that people don't call out things that are problematic maybe like within the institution it's very difficult [...] people subscribe to tags and labels wholeheartedly [...] it's like you can't commit your life to being the woke black girl because once you do something that counters that or contradicts that. It's kind of like you're not living up to who you're supposed to be. You know what I'm saying (Lira)

I cannot say I'm straight, but I cannot say I'm bisexual [...] but the more I get older I'm kind of like finding terms because terms for people are like mad like really important [...] I would like to refer to myself in masculine terms and whatever. I don't consider myself a woman in particular and now I don't consider myself a man either. I don't have a gendered experience, you know what I mean [...] but I do know I was assigned female at birth. I know that I mean sh*t since first year [...] even when I was applying to universities, like I was just like reading, like you know [...] but like yeah I understand I think doing things on black women is important because a lot of times they're people that get like purposefully excluded from research (Fundiswa)

In the texts above both Lira and Fundiswa explain their dilemmas with ascribing to certain labels and values. Lira speaks of the fixation of normative culture being unable to conceive of individuals outside the social constructs that they have been assigned to, she speaks of the dilemma of individuals accepting differences amongst each other yet being unable to comprehend differences that conflict with the self. According to May (2015) intersectionality understands ontology plurality of the self as a space where one can identify themselves as living in both opposition of the "self" and "selves" in terms of the world around them without having to distort or erase aspects of themselves. This then allows for a theoretical shift where we can understand ourselves as being able to inhabit more than oneself. May (2015) quotes Lugones (1987) by explaining that one "is" and "is not" at the same time. bell hooks (2014) speaks of this dilemma in her work on the conflict between black feminism and feminist theory. She explains that the ideology behind the concept of womanhood is always placed at a contradictory position. On one end is the question of the self

and one's identity, on the other is the ideology of how a woman should act and behave. Judith Butler's (1988) work on gender performativity speaks to this contradiction of social identities versus ideologised social norms. Her conceptualisation of gender as a performance speaks to the dilemma of the intertwined relationship between spaces of ideology and identity. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) speak of this conflict as well, arguing that in terms of feminist conceptualisation, only a few elite individuals can be feminists. In this modern era plurality and ambiguity are seen as a taboo. Complexity is viewed as an element that should be removed or distorted instead of embraced, with Fundiswa speaking of this alienating narrative construction in terms of her identity. She allows herself to critically engage in how she views herself in contradiction to how the world views her. What appears is a sense of discomfort where she feels the world views her in a fragmented way. Lugone (1987) as quoted in May (2015), explains that the structural system at which we adhere to most likely perceives ambiguity and ontology as fragmented in order to force us to return to atomisation and false homogeneity. This takes us back to the question of socio-political and epistemological structures. Lira and Fundiswa's concerns over the structure of social categories and their stagnant conceptualisation speaks to the larger context of structural oppression. May (2015) believes that intersectionality accounts for structural transformation in that it allows for spaces of agency to exist in between systems of oppression and spaces of resistance. She further argues that "intersectionality's focus on ontology complexity highlights how many of the problems faced by subjects who speak and think from a matrix place, and insist on justice on these terms, require collective organising and macrolevel transformation" (May, 2015: 36)

The state of persons living within the matrix structure also questions the liberal notions of agency. According to Bilge (2010) liberal notions of agency are understood as autonomous, free willed thinking agents that pick and chooses between ready-made options. This speaks to Fundiswa's concerns over the structure of a gendered self in that the current knowledge that is out there still places her in a position wherein she is required to pick sides, she is then robbed of her agency in that even when she steps outside the constructs of gender, she is given ready-made option that she is forced to choose from. May (2015) argues that in intersectional scholarship what we are given, as subjects, can be resistant while also being confined to conventional logic of resistance.

In the previous chapter, Donolo expressed similar concerns about the social construction of racial and gendered identities at Rhodes University and the difficulty that comes with the intersection between spaces of resistance and one's social background, which has conditioned one to think and view things in a certain way. In the recent years, intersectionality scholarship has probed the nature of social identities (Alcoff, 2001; Kunz, 2019; Khan, 2017). Under the concept of "womxn", intersectional scholars have sought to provide a more inclusive social category that does not conform to binary constructs of male and female while incorporating transgenders and women from third world countries (Kunz, 2019). Khan (2017) adds that wom[x]n represents a space of political work that is raw and experiential. Although the term originates from the 1970s in the era of the second wave of feminism, it was deployed with the intentionality of reclaiming the ideology power in language that encapsulates gendered experiences in an exclusionary and capitalistic form (Ashlee, Zamora and Karikari, 2017). Ashlee, Zamora and Karikari (2017) describes the gradual re-emergence of wom[x]n as a collective liberating journey of wokeness.

Political action has varied forms of advantages and disadvantages. Ashlee, Zamora and Karikari's (2017) explanation of wom[x]n speaks of the term from both a fluid and stagnant point. Fluid in the sense that it incorporates a sense of inclusivity for pupils who were previously marginalised or excluded from the traditional gender constructs of male and female, i.e, transgender students. Yet understanding wom[x]n as a state of wokeness ascribes certain roles, social patterns of thinking and various political narratives that can be very exclusionary. Cho Crenshaw and McCall (2013) suggest that one of the major problems with feminist narrative was the politicised nature of feminism that attached certain roles and norms that a lot of people felt compelled to conform to. bell hooks (2014) extraordinary work on *Ain't I a Woman* speaks to this dilemma of traditional feminist scholarship of political action that silenced certain differences that women carried in order to bring out the major narrative of coalition under universalisation.

As an experiential concept, questions of reductive readings and essentialisation are common. However, Lahmann (2020) explains that X is linguistically termed as the Unknown, usually in reference to terms that are left to one's own interpretation. While the term wom[x]n runs the risk of applying a traditional method of reducing differences into one core construct, May (2015) reminds us that a coalition model that is based on ontological plurality accepts differences, diversity and self-contradictions. It is open-ended and open to interpretation and improvement

based on one's subjective view. In the instance of Fundiswa's narrative, one can depict the dilemma of the intersection between resistance, agency and common denominator logic. Fundiswa could possibly apply the term wom[x]n as a political action against binary constructs of male and female, or to disrupt the notion that there are natural and unnatural women. Kaprinski (2020) adds that wom[x]n can also signify a statement that gender is constantly at work. The coalition politics behind wom[x]n speak to how the shared understanding of differences can form a curdled logic where students can share their experiences with people of other marginalized groups.

Conclusion

It is without question that gender as a social construct has played an immense role in shaping socio-cultural issues of black women. In this chapter we see the extent of its influence in shaping the narrative that seeks to deal with rape culture. The hidden culture behind sexism and patriarchy inevitably effects the narrative on dealing with issues of rape culture. While intersectionality opens up these small hidden intersections and allows us to question these hidden gaps between macro and micro processes, social change is still slow. Collins (2011) description of the relationship between structural, cultural and interpersonal domains of power proves that power works best to influence habits through its fluidity across different disciplines.

The nature of hidden forms of oppression also plays an important role in terms of influencing social issues such as mental health and abuse. These various narratives of different participants prove how complex intersections can be when dealing with lived experiences. Schreiber's (2018) work on mental health in South African Higher Education Institutions reminds one of the importance of engaging with students to understand their struggles in order to place individuals within the paradigm of social justice, while working towards its attainment. The connection that students have between their academic experiences and their mental health, inevitably proves that there are no hierarchies when structuring our experiences. Each one is important and interconnected to the other. With the evident intersection of power, agency and resistance at play, one can conclude that even with the formation of new terms such as wom[x]n, common denominator logic runs the risk of diluting progress. However, critically assessing reductive readings through a process of learning and unlearning liberates us from traditional pedagogies and methods.

The experiences that each individual faces in relation to their connection to structural power also alerts us to the complexity of the self. Whilst intersectionality and feminist scholarship alerted us to the different intersecting social categories, multitudinal experiences gave us a precursory glance into the participant's internal contradiction which further alienates them for the singular conceptualization of the outside world. The participants stories of connecting the then, now and the future in conjunction with the resistance the formulated around their sense of agency created a complex paradigm that sought for a contradictory self, filled with ambiguity that fought for new ground intermeshing both the resistance of now and the autonomy that the future might hold.

Chapter 7: The workings of domination within the matrix structure

Introduction

Intersectionality makes the claim that domination occurs through practices and idealised social norms that occur on a daily basis. In this chapter the participants engage with dominant systems and norms that have been accepted as part of the inherent institutional culture that defines Rhodes University. By questioning their everyday experiences, as they understand them in academia, social relationships and institutional cultures they set to unravel the workings of domination in the university. What was recurrent in their experiences is the systemic interlocking nature that is deeply embedded in the epistemological practices of Higher Education Institutions. As an academic space that engages with issues of transformation, curriculum and pedagogy, the intersection between epistemic practice and epistemology qua knowledge, the participants found themselves in a complex matrix of power, which they had to navigate continuously.

Institutional Culture as a Vehicle of Institutional Domination

Rhodes University defines institutional culture as

the general ethos and dominant value system of an institution as embedded and embodied in the structures through which institutional life is pursued such as academic departments and schools, teaching and learning systems and practices, research systems and practices administrative systems, residences, sport and cultural clubs and associations, governance structures and rules or codes of conduct (Rhodes University equity policy, 2004: 2)

Culture is seen as a system by which curriculum, pedagogy, research cultures and governing administration all fit into one social structure that operates in unison. According to Hwami (2017), the process of knowledge production, the organisational structure of research cultures and subcultures, institutional culture and research – all of these factors work as separate entities respectively. However, she (Hwami, 2017) acknowledges that the exclusionary discourses of heteronormativity, race and sex prompted by institutional culture can have an effect on research cultures as part of institutionalised norms. Rhodes University is considered a Historically White Institution, as such its history of culture and traditions dates back to the early apartheid era (Naicker, 2016). According to Naicker (2016:57) although South African Universities have

undergone a major transformation restructuring from 1994, permanent black researchers and academic staff still remain below par. She further argues that the statistics of black academics and researchers in higher education reinforce the claim that knowledge production and dissemination in South Africa mimics the old apartheid ruling system in that it remains refracted by class and gender disparities (ibid)

According to Higgins (2007: 97), as quoted in Hwami (2017), in South Africa – dominant cultures in academia are described in relation to whiteness. Simply, the ideas, cultures and mores that prevail in the sector are those that are associated with whiteness. This suggests social practices that are passed down from year to year, thus integrating into the accepted standard of what Rhodes describes as “how things are done”. Rhodes University’s definition of cultural practices as the way things are done reflects on what Naicker (2016) understand as Historically White Institutions’ complacency with silence. This short and somewhat confusing phrase that Rhodes University equity policy uses in describing the culture at Rhodes reinforces as a closed off understanding of cultural practices that perpetuate racial and gender discrimination.

