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“What’s good fam?”: African digital sociality and notions of community and family in the UCKAR Facebook group

By

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DECLARATION

I, Hope Mutipeni Dube, hereby declare that this dissertation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies, is my original work. It has not been submitted elsewhere for examination or publication, and it does not contain any material previously published by another person, except as acknowledged in the text. I attest that I have followed the ethical guidelines and protocols required by the university and the faculty, and that I have obtained the necessary approvals and clearances for the research conducted.

Signature: H.M Dube Date: 26/06/2024

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the digital sociality of the UCKAR Facebook group. This student Facebook group was formed during the 2015 #RhodesMustFall period. The acronym UCKAR stands for the "University Currently Known As Rhodes" and signifies hope for the transformation of the university. Qualitative interviews were conducted to investigate how UCKAR Facebook group understood and interpreted their sociality, *i.e.* what do they mean when they say "we" or "us"; how such understandings emerged from group membership descriptions and interpersonal obligations as well as the actual social interactions and participation in the group through digital practices, that is, posting and commenting. A qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken through grouping together representations of various notions of the nature and purpose of their Facebook group as a social space, or its sociality. The findings revealed how various digital socialities co-exist in the same digital space. They reflect different ways in which group members can relate to each other meaningfully: either as fellow students, activists, student entrepreneurs and customers, caring community members or fellow revellers. I refer to these socialities as "Rhodent sociality", "comrade sociality", "hustle sociality", "ubuntu sociality" and "groovist sociality". These socialities are evidentially not mutually exclusive, and members can and do engage in multiple socialities within the group or shift amongst them depending on the situation. In this analysis, these socialities are linked to the existing scholarship on digital socialities. The findings suggest that the resilience to survive in an alien cultural space does not only demand a digital space that supports rational political resistance and practical tips to navigate the space as seen in the "comrade sociality" and "Rhodent sociality". It also requires a digital space which can incorporate elements of communal care, economic survival and at times a Bakhtinian carnivalesque outlet to momentarily invert an unjust society . I call this kind of digital sociality a survivalist digital community, which is a form of digital sociality created by persons who need to survive a space that was not designed for people like them, and is underpinned by survivalist knowledge.

Keywords: UCKAR, Facebook, socialites, Rhodent, sociality, 'groovist', social media, digital sociality, African siciality

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ABBREVIATIONS

UCKAR	University Currently Known As Rhodes
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SRC	Student Representative Council
UJ	University of Johannesburg
SASCO	South African Student Congress
SANSCO	South African National Students' Congress
#RMF	#RhodesMustFall
UCT	University of Cape Town
RU	Rhodes University
#FMF	#FeesMustFall
WSU	Walter Sisulu University
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
UFH	University of Fort Hare
EFFSC	Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
ANC	African National Congress
BCP	Black Community Programmes

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the history and broader social context to comprehend the dynamics of the UCKAR[1] Facebook group. An outline of the historical background of South African youth, including the legacy of apartheid and ongoing struggles for social justice and equality is expounded upon. Furthermore, the long history of student activism in South Africa is examined and traced from its roots of the anti-apartheid movements to the Fallist movement of the mid 2010s which included campaigns such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. The focus was then narrowed to Fallist campaigns on the Rhodes University campus which include #Rhodessowhite and the #RUReferenceList. The chapter then examines the integral role of social media in recent student protests, situating the UCKAR Facebook group as emerging from such history. To understand the very particular context of the Rhodes University campus, I present an overview of the history of Rhodes University as a liberal English university emerging from an oppositional but also complicit history with apartheid, and now struggling with the challenges of transformation. I track recent rapid changes in the student body's racial composition, arguing that this led to a large group of students struggling to fit into a space that was not structured around their needs and did not sufficiently foster a sense of cultural belonging.

The young Black[2] South Africans from poor backgrounds, who were suddenly making up the vast majority of Rhodes University students, faced numerous challenges, including financial struggles, socioeconomic disparities and systematic barriers which threatened to hinder their academic success and socio-economic mobility. The chapter then focuses on digital connectivity, the digital divide and social media usage in South Africa, showing how university students suddenly find themselves in a highly connected space where social media plays a very important role in their lives. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of online communities such as Rhodes University's UCKAR Facebook group as continuing to provide a platform for students to

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[1] UCKAR stands for "University Currently Known as Rhodes" and was a term that emerged during student protests in the mid-2010s to call for a name change and the transformation of Rhodes University. Throughout this I use Rhodes to refer to the university and UCKAR to refer to the Facebook group because Rhodes is the term that is generally accepted.

[2] The term Black is used as an opposition to racism – not really an issue of colour.

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voice their concerns around racism, sexism, and anti-poor practices. Here they can create a supportive space of belonging.

1.2 Historical background: Struggles amongst youth in South Africa

The history of South Africa is marked by a struggle for freedom and democracy; a struggle which continues to shape the experiences of young people today. From the outset of apartheid to the present, the youth has been at the forefront of multiple resistance movements. The 1976 Soweto uprising is a poignant example of student activism and broader societal struggles, particularly for the Black majority during the apartheid era in South Africa. Approximately 600 casualties were injured in the Soweto uprising due to police brutality which was directed at Black protestors and the citizens (Franklin, 2003). Moreover, students and a 13-year-old schoolboy were killed. On June 1, 1976, students from Soweto township marched in protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools. The Soweto protests soon spread nationwide, compelling the apartheid government to relent on its language policy (Ndlovu, 2011). In subsequent years in apartheid South Africa, June 16th became a symbolic day of protest and rallies to recognise the sacrifices of young people (Sitas, 2017). In the 1980s, youth organisations like the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) continued to play a crucial role in protests, organising marches and the boycotting of schools (South African History Online, 2012). The massive contribution of young people to the anti-apartheid struggle and South Africa's current democracy is honoured in the celebration of Youth Day on 16 June every year (Republic of South Africa, 2019).

The void created by repression and ongoing systemic inequalities saw an emergence of student-led resistance, which became the primary driver of political dissent and social change in the country (Franklin, 2003, p. 210). The term "comrade" in South Africa became associated with a particular kind of rationality, which Marks (2005) describes as "activist rationality". One of the key youth organisations of the 1980s which organised in High Schools was the South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO), which organised Black students in Higher Education (Sitas, 2017). Aligned with the mass democratic movement, SANSCO members addressed each other as comrades and developed an alternative political curriculum through arguments shared during meetings and workshops. Anyone who attends a political meeting where "comrades" gather will be struck by the observance of formal debating rules where many "points of objection" and "points of order" foreground the rational discourse of such meetings. Being a comrade could therefore be considered a particular kind of South African intellectual tradition, in which critical political understandings of South African society are developed through rational argument. For Marks (2005), such rationality is embodied in the figure of the "comrade", someone who is willing to fight for their beliefs and principles no matter the cost. The concept of rationality has had a significant impact on South African politics, influencing how activists and politicians think about and engage with politics (Marks, 2005). The protests of the pre-online era were characterized by traditional forms of mobilization such as word-of-mouth, face-to-face interactions, and meetings.