According to Almeida and Kumalo (2018) the recent call for decolonisation in South African institutions meant an acknowledgement of white culture, western and European ownership of spaces of knowledge production and the erasure of indigeneity. Almeida and Kumalo (2018) argue that the recent student uprisings resisted epistemic negation and were a critique of the institution from an aspect of land, space, knowledge and identity. In this new space of resistance identity, curriculum, pedagogy and knowledge production are all viewed in unison. The students from Rhodes University understood this intersection in various ways.

Even though art may be transformed spaces such as art galleries remain exclusively white [...] it all boils down to who owns the space [...] The HoD is white, even black lecturers submit to a white Dean. (Luleka)

Another student notes that

The space is very accommodative to white people. Like in terms of people who have access to it. My friends are very loud people [...] but you see the kind of reactions you get from people when you’re in like, let’s say, the dinning hall or something and someone cracks a

joke and then like people are moving their chairs back and laughing and people are just looking at you. It's like [...] how dare you be loud in this space [...] like normally I think it's cultural differences that define the space. (Sihle)

And yet another account of the hostilities that are encountered in the space suggests that

Being a black body at Tuks was hard but I think because I went with the mentality that I'm going to be a black body at an Afrikaans institution, I was prepared. You know what I mean, but like here I was not prepared for the kind of discrimination that black bodies faced in terms of your department, with respect to things like your work. So, I really didn't expect it here because I thought it was more of a liberal university. (Sange).

According to Ndlovu (2017) these new spaces of resistance that were created by student activism facilitated modes of questioning and acknowledging the power structures at play in academia. However, there is the perception that South African Universities have always been under constant flux and contestation. Souiden (2013) explains that policies that came after 1994, that were integrated with the hopes and ambitions of the constitution and the White Paper 3 of 1997 addressed transformation, social cohesion, curriculum and diversity, which—however—continue to ebb elusive. Luleka and Sihle contextualise the university as a place that is accommodative to whiteness. Sange, contrasts the institutional space of whiteness with her identification with “blackness and black bodies”. This creates a structure of dualism that espouses the element of binary construction. This is to say that this chapter—through these narratives—traces the structural domains of power interplaying with cultural, interpersonal and disciplinary domains. Gouws (2017: 26) argues that in South African academic institutions questions of whiteness and colonial imperialism are well known factors, what remains hidden is how essentialisation of identities and the reproduction of (post)-colonial societies is a consequence of praxis. Adésínà (2005) points to the *raison d'être* of the university structure. According to Habib (2016) institutional autonomy and academic freedom, which are right enjoyed by the institutions, makes it easier to endorse ethnic and racial agendas. Mahabeer, Nzimande and Shoba (2018), agreeing with Habib (2016), suggest that the problem lies not within institutions but rather with government policies that are geared to structural changes. To elaborate, Badat (2002: 9) identifies several factors of importance in the White Paper 3, which are:

- A restructured inclusive higher education system that can compete with the global market;
- A higher education system that can contribute to addressing political democratisation and economic reconstruction;
- And redistributive social policies aimed at equity.

According to Naicker (2016) the higher education model in South Africa resembles the United States neo-liberal capitalistic model. Set on a “managerial ideology” that is based on hierarchies and an elites structures South Africa’s higher education system function on providing resources with a hidden goal of self-advancement whilst simultaneously meeting global market demands (Naicker, 2016;56). These principles are clearly directed at meeting global demands rather than restructuring the higher education to abandon apartheid structures and norms that set a precedent for education standards. Nash (2006) as quoted in Naicker (2016) explains that although South Africa has geared academic institutions towards democratisation and non-racism post apartheid, researchers are often pressured into publishing with international journals in order to compete in the global ranking system.

By centring they attention towards meeting global markets rather than meeting local demands the structural system changes to legitimisation through global markets. Booi, Vincent and Liccardo (2017) raise a similar concern on the structure of higher education systems being legitimised through global ranking systems that aim to attract investors. This schema pays little attention to improving equity and diversity, with efforts placed on increasing the quantity of black academics (Booi, Vincent and Liccardo; 2017:499). Almeida and Kumalo (2018) add that these patterns of neo liberal capitalistic systems, inaugurate epistemic negation and reinforce racial and colonial modes of being. Booi, Vincent and Liccardo (2017) add that the higher education system is structured in a way that endorses the increase of racial students as a sign of transformation, without addressing the systematic issues that may afflict the sector. Govinder (2013), as quoted in Booi, Vincent and Liccardo (2017:499), explains that while internal qualitative measures of transformation are important, the equity index serves as the ultimate indicator of transformation in institutions. With a demographic of race and gender, the equity index has been criticised of being a transformation code for race (ibid). Put simply, the racial quantity of students within academic institutions has become a standard for indicating structural changes within the institutions

regardless of whether or not racial and gender discrimination has been changed within the institutions. According to the Rhodes University equity policy its core objectives lies within addressing the social, economic and moral imperatives of bringing about equality, which in this case stands for racial equity (RU equity policy; 2003). By aligning social and economic goals, this places the Rhodes University equity policy in parlance with global trends. Gedalof (2013: 120) believes that the liberal notion of equality is premised on valuing sameness over differences. This is evident in Higher Education Institutions through the discursive practices of “excellence”, which often accommodates student from model C schools and reproduces an institutional culture that privileges whiteness (Booi, Vincent and Liccardo, 2017:499). Preference is given to black students from privileged backgrounds in order to maintain the system of “excellence”. This behaviour is also evident in the experiences of some of the participants

So, I started to realise that there's a major thing with class that affects how I'm able to participate at the university. People perceive me and when they look at me, they're like oh the way you speak English is different from other black kids, the experiences you've had in your life are different from other black kids... so there's like this whole entire thing where I'm able to have, especially in first year when I started when people in the lab would be so shy and so scared to ask tutors for help, and they came from say Mthatha or somewhere, and these others schools where they didn't have much experience in having labs, I didn't either, but it was just like the thing where the tutor could hear that maybe we'd like watched the same kind of thing. They kind of perceived me in a way that said 'okay we can afford this and that'. Like the culture here is very class based, with my ability to go to lecturers and tell them what's going on being based on the perception of my class. (Fundiswa)

The behaviours associated with the level of access in academia are interconnected with the notion of privileged students who are able to articulate themselves in a particular way. By endorsing a selected culture from privileged backgrounds and private schools, this automatically places a subculture on the type of students that are afforded certain benefits or placed and thus are able to succeed at Rhodes University. Part of the power associated with dominant discourse is the ability to establish limits on what counts as meaningful and what doesn't (May, 2015: 99). The class-based system at Rhodes University is an example of these dominant powers. By using a criterion

of privileged black students as the margin of acceptance in conjunction with the norms and practices that are permitted to exist in the institution, the system places class at the centre. This places other social categories in the background, often hidden and unrecognised. While class remains the dominant means of interaction it is often sustained and reproduced by other interconnected social categories.

The Politicised Dominance of Class in Institutional Culture

The prevailing question, however, is why class is often presented as central to Rhodes University's institutional culture? Mkhize (2005) believes the answer lies in what the Rhodes culture tries to endorse. According to Mkhize (2005), a junior lecturer (at the time) at Rhodes University from a white privilege high school, the same concept of assimilating into an Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie culture was used in her high school, existed at Rhodes University. Participants from privileged schools reaffirmed this position when they maintain that,

I've obviously struggled with issues of race right but I always felt like the social class that I come from mediates my experiences of race and racial oppression. When I came to Rhodes and I was exposed to other people's experiences, other black women other black students who didn't have the class factor to mediate, their race, that's when I got a rude awakening [...] when you don't have that cushion of class, its completely different and just hearing how other black students who are here with me while we're all supposedly equal, we all have the right to education, we are all learning in this space, but don't all have the safety net of class (Sihle)

Having come from a privileged background, Sihle believes that her class serves as a safety net when it comes to being in an environment such as Rhodes University, thus her racial and gender experiences – while they intersect – they are considerably different from other black students who do not have class privilege. From her experiences at Rhodes, she acknowledges the relative class privilege afforded to her by her position. It is this type of criteria that that creates challenges in the objective of dismantling the structure of inequality and dominant power structures. From these narratives, as shared by the participants, there is a clear intersecting link between class and academia. Sive, a student who doesn't occupy the same social position as some of the participants highlights this link.

No. When I think I can now say and identify this after having studied at Fort Hare, there's very little that gets done to help people that cannot afford, like Rhodes is a rich university. You apply knowing this and like deal with it. That's the type of mentality I feel like they have, or that's the kind of environment that is created at Rhodes because like compared to Fort Hare, the lecturers there in comparison to here know the conditions that students come from. Let's use last year's textbook. And then let's make copies of this chapter, let's ask the publisher for permission or the author for permission, to do electronic copies and use them because students can't afford, we can't afford to just change the textbook from one year to the next, because students can't afford, like at Rhodes. It's like, okay, this is accounting. This is what you need. Make a plan. (Sive)

One of the major problems with endorsing class privilege is the effects it has on the identities of black women and how they relate to their academic journey. Sihle, having been assimilated into the class privilege of Rhodes culture, also locates herself in the continuum of class privilege. The social conditions at Rhodes University allows her to distinctly see a hierarchy with respect to her social categories, which privileges a class-based analysis. While she identifies the intersecting ties of her experiences, she centres everything around her class as per the norm in the institution. This is one of the evident factors in the workings of domination. Collins (2017) explains that this forms part of the process of political intersectionality. While one can depict the power outlines using the social aspect of class, it is the politicised nature of the workings of domination where class is also used as a tool for setting the culture within an institution that raises concerns.

The Political Nature of Academia at Rhodes University

According to Morreira, Lockett, Kumalo and Ramgotra (2020:2)

“decoloniality as it applies to pedagogy and curricula as an inherently plural set of practices that aim to interrupt the dominant power/knowledge matrix in educational practices in higher education. These practices affect both what knowledge is produced via research and then selected for a curriculum (what content is taught), and the ways in which teaching, learning, and assessment occur (how curriculum knowledge is taught, including the social power relations at work in teaching and learning).”

From the previous section above, we understand that the uses of class at Rhodes University speaks to the social structure behind institutional culture, with questions of curriculum and pedagogy also playing a vital role in reinforcing colonial practices. Naicker (2016) extends this argument by indicating that the emergence of race and class privilege in Higher education institutions was amplified by the capitalistic global ranking system that had been adopted which mimicked elements of hierarchial academic elitism from the apartheid era. This alerted us to the intersectional nature of how social cultures in academic institutions are inextricably linked to knowledge production and dissemination. The grievances expressed by Luleka and Sihle in the section above also speak towards this intersectional structure of social cultures and knowledge practices. According to Morreira, Luckett, Kumalo and Ramgotra (2020) the recent call towards decolonisation in South African Universities was an act of defiance against the settler culture that has been adopted. Their definition of decoloniality speaks to the contestation of dominant discourses and practices in a plural form.

According to Holloway (2011) as quoted in May (2016:43) critical knowledge practices easily become functions of social pedagogy and institutionalised practices. She further adds that the ways in which information is adopted and interpreted inevitably effects the politics of knowledge production. Adésinà (2005:31) agreeing with this statement adds that as a University located at the centre of the Eastern Cape, very little is known about Xhosa ontology, in terms of the research as well as the sanctioned ways of being in the institution. The debates on curriculum and pedagogy at Rhodes University are very contentious.

I think undergraduate was still a little prescriptive because I remember a course on Ubuntu, I answered it completely differently. And he, to be honest, I think he under marked me. And then I asked why I'd been under marked and he said that you were not. The person who then responded to me, which was not Phillip said that, um, you did not regurgitate what we had been taught. People that got 90s are people who regurgitated his book when I would do fancy things, doing this, doing that. He doesn't like that [...] Ubuntu was a very philosophical course, like, um, and I think, I didn't know it back then, but I think, I'm in love now with political philosophy. So, um, that's why I, I loved it, but I think that people were problematising it, although I didn't see it back then but problematising it later on because he used African philosophy to put African philosophy in conversation with Hegel

and these people and those people. And to be honest, I don't know what people were complaining about because that's how theories grow by being in conversation with other people. (Donolo)

From one perspective, curriculum and pedagogy are seen as two aspects that contrast each other. In Donolo's instance, she uses the example of her undergraduate course on Ubuntu, which allows her to explain the predicament of the pedagogy of the course as constrictive, which inevitably hinders progress. On the other hand, she praises the curriculum in terms of building theory that is rooted in African knowledge. For Almeida and Kumalo (2018), the core issue lies with indigeneity. Whether the conversation is derived from the angle of curriculum or pedagogy, the principles of academia are rooted in what is coined a "psychosomatic desire" of whiteness to control indigeneity, thus academic practices are aimed at placing fragments of the indigenous world within the power constructs of whiteness. Almeida and Kumalo base their argument on the notion of epistemic erasure, they argue that by assimilating everything under the constructs of whiteness, indigeneity loses its value and becomes a concept of whiteness. The example that Donolo describes of the Ubuntu course could be an interplay between an oppressive system that seeks assimilation or a constructive theoretical philosophy that seeks to build African philosophy. May (2015) believes that the task of undoing or working against epistemic negation is complex in that factors such as methods of observation, dissemination and interpretation of knowledge all play an important factor in undertaking such a process. For other scholars such Collins (1995) the question lies in the politicisation of knowledge, because we have adopted the understanding that what is written is factual. Epistemology has always been a contested space.

Heleta (2018) expands on this idea of contested epistemologies in South Africa through his historical research on colonial domination. He argues that South African universities were seen as symbols and disseminators of European civilisation (Heleta, 2018: 51). This speaks to the intersection of identity and epistemology.

It's like having a certain level of power, it's fine, you can do that, but the fact remains where are you and who is in charge [...] so it's two different environments from the practical side and the theoretical component. The practical side has been a challenge [...] so communicating your ideas as a black person is quite difficult because of the things that

you want to talk about. It's like no you don't have to be that deep. Why don't you make it lighter or maybe, why don't you, [...] there was one lecturer who liked doing that to me, but I'm talking about my experience and what's this about. And then this year you find that they are more toned down. The relationship between lecturers and students has changed. They aren't really talking to us; they are more talking at us. So, it's like you have this idea, but can't quite express it. They didn't understand what a person like Luleka is talking about from a Xhosa perspective. (Luleka)

As an art student, who expresses her lived experiences through her artwork, Luleka conveys her concerns about the structure of academia and how it tends to stifle her ideas. She indicates the intricate detail of her artwork being in unison with her identity as a black woman. She places herself at the centre of the curriculum and pedagogy while simultaneously speaking about her experience, thus shifting the relationship of the knower and knowledge. Bilge (2013) as quoted in May (2015) speaks of a constant struggle that black women often face when having to deal with “epistemological policing”, where individuals who carry the key to knowledge often try to minimise or reduce black women's work, voices and experiences. May (2016) further adds that this concept interplays with the whitening patterns of academic work that always are incorporated as a tactic of philosophical border patrol. Grace Idahosa's (2019) paper on decoloniality and African women, discusses the issue of knowledge production and the role that identity plays. In an effort to conceptualise the shift towards an African based knowledge system, she identifies the role of students and academics. She asserts that although the ideal situation would be to get rid of Eurocentric ideals, much of the knowledge produced in today's African society is influenced by Eurocentrism (2019: 7). Thus, she asserts that (2019: 7)

A way out of this would be to acknowledge the role played by identity and context in the production of knowledge. In this view, implied in a decolonized curriculum is a commitment to questioning and considering the role of an individual's position and values in the production of knowledge, as well as a recognition of marginalized voices.

In essence Idahosa's (2019) contextualisation of a way forward requires both acknowledgement of the past and its influence and looking to the future with a diverse spectrum of what it means to speak from the margins. Luleka's conception of her cultural identity as constitutive of her

academic identity alludes to her lived experience being philosophically relevant to the knowledge making process. In cases similar to that of Luleka's experience, many scholars have expressed concern over the epistemic structure of knowledge production. Placing your experiences at the centre of academic research shifts the dynamic of social science research. According to Mabokela (2019), using the lived experiences of black women to centre processes of knowledge production devalues traditional social science research, which would prefer that black women objectify themselves by placing themselves by disavowing their lived experiences.

Collins (1995) believes that one of the biggest problems with black women being agents of knowledge is the constant adherence to Eurocentric masculinist epistemologies. While they can be agents of change, disseminating knowledge and bringing about new forms of thinking through their lived experiences, they rely on traditional academic credentials to prove their worth in the academe. Collins (1995) uses Zora Neale Hurston as an example, a famous African American writer in the 1950's whose work on black women's standpoint expanded the thinking of the lived experiences of black women living in the United States in the 1950's. However, in order for her work to be recognised she had to infiltrate the scholarly market which meant adhering to the structure of the social sciences that opted for reasoning versus emotions and mind versus body divides. This brings us to the question of deriving change from a curriculum. What is important in changing curriculum to become more inclusive? Such a change would facilitate a shifting of the methodological and epistemological content in literature.

Curriculum Transformation Equals Epistemic Justice?

According to Adésinà (2005: 29), "the implications of an educational system that damages the inner self of students may not produce body counts but are fundamentally damaging nonetheless".

According to Collins (1995) in order to tackle the issue of transformation and inclusion in academia, one needs to depict where the systems of interlocking oppression lie. Heila Lotz-Sisitka (2009), a prominent educational transformation and epistemology scholar at Rhodes, probes the idea of how teacher education (read, teacher training) sets out to make space for epistemological access. This question inquires deeper into the context of pedagogy but most importantly it cautiously asks whether the curriculum that is currently taught has the capacity to create curriculum access. The participants answered this question, varyingly.

Personally, I could call the head of botany now, like it's really accessible [...] but it is incredible white at the same time, so you have to have certain backgrounds or be set in a certain way as a person who doesn't pay attention to those type of things to be able to take full advantage of it right [...] it's pretty accessible in terms of learning, it's got one of the most transformed African focused curricula that there has been in the country it feels like everything we do is about Africa. We don't learn things about the west. It's like our literature is very much shaped literally by the political context in which we exist. In terms of access to academic content [...] this is also really accessible [...] (Fundiswa)

There are things that we study in theory mostly, it's like art history but it's not really art history where we learn about the renaissance. Basically, we apply ourselves to South African art, and consider it against the backdrop of social issues [...] talking about social justice and the likes. (Luleka)

I don't remember the course that well, because there was a lot of big words and jargon, and so to study his course you needed a dictionary. So I am of the view that it needed to be taken up to Honours level. That I agreed with, yeah. I don't like that. They removed it as a course. I mean, you want something challenging. You want something that will even make you angry because he wasn't downplaying Ubuntu per se. He was possibly misinterpreting it through a western lens, but he wasn't downplaying it at all. So, you want that in the curriculum. that's how Rhodents are curated, that's how Rhodents are made. (Donolo)

All three participants speak of how they experienced the courses at Rhodes University, both from the perspective of curriculum content and creating spaces for critical thinking. Fundiswa and Luleka's examples, of their curriculum experience, indicates the level of complexity that comes with curriculum revisions. Although Fundiswa praises the Botany Department for being African centred, Luleka believes that the focus on South African doesn't give her the full depiction of art history. The lack of information on the renaissance is seen as a hindrance to a broader understanding of the world of art and art history as a discipline. Donolo takes a different turn by shedding light on the role of academia facilitating the inculcation of critical thinking skills. She

speaks of removal of Ubuntu from the Politics Department as problematic, in that it taught students how to think critically.