1.3 South African student protest in the post-apartheid era

Despite the country's transition to democracy in 1994, massive inequalities persist, with the majority of Black youth struggling to access basic necessities like education, healthcare, and employment (Masipa, 2018: Akinola, 2020). During the 1990s, there was a marked absence of youth protest, and commentators focused on youth's consumption of fashion and other consumer goods, which they had seemingly traded for their former leadership role in protesting social inequalities (Everatt, 2000). During the 2000s, South Africa experienced increased protests, however there was no clear political debate or political movements appearing alongside such protests. There appeared to be no space to articulate the growing resentment with everyday inequalities (Robins, Cornwall and von Lieres, 2008).

In 2007, approximately 300 students at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) protested against increased tuition fees and the privatisation of student accommodation (News24, 2007). The peaceful demonstration was met with a violent response from the police who fired rubber bullets at the students without warning, and arrested a number of them (Abahlali basemjondolo, 2007). This response to the Wits University protest, which included the use of force, parallels the tactics of repression utilised against protesters during the apartheid era, more than a decade since it was abolished. The protests at the Durban University of Technology in 2008 mirrored the violent clashes between student and police at the University of Cape Town in 2007. Both incidents involved students who protested against unaffordable tuition costs and the exclusion of disadvantaged students (MacGregor, 2008). The eruption of these protests at various universities suggested a wide-spread dissatisfaction with the state of higher education in South Africa

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(Maimela, 2008). In 2009, the University of Limpopo also experienced student protests which was related to accommodation, National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) support, quality of staff, alleged victimisation of students by some staff members and academic exclusion (SAHO). A number of students were arrested and faced disciplinary and criminal action. Wits University and the University of Pretoria followed suit and staged a series of demonstrations. Pretoria called for political party representation in the Student Representative Council (SRC). Fortunately, these were both peaceful (SAHO). In 2010, at Mangosuthu University of Technology, the students protested and demanded suitable accommodation, lower tuition fees, as well as buses to transport students from residences to the campus. At Tshwane University of Technology, the students protested against slow registration and filthy residences. Later in the same year, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) joined the protests and demanded free education. This protest was instigated by the South African Student Congress (SASCO). Students at Stellenbosch University held a peaceful protest and demanded affordable tuition and accommodation fees, after they were informed that in the upcoming year, their tuition would increase by 11% and their accommodation fees by 14% respectively. The protests at the South African universities between 2009 and 2014 also reflected a pattern of recurring unrest over issues related to tuition fees, accommodation and academic exclusions.

1.4 The fallist student protests

1.4.1 Rhodes Must Fall

In March 2015, the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement swept across South Africa, however it is important to note that this hashtag was not focused on Rhodes University. Smith (2015) identifies the genesis of these protests in the student activists' demand for the removal of symbols of colonial oppression at the University of Cape Town (UCT) specifically the statue of British colonialist and arch-imperialist Cecil John Rhodes which dominated the steps leading to upper campus.

The #RhodesMustFall and #RMF hashtags soon went viral on social media in South Africa after UCT student Chumani Maxwele threw human excrement at Cecil John Rhodes' statue at UCT (Nyamnjoh, 2016). This act became a catalyst for heightening student activism and movements throughout universities in the country, stimulating political discourse within South Africa as well as around the world about the appropriateness of colonial symbols on university campuses and the need to decolonise the curriculum (Masenya, 2021). Some of these ideas were inspired by global discourses that circulated through the #BlackLivesMatter movement on social media (Binning, 2019). Queer rights were central alongside anti-racist work, non-violent protest culture such as the occupation of buildings and a realisation of persistent colonial cultural vestiges (Ramaru, 2017).

At Rhodes University, the #RhodesMustFall activism surprisingly did not immediately inspire an engagement with the name of the university, but instead focused on a university culture that was geared to accommodate whiteness and support upper middle class white students (Mpemnyama, 2015). Many students involved in student protests were actively following the #BlackLivesMatter protests on Twitter at that time and related anti-racist campaigns (Binning, 2019). The #OscarsSoWhite campaign which exposed how Hollywood actively ignored Black talent became the inspiration for a campaign at Rhodes University that similarly highlighted the erasure of Black students and their struggles (Ugwu, 2020). Twitter had become a radical counter public for the #Fallist student protests in South Africa (Bosch, 2017). The platform enabled students to challenge dominant narratives and create their own counter-narratives, bypassing traditional media and institutional channels. Through Twitter, students connected, coordinated with each other and allies, mobilizing support and solidarity under the unifying banner of the #Fallist hashtag (Bosch, 2017).

The #Rhodesowhite campaign at Rhodes University highlighted the reality of institutional racism that devalued Black experience on campus (Qambela, 2016). Using the #Rhodesowhite hashtag, students placed placards all over the university premises and on social media platforms like Twitter Qambela, 2016). The hashtag rapidly grew popular as students shared their experiences of white imperialism in the institution. The students also created a list of demands including the hiring of more Black academics and creation of a more inclusive and diverse university environment (Qambela, 2016). This campaign was in line with the calls by the student movement for decolonisation and the ‘Africanisation’ of the university which included aesthetic representation such as appropriate statues, the Africanization of the curriculum, but also a culture of belonging and as most Black African students found university education to be far from their lived reality (Matandela, 2015). Only later would students and academics start to publicly ask why the university was still named after the questionable colonial figure of Cecil John Rhodes thus, the emergence of the term UCKAR (University Currently Known As Rhodes). The need for belonging and care highlights the need for different forms of sociality in these spaces as part of decolonising to create a welcoming culture that could incorporate Africanised notions of communalism and collectivism (Le Roux, 2000).

1.4.2 Fees Must Fall

While global ideas around challenging whiteness, queer rights and decolonising the curriculum had been adopted through the #RhodesMustFall campaign, as the student movement grew and incorporated less wealthy institutions. South African student issues raised in the 2000s began to take centre stage (Ahmed, 2019). In October 2015, the student-led movement, #FeesMustFall began to spread all over South Africa. This was an accumulation of the protests against the increment of fees and academic exclusions which were traced back to 2007 (Greef et al., 2021). The build-up of high tuition fees, lack of monetary aid and flaws in the NSFAS resulted in the demand for access to free tertiary education (Lekhetho, 2016). The reaction hereto was the #FMF movement. The #FeesMustFall movement which began in 2015 and peaked in 2016, represented the coalesce of years of student protests against increasing tuition fees, inadequate financial aid, and structural flaws in the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This movement could be perceived as a culmination of student activism which dated back to the 2007 protests against an increase in fees.

Finally, the disparate protests for student causes of the 2000s would find a coherent political voice through social media and the ideas circulated through global campaigns to express these frustrations. The demands for access to free tertiary education articulated by the #FMF Movement reflected the long-standing frustrations and struggles faced by Black South African students. According to Mdepa (2022), historical debt was one of the significant barriers for certain students, because they were unable to return to university to pursue postgraduate studies. Driven by collective action and advocacy of student activists, the movement pressured the government to allocate increased funding to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and implement a temporary moratorium on increases for the 2015 and 2016 academic years (Mdepa, 2022). Hence, many Black students were able to attend university because they qualified for the NSFAS grants (Mdepa, 2022). The grant only covered students if they passed. Cloete (2016) cautioned that students who failed to complete their studies or failed a subject would have to pay back the accumulated debt regardless of their financial or academic circumstances.

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While the #FeesMustFall protests were primarily driven by the demands for the abolition or reduction of tuition fees at South African universities, the movement evolved and gained traction. The student activists acknowledged the complex contextual factors which influenced their goals, for example, the legacy of colonialism and white supremacy in South African society and universities (Smith, 2015). Smith (2015), in his analysis of the #FeesMustFall movement, linked its genesis to the #RhodesMustFall protests which demanded the removal of symbols of oppression at the University of Cape Town.

1.4.3 UCKAR Reference List

In 2016, the Rhodes University campus became the focus of student protest nationally with the, the #RUReferenceList protests which highlighted rape on campus and the deficiencies in university policies to address this and discipline perpetrators (Thamm, 2016). The reason it was called a "reference list" was to contrast the seriousness with which the university disciplinary structures treated plagiarism and the need for a list of references for every essay, and to contrast this with how they approached rape (Thamm, 2016). The reference list mentioned in the hashtag #RUReferenceList refers to a list of names shared anonymously on the RU Queer Confessions, Questions and Crushes Facebook page. This type of Facebook page allows individuals to anonymously share personal romantic secrets, stories and confessions via automated email to publish on the page without fear of judgement or exposure. On this Facebook page, even the moderators had no access to the names of those who posted anonymously. While the reference list contained only the hashtag and the list of names, some students at Rhodes University recognised various names on the list as being associated with allegations of date rape and this list became a symbol of rape culture on campus and in South Africa (Hussen, 2018). The mobilizations, which took the form of topless protests (Hussen, 2018), were a collective expression of outrage and resistance by students against the pervasive and entrenched culture of sexual violence on campus, and particular focus to address the widespread problem of rape (Gouws, 2018).

The RU Queer Confessions, Questions and Crushes Facebook post was shared on the Rhodes University SRC Facebook page and called for a student gathering, which subsequently led to a mobilisation of students (Seddon, 2016). A group of students met at the SRC offices and proceeded to various residences in search of individuals whose names were listed on the RU Reference List. An individual, whose name was on the list was apprehended and taken hostage by the protesters.

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This prompted the Vice Chancellor to negotiate with the protesters to secure his release. However, when the students were not released the following morning, the police were called to intervene and resolve the situation. Given the prominence of gender-related issues in previous campaigns such as the #RhodesMustFall movement, the manner in which the university managed the hostage situation was a source of mobilization amongst the students. Specifically, the perceived prioritisation to prosecute students found guilty of plagiarism (which often concerned having a proper list of references) more seriously than accusations of rape. This infuriated the students who felt that the management of a string of sexual assault cases was inadequate and dismissive (Pilane, 2016).

Students had used the Rhodes SRC Facebook page up to that point to discuss their grievances, however, they were banned from expressing their views on the page by the SRC. The SRC opposed some if the #RUReferenceList movement's strategy of naming and shaming alleged perpetrators of sexual misconduct, and furthermore, sought to suppress views that endorsed the movement's action, deeming them illegal.

1.5 Rhodes University

The university has in the 5 years preceding this study undergone a period of rapid racial transformation, which coincides with the 2015-2016 student protests. Based on the statistics from Rhodes University, the student population has undergone significant change over the past two decades. Almost a decade prior to the protests, the student population was approximately 50% white (Digest of Statistics, 2007). Between 2007 and 2014, in the period leading up to the #FMF, #RMF, #Rhodessowhite protests, there was gradual racial transformation resulting in a decline in the number of white students at the university. Since 2014 white student numbers have declined significantly, and they now comprise approximately 10% of the student body (Digest of Statistics, 2020). This more accurately reflects the South African population which was approximately 10% white according to the 2011 statistics (Stats SA, 2011). The decline of the white student population might be explained as resulting from the #RMF and #Rhodessowhite protests unsettling many white South Africans who had previously felt a unquestioned sense of belonging at the university. One can also argue that the state of the town, lack of water and streetlights, potholes and overall unsafety of the town contributed to this decline of middle-class and therefore white enrolments. However, despite the rapid racial transformation of the student population, racial transformation

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of the academic staff component has lagged behind at Rhodes university, remaining roughly the same with little transformation as white academic staff numbers still dominated (Rhodes University Equity and Institutional Culture, 2019).

During the period of my study, the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on economically disadvantaged communities, particularly Black South Africans (Ngcamu and Mantzari, 2021). The pandemic also exposed and widened the existing inequalities in access to healthcare, education and economic opportunities and the lockdowns and business closures imposed to contain the virus disproportionately affected low-income workers, of which most were Black South Africans (Shifa, 2022).

1.6 Township socialities: Understanding Black youth in South Africa and cultural belonging

Since the type of student who now attends the university has radically changed, and that the university has been accused of having an institutional culture of not accommodating such students, it is important to understand the world that these students come from. South African youth, particularly those from poor Black backgrounds, faced and continue to face a myriad of challenges that are deeply entrenched in the country's history of apartheid and ongoing systemic inequalities (Jansen, 2009: Fleetwood, 2012). While the rise of the Black middle class has brought some economic empowerment, it has also created new socialities and challenges for poor Black youth (Mosoetsa and Francis, 2019). These include being “born frees” but still experiencing racism and having access to “better education” while still academically excluded and preference given to white schools Gqibitole, 2019). To overcome these challenges, the youth have employed survival strategies rooted in local knowledge and practices (Motsemme, 2011). Swartz (2009) uses township moral dispositions to explain how the township youth space is characterised by four distinct dispositions, of which the most respected moral disposition is that of the “Right One” who is not too sheltered and protected although focused on their studies, but also able to embrace street sociability. The “Mommy’s Boys and Girls” do not engage with the township streets at all and isolate themselves in study and are thus most likely to eventually achieve a foothold in the middle class, however they are perceived to consider themselves as better than others in the township (Swartz, 2009).