According to Adésinà (2005), Rhodes University has had a long engagement with curriculum and African identity. He asserts that Africanity rose as a discourse of historically determined rebellion against the dominant other (2005: 25). It refers to both being self referentially African and a commitment to redressing a racist colonial history through alternative sources. Using the example of Ibadan University, Adésinà (2005) considers the question of the challenges in African historiography when using oral sources and stories to validate knowledge. This clearly demonstrates the methodological and epistemological challenge that bedevil curriculum changes.

Kumalo and Praeg (2019: 2), going further on the issue of curriculum revisions maintain that it should not be merely about disseminating African knowledge but rather a form of epistemic justice. Abrahams (2005), agreeing with Kumalo and Praeg (2019), reflects on her teachings at the University of Cape Town on Sarah Baartman. While her initial aim was to shed light on the violent history to which black women in Africa have been subjected, and the conflation between the categories of livestock and human beings during slave trade, she realised the ambiguity in her study of Sarah Baartman. The manner in which she was represented supported racists and sexist assumptions about black women. Her nakedness also contributed to the degrading and oversexualisation of black women.

Abraham's (2005) concern with local histories forces one to engage with the idea of epistemic justice in more systematic fashion. According to Grzanka (2016) epistemology is simply a way of knowing and by recognising multiple epistemologies across time and space and various cultures, such a move in recognition facilitates epistemic justice. Yet for other scholars, epistemology has to do with finding a shared ethical intuition. For instance, Kumalo and Praeg (2019) interrogate the question of who's conception of justice we are using when developing the notion of epistemic justice. In pursuing epistemic justice, Kumalo and Praeg (2019) believe that there should be consensus on a shared ethical intuition. Epistemology hangs on the balance of who is knowledgeable and is considered a valid knower, thus rationality serves as a premise for epistemological progress (ibid). In South Africa, Kumalo and Praeg (2019) argue that we have different traditions, all of which can be understood as having their own rationality and it is at this

point of difference that the notion epistemic progress is abrogated. In this instance I argue from a point of intersectionality, which aims to bring about differences as a level of progress rather than a mechanism that stifles progress. As individuals, we all have different lived experiences that intersect in multiple dynamic ways. As Kumalo and Praeg (2019) point out, the different colonial systems had varying impacts on people, in line with where said coloniality played itself out, and thus we all aligned differently within the axis of power. Placing a need on a dominant force of rationality compels us to have a backwards orientation, as this approach seeks to align a hierarchal system on intellectualism and rationality, which is very similar to the system we have today. The challenge of epistemic justice should not be about who's rationality should be superior but rather be considered as an opening of space for multiple rationalities to co-exist. As Lugone (2008) argues, one must recognise change as a form of multiplicity. However, in South Africa the conversation around epistemic justice has also considered language.

Curriculum vs Language

I could see myself become white as I became more aligned to the Rhodes culture [...] something that I know that if I didn't come to Rhodes I wouldn't have been as interested in, i.e. speaking English all day [...] here at Rhodes, it's like that to the extent that even some people at will be like they didn't know that I was a south African and you just like it's the culture here. She wouldn't know that I was African because we never get the opportunity to speak I our own languages. (Vatiswa)

It's my second year at Rhodes, yeah, on journalism. We're really tackling a lot of questions around representation. Just in the courses I've done, that is representation sign, symbols and how the (post)-apartheid impacted representation and how its shifted, especially when pertaining to black bodies. I feel like that's just on the surface, like a crash course overview, is how I can word it to you. So, we've been doing a lot language wise, I also do isiXhosa for Journalism, so I've been learning a lot on that front and just like culturally like how black people or African cultures distinguish ideas of home and a house and in terms of social linguistics. (Lira)

The way that I speak as well, my accent and the way that I articulated myself [...] the way I enunciate my words best fits into what white people would want for black people to be

like, or what resembles whiteness the most. And I think that is what has sort of carried me through and sort of shielded me from certain experiences that my peers who don't carry the same privilege as I do would have experienced. (Sihle)

According to Alexander (2005: 2) language policies are deliberate strategies designed to promote the interests of specific classes and social groups. In his paper on language in (post)-apartheid South Africa he discusses the intersection between language, power and the social identity of class. The domination of language in a specific state is intrinsically linked with the economic, social and political structure that prevails in that state. Using Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, Alexander (2005) explains that placing English as the hegemonic language of discourse, dictates the image of intellectualism. By speaking the language that dominates knowledge-based systems, this places an individual amongst the elite. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) disagreeing with Alexander explain that the interconnectedness of language and identity is very complex and stretches across multiple and dynamic systems. For instance, Sihle explains her predicament with having been from a Model C school that automatically places her in a position that is favourable, her English accent and enunciation gives her leverage as this closely resembles whiteness. However, while the privilege extends outside her peers who aren't from a Model C school, her social position also places her to a point of disadvantage. As black a Xhosa woman in a Historically White Institution, her resemblance to whiteness places her in a better social standing to an extent. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) explain that within the matrix structure, everyone lives within the confines of privilege and oppression. By linking the structural to the experiential, both systems of power and privilege intersect with one another simultaneously. Thus, it is possible for Sihle to identify herself as existing in a system with a certain level of privilege, her English accent affording her certain privileges, while simultaneously feeling trapped by the ideology of aligning herself to and with whiteness and white middle class mannerism in order to be accepted.

Similarly, from the context detailed above, curriculum and identity present themselves as structures that dictate the context of arguments relating to decolonisation and epistemic justice. Alexander's argument presents an intersectional structure that intersects with various structures in a complex yet irreducible manner. However, in the context of the, above Vatiswa and Sihle's experiences align them with whiteness.

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 370), identities are grounded on the practices of sameness and differences. Social grouping under a specific speech community is more complex. The relations of sameness often require that individuals minimise their differences in order to fit into a certain criterion of sameness. This is evident in both Sihle and Vatiswa's accounts as they explain their predicament with aligning themselves to an English accent that closely resembles whiteness. Vatiswa finds particular difficulty in being identified as a black South African. Her assimilation into English, does not eschew her alternate identities making, it's difficult for her to be seen outside of Rhodes University's institutional culture. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) explain this phenomenon as the process of essentialisation. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 374) "essentialisation is a theoretical position which maintains that those who occupy an identity category are both fundamentally similar to one another and fundamentally different to other groups"

The process of essentialisation rests on the assumption of formulating relations through sameness requires one to relinquish their differences for the purpose of sharing sameness. On a structural scale Bucholtz and Hall (2004) explain that this tends to be the alternative when creating a national identity. The Rhodes University Equity Policy clearly addresses issues of language use in academic spaces. Under the section of institutional culture, strategies, actions and processes the policy state: "promoting multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage, recognising the cultural and religious significance of various foreign languages and advancing the academic viability of three main languages of the Eastern Cape (Isixhosa, Afrikaans and English)" (2003: 10)

While the Rhodes University equity plan clearly states sensitivity towards language usage, in reality there is a clear hierarchal system in language use. For instance, Lira explains that

People who do not have the vocabulary to speak in certain spaces suffer. It always manifests as the plight of the less privileged. This turns into a form of essentialisation and the black narrative suffers.

Lira elaborates on the dilemma of having the right vocabulary in academic spaces in order to succeed. Crenshaw (1995) explains this phenomenon as the system of binarization. In most cases when there is a hierarchal system at play, two contrastive ties are created. A form of oppositional ends is created where one serves as the positive and the other, as the negative or subordinate.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) add that contrastive identities make place for social inequalities where one end serves the ends of becoming the norm through ideological constructs and the other feeds into the ideological construct as the subordinate.

Literature on language and identity suggests that the correlation between the two subjects is a result of attributes of the individual. (Appalraju and De kadt, 2002; Parmegiani, 2014; Aziakpono and Bekker, 2010; Nongogo, 2007; De klerk, 2002). For instance, Nongogo (2007) argues that students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal retain their language as a means of expressing their identity. This argument rests on the understanding of one's ethnicity being tied to the language they speak. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) believe identities correlate with social action and thus identities inform social situations. Similarly, May (2015) emphasises the importance of moving away from the philosophy of social categories being a fixed phenomenon. In intersectional scholarship, lived experiences are considered as philosophically relevant, thus it is important to consider identities as fluid and interchangeable. Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 376) explain that

Identities inhere in actions, not in people. As products of situated social action, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances. This dynamic perspective contrasts with the traditional view of identities as unitary and enduring psychological states or social categories [...] the semiotics of language concerns not only identity as a set of fixed categories but identification as an ongoing social and political process.

The process of social action is quite evident in Sihle and Vatiswa's experiences at Rhodes University. For Sihle, while her background predominantly advocated the use of English as a means of communication, she expressed the circumstances under which English served as a useful tool in certain scenarios. The environment under which institutional culture is intricately connected with English, as a predominant language, served as a circumstance where she used her accent to navigate her immediate environment. This served a process of social action and the combination of her present circumstance, whereas culturally she identified herself having coloured ethnic roots from her mother's side.