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In contrast, the "kasi" boys and girls who roamed at night, drank excessively, partied all the time, and wore expensive brands were considered less moral, however still very much acceptable as typical young people from the township space who were however unlikely to ever leave it. The emergence of groups like the kasi boys and girls, who form close-knit communities in informal settlements, and the Skollies, who engage in gang-related activities and drug use as a way of asserting their power and status, reflects their struggles to cope with poverty, inequality, and marginalization (Swartz, 2009).

Motsemme's (2011) classification of township dispositions of adult women similarly resonates with Swartz (2009) notions of township youth morality, where women are either classified as engaged in 'ukuhlonipha' or respectful practices or 'ukuphanda' or hustling practices. Motsemme's (2011) argument differs from Swartz (2009) in that, being respectful is also considered a survivalist practice and that even though having aspirations, educational commitment and respect is considered preferable, the most important moral responsibility to your family and your community is to survive. Both these dispositions, or township socialities, of the post-apartheid era further show how people create ways of coping within increasing deep inequalities, the persistent racism and the growing middle black class and their aspirations.

Motsemme (2011) challenges the notion that Black South Africans in socially and economically challenged spaces are merely passive victims of structural inequalities, and does not see resilience as passive either. Instead, she conceptualises them as possessing valuable knowledge and skills that enable them to survive and adapt to their challenges. This includes sharing resources and experiences, as well as coming together for collective rituals of healing. Surviving through respect or surviving through hustling can be understood as different (but informed by the same overall aim: to survive) and the struggles of marginalised people is here not primarily about inclusion and giving voice as they are portrayed in the Global North, but also about surviving. In Media Studies, a discipline that evolved in the Global North, social justice appears to be primarily conceptualised as occurring through inclusion and giving people a voice (Fraser, 2007). Survival is accepted as given.These survival tactics rooted in local challenges and experiences are a different paradigm from the Global North, as they don't share the same problems and experiences as the Global South. Motsemme's (2011) focus on survivalist knowledge provides a social understanding of resilience which celebrates the agency of Black South Africans through social learning.

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1.7 Goals of the study

The main research question this study is concerned with is how a digital sociality or various digital socialities on the Facebook group might emerge through various meanings or representations, which included how people in the UCKAR Facebook group understood the nature and purpose of their group, their relationships to each other and what this meant for their own role in the group. Furthermore, the study seeks to delve into the individual experiences and perspectives of students in the group, with a focus on how they interpret and enact their roles through their digital practices, such as ‘posting’, ‘commenting’, and ‘liking’/ ‘reacting’. By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the nature of the UCKAR Facebook group as a digital space enabling various digital socialities.

1.8 Research methods

This study employs qualitative research methods as it seeks to ask interpretative questions focused on meanings (Ritchie et al., 2013), such as how people understand the nature and purpose of their group, their relationships to each other and what this means for their own role in the group. This study employs focus group interviews and individual digital trace interviews as methods of data collection. Since this study is about sociality, focus groups will be adopted to facilitate reflections on this in a communal setting. Online focus groups will gather ‘descriptive data and students’ own words’ (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.5) about how they conceptualise the sociality facilitated by the group and allow respondents to express how they understand their relationship to each other. This study also uses individual interviews where users reflect on digital traces (Latzko-Toth, Millette and Bonneau, 2017), such as “posts”, “likes”, “shares”, “reactions” and “comments” left on the group so eliciting richer descriptions and narratives of their activities (Howison et al., 2011). This study adopts purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to identify participants with the qualities needed for the study (Etikan et al., 2016). In this case, this means approaching people who are more active in the group and the group moderators. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis method, to identify patterns and themes in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: Clarke and Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis involves systematically coding and categorizing data to uncover underlying themes and meanings (Patton, 2002). The analysis followed a step-by-step process, starting with data familiarization, where the researcher immersed themselves in the data to gain a deeper understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data were narrowed down into parts that represented segments of raw data and the global categories retrieved from that data were narrowed into smaller sub-units (Braun and Clarke, 2006). When units for analysis became fewer, emerging categories were continuously refined and compared against each other until saturation was reached indicating that no new themes emerged from the data (Guest et al., 2006).

1.9 Chapter summaries

This chapter, chapter 1, has examined the context of the research, with focused on the history of South African youth and political protests, the context of a rapidly transforming Rhodes University and South African youth and socialities of survival in the post-apartheid era. The chapter also covered the research goals and chapter summaries. Chapter 2 and 3 cover the relevant scholarly literature and have been divided into 2 parts. Chapter 2 focuses on sociality, meaning and modernity while Chapter 3 focuses on sociality, political voice and digitality. Chapter 4 outlines the research objectives, research methodology, and specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze data. The findings are divided into 2 chapters; chapter 5 and 6 to provide a detailed discussion and analysis of the digital socialities emerging from this study. The final chapter 7 presents the conclusions of this study, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the theoretical framework of this study which centres on the concept of sociality as a lens for understanding how students in the UCKAR relate and what they mean when they say “we”. Chapter 5 outlines the research objectives, research methodology, and specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze data. Due to the length, one chapter, the findings were divided into 2 chapters; chapter 6 and 7 to provide a detailed discussion and analysis of the findings from this study. The final chapter presents the conclusions of this study, along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIALITY, MEANING AND MODERNITY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts off by defining the concept of sociality through unpacking the literature. While sociality can be defined as emerging through social practices and social roles, for this study, conceptualising sociality as emerging through meaning-making and representation, or what we mean when we say "we" will be chosen as the most useful conceptualisation. This chapter also reveals how the literature related to sociality and the various ways people relate to each other is concerned with the problem of modernity in Western societies. Giddens (1994) and Bauman (2001) described how modernity in Western societies is characterised by a type of sociality in which people have lost close ties to a place, extended family, traditions of the villages and migrated to the cities. In the cities they became more individualistic and fragmented (Giddens, 1994). This led to a decline in traditional forms of relating to each other, strong community ties and close-knit networks (Bauman, 2001; Castells, 2001). Instead, people relied on weaker forms of social connection, such as media and consumerism (Bauman, 2003). As people moved to cities, they became more isolated from each other, however, the media enabled them to conceptualise themselves as citizens who relate as equals with individual rights and freedoms (Habermas, 1989). Many of the definitions of socialities discussed in this section, for example, the idea of the public sphere and of counter publics, emerged in this context and deal with how people as citizens in Western democracies could interact, whether through the media or directly, and could utilise their voices to resist domination and support each other rationally. Through such a central role the media would therefore have extraordinary power to shape people's vision of reality and to accept the domination inherent in the *status quo*, a power that is defined in the idea of ideology (Althusser, 1970).

Later in this Chapter, the idea of interpellation or "hailing" a person into a meaningful relationship with an ideology or set of meanings related to power in society will be discussed. Furthermore, meanings, roles and relationships will be defined, to show how sociality emerges through such interpellation into a world of meaning, followed by an explanation of how people could be interpellated into various roles differently. Then I introduce the question of how such differences could arise by expanding the notion of hailing into the concept of discourse and subject position.

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After describing the various types of socialities which emerged from the context of Western Modernity, literature on digital sociality is explored. While there are many similarities between online and offline socialities (Turkle, 1996), there are also key differences. One important difference is the ability to connect a much larger and more diverse group of people online than possible in offline settings (Rheingold, 2000: Boyd, 2010). Online socialities are often more fluid and dynamic, that is, people join and leave groups more easily than in offline settings (Shirky, 2008: Beer, 2016). The concept of networked individualism, as postulated by Mayer et al. (2020), contends that digital media has accelerated the process of individualism, which is a hallmark of Western modernity.

Furthermore, the chapter also considers the literature related to digital socialities, and it will set out how digital connectivity was initially considered particularly conducive to facilitate direct connections between people, through which they could not only counter their isolation but engage rationally to build resistance against dominant social forces and ideologies perpetuated in the mainstream media. This section explains how such idealistic notions of online spaces that enable rational and democratic socialities, whether in the form of a public sphere, a counter public or an online community, were complicated through a particular characteristic of social media which is explained through the concept of networked publics. Networked publics will then be acknowledged as fundamentally different from notions of a rational public sphere as spaces based not on rationality but on virality, for example, trolling, cancelling, influencer lifestyles, memes and instant celebrity. Therefore, networked publics can occasionally undermine rational speech and become more conducive to carnivalesque expressions of spectacular viral culture.

Finally, African modernity and how the socialities it has facilitated are both similar and differs from those of Western Modernity is considered. While most literature on the impact of modernity has focused on Western modernity, selected scholars have argued that similar processes occurred in Africa. However, a number of scholars argue that the experience of modernity and urbanisation in Africa has not led to the same degree of individualism and weakening of traditional family structures as in Western societies (Mbembe, 2001; James, 2002; Kihato 2012). Understanding one instance of such African digital sociality through focusing on a student Facebook group is the topic of this dissertation. The chapter will conclude by questioning whether the socialities that emerge

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in online spaces in Africa would be adequately captured by existing literature on digital socialities in the field of Media Studies.

2.2 Sociality as meaningful

In contrast to the term “society”, the term sociality was defined by anthropology scholars as encapsulating a more dynamic process and also being a more appropriate term for representing current notions of social interactions. For example, Strathern et al. (1996) argue that the term sociality captures the fluidity and ever-changing nature of social interactions. In contrast, the term society represents a more static and rigid understanding of social interaction, which fails to fully capture the complexity of human relationships. According to Ingold (2001), sociality is not only a more dynamic but also a more contextual concept than society, which is too static to capture the full complexity of social life. Strathern et al., (1996) have advocated for the term sociality as particularly more appropriate than society to understand informal and domestic settings so as to describe the fluid and ever-changing dynamics of social interactions. In this context, the term sociality underscores the active and process-based nature of human relationships, as opposed to a collectivist understanding of society as a static entity.

Maclver (1956) defines sociality as a web of social relationships, as opposed to a physical reality that one can see and feel with one’s senses and that society exists as a time sequence. Various scholars define sociality as emerging through meaningful practices and thus, a process (Long and Moore, 2012) that changes over time, rather than a static concept (Amit, 2015). According to Giddens (1984), practices are repeated and persistent, resulting in social replication of familiar systems and structures. Social action and contact generate "institutions or routines" that "reproduce known forms of social life" as "tacitly enacted procedures" (Cohen,1971, p. 8). Giddens (1984) posits that we are actors and are aware of what we are doing, and we rationalize our actions on a regular basis. We may often give a rational account of our actions as individuals and according to Giddens (1984); in order to feel secure, one must have a feeling of routine. If your daily routine is disrupted, for example, you are more prone to feel uncomfortable (Craib, 1992).

While a notion of sociality emerging through a focus on practice is clearly useful for observational studies, a concept of sociality which focuses on meaning and representation is however most useful for a study that examines social media. A useful definition of sociality for this study, is understanding it as the meaningful connections, interactions, and relationships which exist between individuals and groups (Stearns and Stearns, 2011). This definition highlights the importance of shared meanings, experiences, understanding, and empathy in the creation of social bonds. If sociality is understood as primarily concerned with meaning-making, then Hall's (1997) work on representation is particularly relevant.

Understanding sociality through representation allows one to realise how these human interactions and relationships are imbued with meaning, which is also dependent on the cultural context and shared understandings of those involved. Hall (1980) argued that meanings are created through a process of social construction. This notion of sociality as meaningful informs this chapter and the overall focus of mapping how comprehending social interaction has emerged in both offline, online and hybrid spaces. Sociality provides a sense of what ones implies when one says "we", and therefore, it can also be understood as an issue of meaning (Tuomela, 2007).

2.3 Understanding how meaning and representation works

Scholars such as Gilbert (1997) and Tuomela (2007) have argued that sociality is a social construct, in other words what we mean when we say "we", therefore an issue of meaning. This idea of sociality as a construct draws on Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Hall (1994) argued that meaning is not fixed or inherent objects but rather constructed through our shared understandings, which are shaped by our social and cultural contexts. In his words "meanings are not fixed or determined by any external reality …but are produced in the process of representation" (Hall, 1994, p.223). For Hall, this means that the same object can have various meanings for different people, depending on their cultural and historical background. He argues that representation plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning, because it allows us to make sense of the world around us and emerges through webs of meaning connecting ideas through the notion of oppositional pairs of signs i.e. signs that are defined as opposites. Hall (1980) uses an example of the meaning of stop and go signs encoded in the colors of traffic lights, where it only becomes apparent due to stop and go being opposite in meaning. Therefore, the meaning of a traffic light, whether green or red, is not inherent to the light itself but is instead signified by the shared social codes and conventions that have been established in a particular culture. They emerge from the

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relationship between the signs, which thus all relate to forward motion of a car. In this case, the red light signifies "stop", the yellow, "caution" and the green, "go" (Hall, 1997, p.28-29).

Hall (1973) introduced the concepts of encoding and decoding to understand how meaning shifts and produces different interpretations in various contexts. Encoding refers to the production of meaning through signs and symbols, while decoding is the process of interpreting and making sense of those signs and symbols. Hall (1973) uses audience responses to television programmes to illustrate his concept of encoding and decoding and argued that television programmes are encoded with specific meanings and messages by the creators. However, these meanings can be decoded in various ways by the viewers. The audience brings their own cultural and historical context to the act of decoding, which can lead to various interpretations of the same programme. This perspective accentuates the role of the audience to create meaning, rather than perceive meaning as inherent to the text itself.