My great grandfather was a white man who was a settler just along the coast. So I come from a relatively coloured family and again, not coloured, like by my culture, it's really a racial thing because we are coloured people that speak isiXhosa [...] when I'm among

coloured people, I don't speak Afrikaans. So again, I'm an outsider because coloured people are also like you think you're better because you don't speak Afrikaans [...] better where because I'm not an Afrikaner, I'm a coloured person literally by colour, because I grew up in the rural areas. That's all and all my understanding of coloured folks on this side of the Eastern Cape here in the Ciskei right, as you cross over from the Transkei, so coloured people from these areas speak Afrikaans right. They are coloured by culture. But on my side of life, it's just because there was a white man who found a black woman and they had babies and this is the colour of my skin, but it's you can't fit in anywhere. (Sihle)

From Sihle's depiction of her family, it would be very difficult to pinpoint her cultural identity with a particular language criterion, thus Bucholtz and Hall (2004) remind us of the importance of understanding the complexity in the language and identity phenomenon. Similarly, in the case of Crenshaw's (1994) work on intersectionality, she reminds us of the complexity that black women carry in their social categories that don't always fit into neat categories. Her argument rests on the fact that black women often are set to choose between identities due to the stagnant nature of identity construction in literature. Sihle's lived experiences, demonstrate the fluidity of identity under the circumstances of social action and not stagnant social identities.

While identities being contingent on social action places emphasis on agency and power, the question remains, regarding how social action and circumstances often lead to choices being constricted under dominant languages and social categories. Mwaniki (2018) believes the answer lies in language policy. According to Mwaniki (2018), language plays a crucial role in the system of domination in the education system in South Africa, where the medium of instruction is usually English. This sets a precedent on what is considered as the normative means of learning. Agreeing with Mwaniki (2018) Dalvit, Murray and Terzoli (2009) add that the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) often dictates how one thinks. For instance, De Kadt (2005) explains that in the native languages of isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho, the majority of nouns, pronouns and verbs don't exist as they do in English. For instance, pronouns such as him or her do not exist in isiXhosa, which means that the meaning of gender and its performance in the isiXhosa language and English vocabulary are very different. However, the norm always sets the precedent of how one should think, act and behave.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) explain the interconnected and overlapping relationship of how the social actions of individuals who have the power of agency always revolve around dominant systems. In this case we explored how the English language as (Language of learning and teaching) LOLT remains as the dominant discourse and practice.

From the paragraphs above the participants engage with curriculum in the form of language practices that should be used in the curriculum. Although the literature indicates the intersection of language and identity as a tool to maintain traditional academic practices, it also alerts us to the wider context of the influence of discourse within academia. From Almeida and Kumalo's (2018:3) work on decolonisation, we are made aware of the importance of revealing the ways of existence of indigeneity in academic discourses. They further argue that indigeneity as a phrase is contested itself, thus they suggest that in order to avoid essentialisation of the phrase the best alternative would be to leave it open in order to avoid creating "pure identities". When tracing the different experiences and interpretations of language and curriculum, it seems that the underlining framework lies not with the type of language that should be used rather the discourse practices that interrupt progress towards deferential acknowledgement of indigeneity. Due to the changing and fluid nature of identities, the structural domains of power and its influence on individual, focusing on the Language of Teaching and Learning does not necessarily mean that discourse practices that have been traditionally used, will fall away. As an academic institution that places hierarchies on everything, focusing on LoLT runs the risk of pitting ethnic languages against each other. This is not to say that South African native languages should not be endorsed, but rather closer attention should be paid to academic discourses that abrogate growth.

Conclusion

The fluidity of power dictates how individuals experience various forms of domination. It seems that the variations of differences not only affects inequality but also spaces of resistance. The movement towards decolonisation opened up contrasting arguments around the ideal of progress. From the participants, one can clearly see contrasting views on what it means to be in an academic space. The arguments around curriculum and pedagogy showed the intricate intersections between epistemic justice and the praxis of epistemic defiance. Institutional culture, curriculum development, pedagogy and language and discourse practices all demonstrated the intermeshed cycle of the workings of domination, thus we come to the understanding that epistemic justice is

not singular in nature but rather multiple, with intersecting disciplines. It seems evident that epistemic justice cannot be achieved without looking at the structure of institutionalised norms. Similarly, we understand that decolonisation in academia should not be seen as an arrival point that is stagnant and concrete, but rather it should be a constant space of critique that allows for multiple standpoints. It is not about language, or curriculum or pedagogy, but rather a combination of taking the past, present and future into consideration. Thus, the separation of struggles cannot work when trying to understand what progress is, in these terms, means. It is the combination of all these three factors, grounded on the concept of ontological plurality and coalition through multiple standpoints that we can get a better understanding of intersectionality—as theoretical tool.

Chapter 8: Single Axis Thinking

Introduction

“even when we are committed to eradicating injustice, invested in social change, and seek to transform our social practices we can also pick up and wield master tools” (May, 2016: 64)

In the previous chapter the focus of analysis was the domination that constitutes spaces either as epistemically just or unjust. This is to say that through the deployment of the notion of epistemic justice, the objective lay in understanding how institutions either facilitate ways of meaning making, such that the experiences of black women are explainable even to themselves, or how said testimonies are obfuscated—by the structure—even to the person experiencing said events. This secondary component being constitutive of the epistemic injustice, in accordance with Miranda Fricker’s (2007) theory of epistemic justice. The contending question, however, revolved around the methodological practices behind these spaces of resistance. Put differently, the mechanisms that are available such that black women are able to make sense of their lived experiences. In this chapter, the focus is on the recollection of students’ lived experiences, as they played out during the period of activism at the Rhodes University. This chapter analyses how students engaged with the resistance project against the backdrop of hegemonic master narratives. Although the context in which these protests played out, was constitutive of a clearly defined need for change, binary constructs, essentialisation and singular conceptualisation sought to suppress some of the agitations of the movement.

A Singular Concrete Struggle?

According to Cini (2019) the #FeesMustFall struggle of 2015—2017 was a process of disrupting a neoliberal University culture, both theoretically and practically. While the main focus revolved around issues of fee increment, the interstices included questions around institutional culture, anti-poor policies, gender-based violence, exclusion and Eurocentric based knowledge systems. Gouws (2017) adds that the student protestors used intersectionality as a means to analyse and critically challenge scientific traditions and exclusionary practices in Historically White Universities. The protests took on both a symbolic and abstract form. The recollection of these events varied with

each participants'' social standing reaffirming the proposition that maintains that lived experiences are fundamental in locating individuals in the axes of power.

For example, during the protest I was never a student leader. I've never said to myself you know what I know what's going on, especially during #FeesMustFall because I had a very big problem with the people that were leading the movement. A lot of them came from very opulent backgrounds, black opulent backgrounds right but I've never [...] I've never been a person who existed in those spaces of political resistance in that way. I've never been at the forefront of political movements because as much as I am there to support, I was there as an individual who, to a certain extent, didn't understand that struggle and I can't pretend that I did. So, all I can do is to make myself knowledgeable about what's happening around me and again [...] put my body on the line for that particular movement but I won't pretend like it's my struggle. (Sange)

As a black female from a privileged background Sange places herself outside the struggle of the #FeesMustFall. While she acknowledges her connection to the struggle of being a black female in a predominantly white institution, she places herself outside the lived experience of financial struggle. Similarly, Sihle explains the same phenomenon.

I personally could have been like, I've got class privilege, this doesn't concern me, but it does. I think as human beings and as a person who really cares about transformation, inasmuch white people will say they do, I think the logical thing would be to try and understand the experiences of students in the struggle, right? And I think again, my experience of #FeesMustFall showed me how much of a black person I am because really, I think this one day we had a barricade up by the drama department, and I remember there were a couple of students. So, for example Lima and them at the time were in the front lines and a couple of other people that were in the Black Student Movement, and I remember the instruction being that if we're going to march, we need to march behind white students because police don't shoot white students. Imagine being the person that I am having had to make myself more acceptable to white people and then still need a white person to protect me. For me it just revealed that it doesn't matter how much class

privilege you have or how closely you resemble whiteness, you're still a nigga dawg like you still a black person definitely. (Sihle)

Initially, Sihle considered her experiences through the lens of class privilege, which operated as her safety net around the normativity of assimilating in a whitely space. However, the reality of #FeesMustFall placed her in a social context wherein her privilege intersected with her oppression. This meant she could not detach one component of her social identity from another. In the previous chapter, Sihle expressed her class privilege as a form of advantage when it comes to assimilating to the institutional culture of Rhodes University, however, the #FeesMustFall protest reminded her of the interconnected relationship of social categories and the structural and political axes of power within the matrix system. Gouws (2017: 23) reminds us of the complexity of settler colonial states that intermesh with the violent history and current political conditions that foreground one social identity over others, in order to recreate exclusion and marginalisation.

In the context of #FeesMustFall, the protests revealed the reality that the history of colonialism and its effects on individuals from different axes within the matrix is something that can still be felt to this day. Dhamoon (2015: 30) reminds us of this complexity within colonial settler states. She asserts that “historical processes that have created our contemporary moment have affected everyone at various points along their transit with and against the empire.”

Qambela (2015: 35) protest reminds us of this phenomenon. While the driving narrative during the #FeesMustFall protests was the struggle against the minimum initial payment (MIP, as it is known amongst Rhodes Students) and the #RhodesSoWhite movement, which exposed the structural inequalities and anti-poor policies at Rhodes University, some students were grappling with the growing xenophobic attacks in Grahamstown. This led to a protest march that called for the end to xenophobia and a call towards embracing differences across class, geographic location and social status (ibid). Both Qambela (2016), Sihle and Sange shared an understanding of their different struggle(s) that were different from the main narrative of #FeesMustFall. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the different concerns over who gets to be heard, what perspective gets centred and the separation of different protests, all of these factors brings us to the conclusion of the Olympics of oppression. For Qambela (2016), the concern dealt with the 500 + people who

were displaced in Grahamstown during the xenophobic attacks. However, people like Vatiswa had other concerns during the protests.