In summary, through the process of representation, multiple meanings can emerge from one media text for various audiences who come from different social contexts (Hall, 1973). Similarly, a physical or online space can accommodate multiple ways to relate to others or multiple socialities. By understanding the role of representation in encoding and decoding, a deeper understanding of sociality is acquired.

Ideology

One of the key concepts in Media Studies related to how representations of power and resistance are encoded in a text, is that of ideology (Fiske, 1998: Griffin, 2013). In social sciences, ideology is viewed as a set of ideas, values, and beliefs that shapes the way people understand and interpret the world around them (Douglas, 1984). Althusser (1971) defined ideology as a complex system of ideas and representations which shapes and structures our understanding of the world. In his interpretation, ideology is not a neutral concept but a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1971, p.166). Douglas (1984, p.41) argued that ideology helps create "meaning systems" that gives us a sense of who we are and how we fit into society.

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Gramsci (1971) argued that ideology, or a set of beliefs and ideas, underpins “cultural hegemony” or the dominant, taken for granted views in a society. Gramsci (1971) draws heavily on Marx’s (1845) work in developing his theory of cultural hegemony. He expands on Marx’s concept of ideology that a society’s ruling class does not only maintain power through economic dominance but also through cultural and ideological control (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci (1971) argued that ideology is a pervasive and powerful force in society, and shapes how individuals perceive the world around them. Furthermore, individuals often internalise and accept the dominant ideology without fully understanding its implications. Gramsci (1971) also acknowledges that the dominant ideology may change over time but the process of cultural hegemony - how the ruling class maintains its control over the broader population is an ongoing and dynamic process. It was also argued that the dominant ideology is maintained through principal notions of common sense, which is promoted by the media, education, and religion, and popular culture, shaping people’s understanding of the world (Gramsci, 1971).

Interpellation

The concept of interpellation (Althusser 1971) is closely related to that of ideology as it focuses on power and meaning in texts, however it is particularly useful for this study as it focuses on how this sets up relationships between people. The concept of interpellation, as defined by Althusser (1971), refers to the process by which individuals are “called” or “hailed” into a relationship with each other and constructed as subjects through ideology. To explain this, Althusser uses the example of being “hailed” as a “citizen” by a police officer through the words “Hey you there, stop!”. In that moment, the individual assumes a specific identity and a set of expectations as a subject of the law. This act of being hailed, is according to Althusser (1971) an example of how ideology interpellates individuals into society and constructs them as subjects such as the individual interpellated into a relationship with the policeman as a subject of the law is and then expected to respond accordingly. In Althusser’s (1971) theory of hailing, individuals become subjects of authority and experience of “subjectivity” and “subjection”.

However, critics of Althusser’s theory, for example, Connolly (1982), argue that the scholar fails to account for the complexity of social relationships and their fluid nature and constant evolution. He further argues that Althusser ignores the possibility of “contrapuntal” or “conflicting”

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interpellations, where individuals can be constituted as subjects by multiple groups and discourses, each with their own agenda. Connolly (1982) suggests that Althusser's theory relies on a deterministic view of the individual as simply a passive recipient of ideology. Connolly (1982) suggested that Althusser's theory relies on a deterministic view of the individual as simply a passive recipient of ideology. De Genova (2013) held that Althusser's (1971) theory of subjection appeared to leave little room for agency or subjective autonomy; rather, the subject appears to be entirely determined by the structure of the signifying system that interpellated it.

Butler (1990) also critiqued Althusser's interpellation theory, and held that individuals have a role to play in the process of interpellation and are not mere passive subjects who accept everything and internalise the ideologies which are imposed upon them. Rather, they can actively resist, transform and re-interpret these ideologies through their own agency and actions. Butler (1990) utilised gender and sexual identity as examples that these are fluid and performative, rather than being determined by an external force. Both Connolly (1982) and Butler (1990) concurred that Althusser's theory is too rigid and failed to account for the agency and complexity of the individuals.

According to Giddens (1984), the process of interpellation may lead individuals to align closely with one type of community over the other but does not have to be a rigid or permanent process. Giddens (1984) utilised the example of identities to illustrate how interpellation can shift over time. For example, someone raised in a religious family may strongly identify with their religious community in childhood. However, as they move into adulthood and experience multiple social contexts, for example, attend college or enter the workforce, they may adopt different subjectivities.

Discourse

Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse extends the concept of ideology. Ideology focuses on how dominant power is encoded in meaning (Foucault, 1972). Discourse also extends the concept of interpellation and its idea of subjectivity (Ong-Van-Cung, 2011). While Althusser's interpellation focuses on how individuals are hailed into subjecthood, through ideological forces, Foucault's discourse theory explores how power operates through language and knowledge production to shape subjectivities. Discourse is defined as a set of ideas, concepts or practices that work to reproduce power and knowledge in the world and that is shared by a group of people who become subject to that discourse (Foucault, 1972). It can be perceived as a way of making sense of the world and organising our thoughts and experiences by aligning ourselves with different sources of knowledge and power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued that discourse plays a crucial role in the formation of political identities and communities and through discourse, people come to see themselves and others belonging to certain groups or categories. Theorists such as Foucault (1972) have argued that discourse creates new categories of thought and new subject positions, i.e. new ways of being.

For example, Foucault's (1976) work on sexuality shows how the emergence of a new discourse produces new knowledge. He presents an example of the discourse that emerged around sexuality in the 19th century, linking it to how the production of new scientific knowledge replacing religious beliefs, led to a new way of understanding human behaviour and also produced new subjectivities. According to Foucault's discourse theory, the discourse of sexuality produces various subjectivities, shaping individuals' understanding of themselves and their place within the sexual landscape. The dominant discourse of heterosexuality hails individuals into a heterosexual subject position, performing and enacting heterosexuality as natural and authentic (Foucault, 1972). Subjectivities such as "homosexual" and heterosexual" emerged through the discourse, changing how individuals interacted with each other and how they were categorized by society (Foucault, 1972). This is an example of how a new discourse can have a significant impact on our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world and our relationships with each other.