You know in the bigger scheme of things; people did get raped during the occupations. People were sexually assaulted even if it didn't end up as rape or there were situations where they didn't want to necessarily do it all the way because I remember that in December 2015, we went to a symposium in Joburg where there were students from all across Africa, from 20 of the 26 public universities; from TUKS from wherever, and they were all sharing and having these conversations, all of them, almost all of them with the exception of us at Rhodes, they had witnessed or been privy to a situation. (Vatiswa)

All of these experiences showcased an overlap of different disadvantages and oppressions depending on ones' social standing in the axes of power. For some like Vatiswa, her the overlap was that of masculinity, patriarchy, racial and gendered oppression created a point of concern with respect to her safety. In the same breath, she did not exclude herself from the overarching struggle of paying school fees, which meant dealing with the shame of not being able to afford being at Rhodes. Similarly, Qambela (2016) emphasises that one struggle was not more important than the other and that the xenophobic attacks were as important as the #RhodesSoWhite movement. These struggles were interrelated and co-constructed being equally dependant on one another. The question that arises is how then did these struggles become separated? Vatsiwa offers an explanation.

Actually, this is what the media did, separate the people in talking to the media. The media wanted to talk to activists who sound a particular way, who are able to articulate this struggle in a particular way. So, there was a rift, during #FeesMustFall, even before the rape culture protests. At UCT there was a huge rift, where a lot of people found themselves in those situations, today there would be a protest where everyone is smiling around the cameras and in the drafting of whatever, but there were cliques that were formed that stated that these types of people don't mesh with these types of people. (Vatiswa)

The articulation of the protest in media created a rift of separate struggles. The separation of students who sound a particular way shed focus on an individual rather than the collective struggle. Similarly, Qambela (2016) highlights the essentialisation that the media created by placing

emphasis on an individual. According to Qambela (2016 37), the 2015 cover of destiny magazine titled “The Year of the Student” placed, on the cover, a prominent female leader who led the march at Wits University. In the article her perspective was mainly on the need to end outsourcing of black workers in universities all across the country. While her lived experience was an important aspect of articulating the protest, the media’s focus on one point automatically silenced issues of white heteronormativity, racial, class and gender struggles. In an effort to shed light on marginalised individuals in universities, the media simultaneously excluded a large aspect of the struggle, creating a reductive notion of what the struggle was about. May (2016) explains this phenomenon as descriptive models. In an effort to shed light on marginalisation and exclusion we use the master tools that propose separation of oppression, thus creating hierarchies in oppression. This framework, she explains, is usually due to mismatches between analytical intent, interpretive methodology and organisational structures. Separation of struggles creates single axis thinking.

Placing emphasis on a singular aspect rather than multiple intermeshing and co-dependant structures creates the sense of ‘oppression Olympics’. The media’s engagement with the protests enhanced the separation of race versus gender, instead of looking to gendered racism. The protest to end rape culture, dubbed the #RURferenceList protest, which shed light on gendered violence – failed to address the complexity in gendered identities in South Africa, which exclude queer and LGBTQ groups (Matandela, 2017). In all these instances, the media placed emphasis on one social identity and the complexities inherent within it. Covering the #FeesMustFall protests highlighted the struggles of the black students, while centring their racial identity.

Mind versus Body Single Axis Framework

The connection between the protests with women’s bodies has dominated the literature. The Nude protest at Wits University and the #RURferenceList were some of the protests highlighted where women used their bodies as symbolisms against the gendered, radicalised heteropatriarchal violence that occurred in Higher Education Institutions. According to Ndlovu (2017: 69) the nude protest at Wits University was a means of calming the violence that masculine men could not end. Ndlovu (2017) argues that the violence that occurred during the protest enforced gender divisions where males became militant comrades who treated violence with violence. In an effort to calm the situation and end the violence three Wits female students exposed their bodies towards the raging protest in order to deviate the raging violence (ibid). In the media, a number of things

followed. Firstly, the black females who stripped in front of the media instantly became national news. Secondly, conversations around the stripping of their clothes turned into an issue of body shaming and discussion of beauty standards (Ndlovu, 2017: 75). Gouws (2017) adds that the naked bodies were a means to share awareness on the invisibility of the black/queer/trans bodies and the LGBTQI+ community at large.

While there were various views on the naked protest and the #RURenewal, what must be considered is the question of what importance is the articulation of the protest. On the one end was the segregation of social identities in the critique of the protest itself. In many instances the arguments were either divided into racists or sexist oppression. The racial analysis mostly pinpointing the violence and brutality against the student body, of which the majority were black, highlighted the sexist stereotypes that were reinforced about black women protesting nude. For instance, Ndlovu (2017: 9) argues

The picket line is a contested space that privileges masculinity while womxn's bodies are often objectified, erasing the hard work (visible and invisible) that is undertaken every day in building the movement. The nude protest in this context attempts to reassert the role of womxn's bodies on the picket line by calming the violence that masculine bodies could not end that day.

Ndlovu (2017) outlines the overbearing control of masculinity during the protest and the reassertion of ascribed male roles into a patriarchal system. While masculinity forms part of the system of power it does not formulate a larger framework and the workings of dominance in the strike. Issues of gender, race, culture, patriarchy and heteronormativity played a huge role in how the protest played out on 'the picket line', to borrow from Ndlovu (2017) once again. Pinpointing the issue with masculinity only outlines the sexist stereotypes that black women faced during the protest. This then forces the struggle into a single axis framework focusing on the gender primary lens, while missing other salient intersecting components that result in oppression. Similarly, in the case of #RURenewal, similar issues of single axis mindset occurred during the protest with Vatiswa understanding this phenomenon thusly,

All those women who, you know, had been side-lined in the main narrative of the previous year, they emerged because now this is their lived experience and you know I'm not saying

poor women don't get raped, but now they were able to change the conversation into their favour because it was all these men who were on the line, getting excluded for being black and poor and these institutions. Whereas now they're saying were not excluded, we still at Rhodes, but being at Rhodes or being in the institution is very difficult because I don't feel like the institution even acknowledges the fact that I've been sexually assaulted. (Vatsiwa)

In the context of bringing about inclusion to the voices that were excluded during the #FeesMustFall protest, Vatsiwa ends up separating the struggle by placing the poor black males who sacrificed themselves for the struggle on one end and the poor black female who is sexually assaulted on the other. This creates a binary system where males are placed on one end with the intersecting dynamics of race, and class and females (subjectivity) being placed on the other. Factually, rape culture and sexual assault -at Rhodes University- are intersectional. Rather than viewing and analysing these systems as separate entities, one must look deeper into the colonial history of our country to understand the overlap at play.

According to Dhamoon (2017) the process of transitioning from a single axis mindset to a multidimensional one is very difficult. In most cases one tends to align themselves with the analytical and methodological norm, which in this case entails analysing contexts in separate and binary social identities. Dhamoon (2017: 4) reminds us that in an intersectional study, one looks to the intersecting—four—domains. The first being the individual and their self-ascribed social grouping, this can be in the form of black men, women or queer or transgender identities that are assumed by the individual (Ibid). The second aspect entails incorporating the categories of differentiation, these are the social constructs that society has placed on the individual such as race, gender, class and religion. The processes and systems of differentiation entail identifying how structural domains of power play out within social differences.

In understanding these complexities of the naked protest and the #RURetentionList, Gouws (2017) believes one must look at the context with an appreciation of the settler colonial framework. Dhamoon (2015) adds that the relationship of black women in settler colonial states is a complex one in that the domination of heteropatriarchy and colonialism always places black women within the confines of otherness. As students who are considered as subordinate, we always understand ourselves in the set norms of hierarchies that places black women at lowest rung of the social order

(Ibid). This inevitably manifests as and through the constricted binary roles we place ourselves in, even as we try to break from hegemonic control.

According to May (2016) part of the problem associated with single axis thinking is the splitting of mind and body. Caputi (2010) as cited in May (2016) explains that the mind/body split separates the male as the thinker and the rational being, while the females are identified with their bodies which are subordinated to the mind. While the #RURestoreList protests, which were done in the nude, were a symbolic demonstration of the violent rape culture and hyper sexualisation against women in higher education, one cannot escape the link between the clashes during the #FeesMustFall protest and women's retaliation against violence with their bodies.

The Process of Essentialisation Through Blackness and Woke Nation

The various protests that occurred at Rhodes University set a chain of events in motion. Silences and conversations that weren't being had started emerging which inevitably changed the social dynamics of the student body at Rhodes.

#FeesMustFall was an affirmation of black people deserving to exist in a space [...] and for me, #FeesMustFall meant that I was connecting with myself as a black person because I'd always had to tone down my blackness in other spaces. Yes, I fit into the conceptions of the better black and am more tolerable to white people, but definitely you need to tone it down. It's something you need to do for yourself to yourself every single day, to be able to exist in white spaces and #FeesMustFall for me was just that, an assertion of the fact that we're black and we deserve to be here. You deserve an education. Just because I have class privilege, it doesn't make me more deserving of education. (Sihle)

The shame of being poor disappeared after #FeesMustFall, solidarity was formed in understanding Rhodes University as being an anti-poor institution. People began to speak freely about issues of finances and their struggles with them. (Vatiswa)

The student body started engaging with discourses of progress and transformation. In the midst of the protest of #RhodesSoWhite and the collective action of the black student movement engaging with anti-poor policies, resistance to violent anti-black systems and decoloniality created a space of solidarity among the students (Qambela, 2016). Gouws (2017) explains that students during the

protest, started using theoretical constructs in order to formulate solidarity and engage with inclusion. For students such as Sihle, the student protest was a means of connecting with her blackness. In her explanation of identifying with her blackness, she makes a comparison with whiteness. According to Bell (2015: 16), blackness is defined as the opposite of whiteness. She argues that what made up the call for decoloniality was the use of theoretical texts that resonated with black identity, oppression and differences. Bikoism, decoloniality and intersectionality were some of the texts used in this call for reimagining the University, as institution. This formed a coalition, amongst scholars, of sharing similar lived experiences. Vatiswa explains the sense of shame that was removed when one does not fit into the system and institutional culture at Rhodes.

As May (2015: 48) explains one doesn't have to be the same as you in order to fight alongside one another. Coalition politics rest on the understanding of students being placed in different axes of the matrix structure, all of whom share different types of privileges and oppressions simultaneously (Ibid). Endorsing angles of solidarity amongst and in the midst of inequality is a means of tackling social justice and issues of decoloniality simultaneously. May (2015) explains that historically, within social movements operating under a coalitional struggle that saw all forms of social oppressions as levelled and equally relevant, this move was considered as divisive – whereas hierarchal struggles that focused on a singular aspect were identified as unifying. While the social movement protests in higher education were split across different times and hashtags, what was of importance was the constant micro tensions of inclusion within the student body during the protests. While the main aim revolved around financial inclusion, there was a diverse group of individuals within the protest who highlighted the need for a diversified understanding of oppression and struggle. Even within the protests of anti-colonial contexts and the acceptance of intersectional forms of struggle, we see evidence of single axis thinking being used in the process of decoloniality. For instance, Lira and Sange identified the level of essentialisation amongst the student body.

How do you look at progress, because even within, I think I'm going to keep referring back to race because that really was encompassing in the conversations that we're having in journalism right now, but I think it spoke a lot to the faces of blackness and how we're not all the same kind of black person. Not every black person will watch intersections, you know what I'm saying or is of the same socio-economic standing, or has the same

advantages and privileges etc. I guess even for this tired and woke narrative, or like this very [...] typical Pan Africanist one, there was the suggestion that we should fit into this kind of mould which denotes how black you are; this is an agenda that excludes other black people. I think it told those kinds of people, the one's that didn't fit, that you don't have to be this kind of black person to be black enough. (Lira)

I do think that one thing I didn't notice though about Rhodes is that when I got here, there were a couple of academics in the politics department -black women- who embody a certain kind of black womanhood, like queen of Azania [...] and they were academics in that space now, my impression was that they felt that they were the elite few black women that could do that. My issue with that is that—in my view—they cheapened the experience of black women because why can I not be a queen of Azania, and go be a bad bitch at the club, and shake my ass? Who says I can't do that, who says I can't be smart and shake my ass in the club, who says I can't be smart, who says I can't be in a social movement and conscious about certain social things? (Sange)

According to Yuval-Davis (2006) the problem with essentialisation is the process of reduction where one social identity has to be a representation of all types of women. Lebo explains that even in the narrative of wokeness, black women are all expected to fit into a certain mould that best fits the narrative of a black woman who is decolonised. Sange expresses the same frustration with black women who accept the “Azanian” type of black women.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) explain this as the fixation of social identities and social groupings being created under sameness. This is the process of people identifying themselves through pre-existing and recognisable traits. As explained in the previous chapter, this system of sameness often leads to reduction and narrow-minded conceptions of differences amongst individuals. It also contributes to the difficulty that comes with changing heteronormativity, since it is grounded in the understanding of maintaining norms and practices that have been repeated over time to become permanent traits of society. In an effort to explain the tactics used in bringing about essentialisation of identities, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) break down reductive identity construction into three parts, adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalisation and authorisation and illegitimation.

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004) adequation is set on the pursuit of sameness. The two scholars explain that “the relation of adequation suggests that likeness is often taken to be the basis of identity and not an objective or permanent state but rather a motivated social achievement that may have temporary or long-term achievements” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004: 383)

Bucholtz and Hall (2004:383) add that adequation is often used as a substance in political alliances and coalition building. At Rhodes University black identity and the narrative of a woke black woman was used as a means to create a coalition against the enforced institutional culture of whiteness. Lira explains the predicament of being forced into the Pan Africanist mould of black woman, which amounts to a fully developed and decolonised black woman. But as Lugone (2016) explains the process of decoloniality and resistance should not be viewed as a set destination, but as an everchanging and developing process. Fixation on a destination often causes instances of reduction and patterns of adequation. One of the problems with having a stagnant understanding of an identity, is the structure of binarization that it creates. For instance, if a pan Africanist black female, who is pro Azania and anti-white supremacy, is the end goal, on the other side of the pan Africanist mould would be the white female who subscribes to the European standards of feminism. In reality these two conflicting views create a structure where one serves as the superior and the other serves as the subaltern. It is thus crucially important to accept change in multiplicity and fluidity.

Authentication and denaturalization serve as the second part, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2004), of essentialisation. This entails asserting aspects of realness in social categories. For instance, Lira explains that the woke narrative is considered as the pivotal point of black consciousness and enlightenment in the movement. An individual who is woke is socially placed at a higher level in terms of being pro black. Bell (2015) explains that being woke was a form of social consciousness that is tied up with blackness, by being woke one acknowledges the traits of colonialism in the system and in society, while supporting opinions that oppose white supremacy. Lira explains that

Even with people with the whole woke agenda, and the culture that's being pushed as of late [...] I see it even a lot on Twitter when people just do it to gain clout. I think we live in a time where people are caught up in this idea of political correctness and people are

caught up in saying everything that they are supposed to say and regurgitating the narrative [...] they are regurgitating the ethos of the woke institution, and these are all the things you're supposed to say for the woke institution. This is the ethos of the institution as opposed to really saying what's on their minds, and us collectively having a productive conversation in combating certain, problematic issues (Lira)

Part of the process of authentication is repetition. Social media was one of the biggest tools of communication for the student movements. It was used as a means to mobilise individuals while simultaneously educating them on relevant social issues. Lira explains that in most cases, Twitter was used as a tool for educating people about political correctness, in an effort to mobilise and endorse the woke nation. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) argue that in the process of authentication, language is used as a tool by speakers to endorse a nationalistic ideal that ought to be replicated. Authentication is further used as a model to enhance a singular and essentialist understanding of particular identities (2004: 386).

The last part of essentialisation is the process of authorization and illegitimation. Authorization and illegitimation places emphasis on the people with power, who have the power to legitimate images and information about social identities. Qambela (2016) uses the example of *Destiny Magazine's* issue of the year of the student, which had the leader of the Wits #FeesMustFall protest on the front cover. She was dressed in African beads and was wearing a doek with the caption #FreeEducation. Qambela (2016) problematises this issue for several reasons. Firstly, the cover conveys the movement through the eyes of an individual and not the collective coalition. Her image being on the cover sets the norm of individual hierarchal efforts instead of the student body. Secondly, the image of her wearing a doek with African beads, dictates the imagery of the woke institution, pan Africanist woman, who looks a certain way, i.e. has a certain aesthetic. It explicitly conforms and endorses homogeneity.

With the power to dictate what is regarded as legitimate or illegitimate, Crenshaw (1995) raises concerns around legitimization. Her argument is based on the extent to which dominant narrators try to evade centring black women in legal scholarship. According to Carabado and Harris (2019) in the past decade black women have always fought to become part of the dominant narrative. By bringing their experiences to the fore they have contested the logic behind subalterity both, within

research and in the broader social context. However, Carabado and Harris (2019) note that this has been met with a lot of backlash. The idea of identities being socially constructed rather than being a stagnant entity, brought up the argument of whether one should consider race as a plausible cause for social analysis. This argument was also prevalent in the #FeesMustFall protest. Gouws (2017) notes how reluctant many managers in universities became when the racial question was raised in the structuring of Higher Education Institutions. The fee increment was seen as a concrete argument while the question of socialisation, economic standing and political stance of the university as racialised, were met with a form of strategic silence (Gouws, 2017). Sihle explains this predicament by stating that it had more to do with black students fighting for a space to exist. This statement conscientizes us to the processes of racial othering that were (and continue to be) at play.

Conclusion

The statements presented by the participant's conscientize's one to the power structures that were at play during activism. Although the movement was a manifestation of active resistance, the process of resistance and the outcome we not necessarily done under methodological emancipation practices, leaving us to question black women's place in terms of social justice from a methodological standpoint. May (2017) reminds us that in most cases when engaging with liberation practices one tends to use existing practices that have already been adopted to liberate oneself. In this instance the constant re-emergence of single axis thinking, where students were placed in a position to separate their struggle or constrict it to one concrete form of oppression, re-instilled patterns of oppressive systems.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

According to Almeida and Kumalo (2018), studies on higher education in South Africa, have long debated the issues of transformation and subordination. These studies have critiqued the policies and practices of academic institutions both from a macro and micro perspective. Despite these efforts, transformation has lagged and so has social change. Almeida and Kumalo (2018) believe that this is due to epistemic negation. Grzanka (2014) argues that epistemology sheds light on dominant imaginaries, methodological norms and social practices that contribute towards perpetuating systems of oppression. My initial interest on studies relating to higher education was inspired by the #RUPreferenceList protest that took place at Rhodes University in 2017. Having had the privilege to be part of the protest and the evening engagements, I was transfixed by the stories black women were sharing amongst each other on their struggles both in relation to and outside of the protest. Following the protest, Rhodes University, had various colloquia and public dialogues – engaging with issues of rape culture, the Rhodes University name change and decolonisation, with respect to curriculum changes. What sparked my interests in all these various conversations were the grievances black women raised. Although they all had differences of opinions it was their solidarity in their differences that brought about a coalition that facilitated or less ambitiously, pushed for change.

Barbara Smith's (1980) article on racism and women's studies speaks to the tedious nature and constant backlash that she is met with when speaking on black women's oppression in feminist conferences. She argues that the problem in feminist research lies both in the absence of racial issues black women face, an absence that is derived from the excluded narratives of black women, and the ontological nature that refuses to conceptualise women's struggles as being different in nature and intersectional in that a black woman cannot separate her racial struggle from her gendered experience. May (2015) adds that Kimberle Crenshaw's work on black women's experiences broke away from the norm of separating struggles by bringing us into the system of matrix thinking which allows for multiple standpoints to be considered, when theorising the lives of black women.

The conceptualisation of individuals being in a matrix system breaks from tradition in a number of ways. Firstly, it takes seriously the concept of complex subjectivity, heterogeneity and differences

– as important aspects that must feature in theory development. Secondly, it shifts our understanding of what is deemed important and worthy of attention thus changing the dynamic of social hierarchies and the structure of power (May, 2015: 13). Thirdly, it forces one to be in a constant self-reflective state that critiques elements of subordination, sameness and identity separation. According to Collins (1995) literature on black women's experiences is often rooted in elements of subordination. The persistence of placing black women as subordinates of the dominant narrative, divides women of colour within the literature and in very real social ways. In this instance Collins argues that black women are strategically placed as validation seekers, seeking said validation from the key holders of traditional scholarship. In this study the focus on black women experiences, in a Historically White Institution, reconceptualised the dominant and subordinate narrative. By placing the participants lived experiences at the centre of my research, I set out to use their experiences as philosophical evidence in the task of reconceptualising the relationship between inequality and social justice.