While discourse refers to the way language is used to create and communicate meaning (Hall, 1997), subjectivity refers to the way in which individuals perceive and experience the world (Burr, 2015). According to Butler (1990) and Fairclough (1995), subjectivity is not an innate or essential quality of the individual but is created and shaped by discourses through which we comprehend ourselves and our world. Unlike the structural concept of interpellation, which saw subjects as passively accepting the subjectivity they were hailed into by agents of the state, the concept of discourse is post-structural and therefore more incorporates diversity and agency into its model (Butler, 1990). Since there are multiple discourses that can provide a person with different subject positions, people can occupy multiple subject positions and are understood to have more agency to actively resist or seek out specific subject positions. Therefore, the concept of discourse is more useful to describe a modern global society in which there are multiple types of power that co-exist

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and all actively produce their own knowledge and subjects. The way perceive and comprehend ourselves and our place in the world is not fixed or static but is ever-changing and open to transformation through the power of the discourse (Foucault, 1969: Butler, 1990).

2.4 Community and sociality

In the previous section, I introduced quite a radical idea that the way people see themselves, their relationship with others and the limits of their understanding of the world is not predominantly shaped by individual choices but mainly shaped by the discourses that dominate that society. While this section does not present such a radical focus on the power of representations, it does present a useful conception of how the concept of community has alternate meanings. The context of township socialities discussed in the previous chapter reflect relationships not simply based on shared interests but from a deep shared lived experience focused on shared survival, dignity and aspirations. This chapter reflects on whether the idea of gemeinschaft and its focus on relationships rooted in shared life experience might still be very relevant in modern societies in the Global South where survival cannot be taken for granted. People who share a space in such contexts need each other as they cannot survive without mutual assistance and care.

Community is defined as a group of people who share common values, beliefs, and experiences (Durkheim, 1893 as translated by Simpson, 1984). These shared characteristics create a sense of connection and belonging among members of the community. According to Tönnies (1887, p.36), "community is the culmination of common life, just as society is its condition. Community is sociality intensified". Theorists such as Tönnies (1912) and Durkheim (1915) have offered various perspectives of what makes a community strong and cohesive.

Ferdinand Tönnies an early German sociologist introduced the concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in his 1887 book "Gemeinschaft und gesellschaft". Tönnies utilised these concepts as analytic tools to compare the rural, and peasant societies which were being replaced by modern industrial ones across Europe. Tönnies argued that the peasant societies were characterised by gemeinschaft, or a sense of community based on shared values and close relationships. This was in contrast to the modern, industrial societies characterised by gesellschaft, or a more individualistic, impersonal society based on contracts and laws.

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According to Tönnies (1912), gemeinschaft comprises of personal relationships and interactions which are governed by traditional social norms and values. Members of the gemeinschaft are driven by emotional bonds and a sense of moral obligation to others, and results in a cooperative and supportive social organisation. In a gemeinschaft, values and beliefs are characterised by personal ties, while social interactions are personal and intimate. Tönnies (1912) held that these types of communities were typical of or rural, peasant societies. Weber (1947) argued that a gemeinschaft, or community, is built upon the subjective, emotional bonds and traditions shared by its members. He held that these bonds, which are based on the members' shared experiences, beliefs, and values, were essential to the functioning of a gemeinschaft. As such, gemeinschaft is distinguished by its emotional ties and the subjective experiences of its members, rather than more objective, rationally oriented forces.

In contrast to a gemeinschaft, gesellschaft comprises of indirect and impersonal social ties which are often not face-to-face. These ties are driven by rational, efficient, and self-interested motivations rather than personal connections or values. Furthermore, the bonds in a gesellschaft are dictated by formal systems of law and order than by the informal norms and shared understandings which characterise a gemeinschaft. Weber (1947) argued that the social order of a gesellschaft is common in modern, industrial, and large-scale societies. These societies are structured around bureaucracies and large organisations such as governments and corporations. Within these bureaucracies, social relations are impersonal and governed by rules and laws, rather than by personal interactions or subjective values.

According to Weber (1947), a gesellschaft is based on rational agreements which individuals make for their own benefit. As such, members of the gesellschaft are motivated by their own self-interests and participate in social relations based on logic and reason. This is contrary to a gemeinschaft, which is based on traditional values, for example, family and kinship ties, and emotional bonds (Tönnies, 1912). The gemeinschaft is characterised by collectivism, shared norms and subjective values rather than individualism or rationality. The gemeinschaft shares similarities with the African concept of personhood. While gemeinschaft and gesellschaft focused on Western societies, the concept of African personhood is rooted in traditional African societies. Both the gemeinschaft and the concept of African personhood accentuated the interdependence of the individual and the social context, and both highlight the significance of communal relationships.

2.5 Networked sociality and modernity

The debate around the recent growing social transformations from mass media society to network society centres around the perceptions held by scholars such as Castells (2000a, 2000b) and van Dijk (2006). At the centre of the debate and public speculation about the types of sociality that the social media might engender is the question of how these media and their networks might change the ways in which individuals are connected to each other and the digital socialities this might produce. Studies have revealed that people tend to incorporate new media into their daily lives in a way that fits their existing habits after an initial period of displacement (Kraut et al., 1998, 2002; Papacharissi, 2002). The kinds of sociality and context for identity provided by social media include new social forms such as networked sociality, a networked sense of self, and modes of networked individualism (Papacharissi, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Van Dijk (2006, p.19) defines network societies as "contemporary developed and modern societies marked by a high level of information exchange and use of information and communication technologies". Van Dijk's definition of networked societies highlights the ways in which technology and connectivity has transformed society and made it more interconnected and dependent on the flow of information. Throughout history, humans have always relied on social networks to fulfil their basic needs and achieve common goals, and thereby them an essential part of our social fabric (Bauman, 2000). The cooperative and supportive nature of these networks has ensured the survival and advancement of humans (van Dijk, 2006).

While traditional social networks have played an important role in human development, they have also faced significant challenges because the world has changed and grown. These networks became limited due to the physical constraints of space and geography (Wellman, 2003). As populations grew and individuals migrated as part of the process of industrialisation under Western modernity, it became increasingly difficult to coordinate and maintain social networks across large distances (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2008). In the contemporary world, mediated communication has largely replaced traditional communication models which were based on direct interpersonal relations. Only with the advancement of modern communication technology, networks were able

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to reach their full capacity (Castells, 2000a: Barabasi, 2002). According to Castells (2000b, p.697), “networks are dynamic, self-evolving structures, which powered by information technology and communicating with the same digital language, can grow and include all social expressions…networks increase their value exponentially as they add nodes”. In particular, this implies that networks which utilise digital technology and communication are able to grow and expand quicker than those that rely on traditional means of communication. Furthermore, networks can be utilised to include a wide range of social expressions and make these invaluable and relevant to individuals and groups.

According to Castells (200b, p.695), the primary element of network society is a network. Castells therefore saw the development of these extended networks as driven by the different ways people were relating to each other under modernity, in other words as resulting from their modern sociality. However, van Dijk (2006) holds that the key elements of network society are individuals or groups with shared goals. In both instances, "a new technological paradigm, centred around micro-electronics-based, information/communicated technologies and genetic engineering" is the catalyst which initiates and facilitates society transformation (Castells, 2000b, p. 9). The emergence of new information and communication technology reshapes human interactions, and result in what can be called network sociality (Goulb and Sadler, 2017).