Engaging with the experiences of these black women bought us to a somewhat nuanced direction of intersectional thinking. Whilst we sought for the spaces of multiplicity within social and intellectual spaces the collision of these two aspect – social multiplicity of categories of differentiation and social justice through multifaceted epistemological standpoints, the journey between the self vs the world became a somewhat complex one. As intersectionality prepared us into entering spaces of discomfort through breaking the norm of singularity, the questions of the then, now and the future amongst the participants ventured into a somewhat uncharted territories. During the data collection process, the University was undergoing a transition of decolonization both within the curriculum and social spheres. This new space foreground different forms of displacements both within social categories and social experiences. From the participants experiences the study found places of discomfort in these new spaces of post-resistance which incorporate a decolonial framework. Participants such as Luleka felt unfulfilled in redirecting knowledge into South African centred intellect yet Fundiswa found a form of liberation being in a space that embraces African curricula. Donolo however spoke of the controversies attached with the combination of African literature with western knowledge¹⁵.

¹⁵ Donolo's critique of the Ubuntu course that was taught in her undergraduate year speaks to the trouble of different viewpoints connecting with intermeshing western knowledge with African epistemologies and theories.

These different viewpoints gave us a precursory glance at the difficulty with engaging in spaces of then, now and the future from an intersectional standpoint. For some, understanding the now and the colonial influence of then only serve as a reminder of how the future should be – a future of resistance without the negative influence of colonialism, living in the future however often presents a difficult task in that it requires a change both internally with the self and externally with the world. Chapter 6 engagement with agency indicated some of the issue we encounter when engaging with spaces of resistance. The participants encounter with agency both within the social realm and academic space indicated the lack of autonomy one has in thinking in spaces of agency. Even within agency and resistance narratives the participants indicated structural powers at play. Participants such as Fundiswa shed light on the difficulty on living in spaces of structural power that are constantly at play even with agency narratives. It is within this framework where some of the participants found difficulty in transitioning towards auto-narratives that are free from structural oppressive systems and socially oppressive patterns that we come to understand intersectionality as not a liberatory guarantee. The study then found that even within an intersectional framework one cannot totally escape the totalizing effect that dominant narratives have instilled.

Throughout the study the participants engaged with their fluid forms of divergence in relation to their identities and the social categories that they engage with. Although May (2015) indicated a level of unease when engaging ontological plurality, elements of fragmentation were present in some of the participants engagement with themselves and the world around them. This called to question whether or not intersectional framework's conceptualisation of multiplicity allows for internal spaces of thinking that are fragmented¹⁶. Throughout the study we see elements of fragmentation from the participant's engagement with the individual and elements of differentiation. Starting from components of essentialisation in the cusp of intersectional social categories indicates the complexity of the self and the world entering spaces of contradiction and conformity simultaneously. The participant's recollection of various protests serves as a reminder of this complexity.

¹⁶ We understand fragmentation in this aspect as a space where the self is in a state of internal conflict, identities and social categories seem to be in a state of atomisation due to its divergent form. The study recognizes this aspect in correlation with the complexity of ontological plurality both between the self and the world.

According Ndlovu (2017), the post #FeesMustFall era created a space for black women to use their experiences as a means of self-definition and self-valuation. At the pinnacle of social and academic transformation, using black women's experiences through a qualitative narrative analysis study of nine participants, as a source of reference and knowledge base, this study created a space of counter narrative discourse that looks both within spaces of privilege and oppression. The participants' stories served as a mechanism for critiquing spaces of epistemology and ontology and the reconceptualisation of sameness and differences as key tools in theory development. In order to get to a space of understanding intersections, Alexander-Floyd (2013) believes that one needs to depict where determine lie. By looking at the complexities of inequality in black women's experiences this study asserted that every individual is qualitatively different, thus inequality cannot be confined to one form of oppression, which can be an adequate representation of all black women's experiences in Historically White Institutions. It is within this context that the study undertook a qualitative narrative approach, in order to adequately capture the experiences of the participants.

According to Yuval-Davis (2006), literature suggests that black women experience inequality in a trinity intersection of race, gender and class. This suggests that black women's oppression cannot only be quantified into three social categories, it also places a universalisation that assumes that all black women experience inequality in the same way. In contrast to this dominant view, this study found that the participant's engagement with their experiences at Rhodes intertwined with their social backgrounds, identities and academic work. As a university that prides itself about accommodating diversity, the study found that the participant's experiences worked in a cycle of matrix. Whether they were talking about their struggles with mental health or dealing with juggling academic work and their social lives—outside their academic work—all these different categories intermeshed with another thus bringing about different forms of intersections that had no common sequence. Each participant's intersections differed in context and in structure. Judith Butler (1999) finds this aspect of intersectionality troubling in that she argues that there are an infinite number of possibilities in differences, leaving no plausible solution. In answering the question, 'what are the pertinent intersections in the lives of black women at Rhodes University?' I found that when viewing intersections of individuals within a specific context, the analysis of their intersections cannot remain on one level. Following Yuval-Davis (2006) argument on additive forms of intersectional analysis, where intersectionality is just used as a means to connect and add a number

of identities together, she argues that intersectionality analyses should incorporate the experiential, the structural, the political and the representational. In this study using the participant's experiences of privilege and oppression I argue that using intersectionality to analyse experiences around identities creates a space where individuals compete on which forms of oppressions are more important than others. Choo and Ferree (2010) describes this as oppression Olympics where a multiplicity of individuals and their oppression and subordination experiences compete for attention. Understanding that power operates on multiple levels this study chose to analyse the participant's experiences from a cultural, political, structural, economic and subjective experiential level, which remained sensitive to historical specificities. The outcomes of these intersections proved a number of factors that were categorised in four major themes that emerged from the data.

Firstly, it showed how social categories from different levels are intersectional in nature, co-constructed and irreducible, that is to say, dependent on one another. This pattern indicated how power operates within the matrix structure, as fluid and everchanging moving between different levels. According to hooks (1990) when doing research in relation to black women, the studies are constantly read reductively assuming that the experiences are premised on racial or gender primary categories. This study found that black women's experiences are not simplistic, they are complex, contrasting, and filled with disjunctures and discontinuities. In the spirit of ontological plurality this study then reasserts Anzaldua's (1991: 101) position, as quoted in May (2016), that differences within black women's experiences should be seen as grounds for political and philosophical coherence of divergent thinking that breaks away from the normative logic of asserting certain patterns or goals.

In the second theme, the qualitative data showed how the dynamism of power within the matrix structure enabled certain categories to appear transparent while others remained hidden. By going deeper into these structural patterns, this study found that the hidden opacities within the literature do not exclusively revolve around structural patterns. According to Perlow (2018) when studying dimensions of inequality and social justice for marginalised people in higher Education Institutions, structural oppressive systems of white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism take the fore. This study found that although structural patterns of sexism and gender-based violence, exerted under the structural domains of gender contributed to systems of bias and inequality, other factors outside structural domains such as depression and anxiety played key roles in creating

spaces of silence and invisibility at Rhodes University. The study also explored the idea of the self in relation to the world. Using the participant's critique of the world in relation to themselves and the silencing nature of social identities that set to exclude certain individuals. This study found that the relationship between agency and resistance within social identities is complex. Although new emerging terms such as wom[x]n find a means to extend the conceptualisation of ontological plurality, both within social identities and in relation to power. However, as individuals living within a single axis logic oppressive state, this study found that new emerging coalition terms run the risk of being used under traditional dominant narratives.

Thirdly as an analytical approach that draws on critical interdisciplinarity, hybrid knowledge and multiple consciousness, this study set out to use its theory beyond its initial symbolic approach by analysing the workings of domination, both from within an epistemological and political narrative. Using the participant's experiences as evidence, unveiled systems that opt for separation of social categories, binary forms of thinking and the essentialisation of black women's experiences. This study then revealed that as black women existing in Historically White Institutions, their intersections are both within the confines of privilege and oppression, and thus following Vivian May (2015) argument, this study concludes that the participants are situated in the myriads of power subsequently creating spaces of resistance to said power, while simultaneously exerting and regurgitating patterns of oppression. This study found that the participants engaged with privilege and oppressive resistance from multiple angles which included curriculum transformation, pedagogy, LOLT, gender-based violence, mental health awareness and rape culture. From an intersectional lens this study depicted the pattern of heterogeneity and in-group differences. This space of heterogeneity opened a discursive construct that allows for fluidity of different realities to thrive. At times many of the participant's engagements with their present realities operated in spaces of self contradiction. On one end we see the complete rejection of social categories such as gender and race as a means to identify one's self, rejecting the standards that structural oppression placed to confine the participants to certain subordinate roles and division. The rejection of these social structures places them at odds with the world yet in alignment with resistance paradigms. This contrast however is not the only means at which they identify themselves, on the other end a pattern of regrouping which aligns them to critique racial and gender constructs by identifying themselves within this categories is necessary. This can also be considered as a form of

fragmentation. The question remains to which form of fragmentation does one speak towards, singularity and atomisation or internal multiplicity and differentiation.

Ontological plurality provides this slippery slope of the intersection of singularity conceptualisation within an intersectionality framework both living simultaneously in the internal and external contextual perception of the participants experiences. Idealistically one hopes for a future that incorporates the then and now in a manner that obliterates the structural oppression that has been lingering amongst black individuals for centuries. The reality however is that the persistence of moving in-between spaces of singularity and multiplicity.

In conclusion, this study recommends that in order to take intersectional scholarship forward, one must always be in a state of self-critique. Following Romero's (2019) argument of unschooling pedagogies, this study recommends that progress can only be found in spaces of social critique. This entails constantly being in a state of openness whether it is in relation to epistemologies, ontologies or coalitions.

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