According to Amit (2015), sociality does not depend on being part of a group but could involve being a recluse because there are various ways for human beings to relate to each other and conceptualise such relations. Once again this underscores that sociality is about the meaning of one’s relations to others. Wittel (2001) expanded on the concept of sociality as a fluid and dynamic process, utilised the term "network sociality" to describe how modern societies tended to create networks rather than communities. In his article "Towards a network sociality," Wittel (2001) outlined the key characteristics of network sociality, namely, individualisation, the rise of fleeting and strong relationships, underscored information over narratives, and the ever-increasing significance of technology. “Network sociality” is distinct from the concept of ‘gemeinschaft’ (Tönnies' 1912), by in which individuals are bound together by tradition, beliefs and locality. In network sociality, interactions may be brief but intense, and not necessarily based on shared physical space or cultural identity (Wittel 2001). Amit (2015) noted that the widespread utilisation

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of the term ‘community’ is so ambiguous that it may appear to be of less to no analytical use. This remark on ambiguity can be understood as a way to examine the nature of the types of emotional connections related to highly dynamic communities. It not only transforms years of postmodern analysis of the concept of community into a new and fruitful research approach, but it also highlights new approaches to address the nature of sociality, which is a key concept for anthropologists interested in understanding not only how people imagine the world, but also how they actually live with one another (Amit, 2015).

In the network society, the increasing interconnectedness of individuals through digital technologies has led to a process of individualisation, in that individuals have more freedom to shape their own identities (van Dijk, 2006). Despite disagreeing van Dijk on this point, Castells shared the same sentiments that traditional groups like families and communities have become more dispersed. This fragmentation results in what Castells (2004, p.196) referred to as the “crisis of the patriarchal family” on one hand and the “erosion of enduring relationships” on the other. Castells (1997) holds that family ties have deteriorated as a result of clashes between home and work life. Furthermore, more women now have an opportunity to enter the job market. Hence, alternative partnerships have now become prevalent in society.

According to Wittel (2001, p. 63), as "serial time" (succession of short episodes) replaces the concept of "linear time" (a flow of the past, present, and future), we experience changes in all aspects of our lives. For example, our personal lives are characterised by a succession of partners in short-term relationships, and our professional lives are increasingly dominated by projects that are scheduled on a contract basis in a particular period of time. Based on the idea of mobility, many people choose to change their professional paths or work schedules; they start working as freelancers, part-time, and from home (Castells, 1999; Wittel, 2001). The importance of this mobility increases in workplaces, and results in a mixture of work and pleasure. According to Wittel (2001), corporate relationships are more informal, and meetings are more casual and held in less formal settings such as bars, cafes, and clubs. These places can be perfect to connect and socialise.

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2.6 African personhood and sociality

African understandings of what we mean when we say "we" recognise a dynamic process which constitutes a relationship between ourselves and others while simultaneously provides a notion of who we are through our relationship with others (Nyamnjoh, 2005: Amit, 2015). Nyamnjoh (2005) discussed sociality in the context of Africa and how it can be a source both unity and conflict. He argued that in Africa, sociality is shaped by various factors, including gender, ethnicity, language and religion. Nyamnjoh (2005) accentuates the significance of understanding sociality as a concept which is always in flux, and constantly negotiated and renegotiated by those who participate in it. He argued that sociality is not just about relationships, but also power, knowledge and agency. Moreover, (Nyamnjoh 2005) postulated that the media plays a significant role in shaping sociality in Africa by creating and reinforcing ideas of who belongs and who does not.

African sociality is often discussed in stereotypical terms and characterised by an unchanging timeless essentialised notion of communalism. However, it has been in flux just like all socialities globally. Okunoye, a Nigerian sociologist, argued that modernity and urbanisation have led to the weakening of traditional family structures and a rise in individualism in Nigeria (Okunoye, 2001). Crush (2005) also argued about the impact of urbanisation on family life in South Africa. Crush (2005) held that urbanisation in South Africa has led to a weakening of the traditional family based on individualism and the erosion of tradition of values. In his book "African cities: Alternative visions of urban theory and practice", Myers (2011) compared the experiences of African cities to those of the Western and concluded that urbanisation has led to similar patterns of social isolation and individualisation in both Africa and the West, accompanied by a rise in the use of mass media. Mbembe (2001) and Wu and Wong (2007) argued that Africans have not completely abandoned tradition and extended family or had the same degree of individualism when they moved to the cities. Instead, they had new forms of collective identity, based on ethnicity and citizenship. For Mbembe (2001), Africa has a unique experience of modernity shaped by colonialism and globalisation. Nugent (2008) contended that African modernity is characterised by the coexistence of multiple temporalities which includes the "slow time" of traditional communities (Nugent, 2008, p.237-238) and the "fast time" of modernity (Nugent, 2008, p.238-239). Together, these studies revealed that modernity has not eroded African traditional values completely but altered the ways in which they relate. This also does not necessarily imply that they relates to each other as citizens in the Western sense. This complex understanding of time and modernity has arguably led to Africans developing a different kind of modernity in offline life and various types of socialities online.

The traditional African concept of personhood is rooted in the belief that the individual is not separate from the community but is interconnected and interdependent. In this view, personhood is not an individual, fixed property, but is instead dynamic and fluid, and develops through relationships with others. This interconnectedness can be seen in many aspects of traditional African life, including kinship systems and communal decision-making. Mbiti (1969, p.108) argued that in African traditional societies, "a person is a person through other persons". Scholars such as Tutu (1999) and Nyamnjoh (2006) utilised terms such as ubuntu/unhu to describe this African philosophy of interdependence and interconnectedness. Nyamnjoh (2006, p.85) held that African societies are characterised by a "culture of interdependence where people rely on each other for support and assistance. The phrase "I am because we are" (Tutu, 1999, p.20) encapsulates this idea, and underscores that the individual is part of a larger collective and is shaped by the community. Ubuntu places a high value on mutual support and understanding and teaches that one's well-being is connected to that of others. According to Tutu (1999, p.78), ubuntu is about "the essence of being human".

Mbiti (1969), Tutu (1999) and Nyamnjoh (2006) highlighted the significance of interdependence and interconnectedness in their respective statements. Both acknowledged that the individual is shaped and formed by others, and this connection is a vital part of the human experience. In this way, they both point to a shared understanding of humanity and the individual's place within the larger community. For Musana (2018), African Bantu languages, physical or biological identity is inadequate to establish personhood, but rather, it is the actions and interactions of the individual which confirms their status as a person. Musana (2018) further explained that the identity of a person is continually affirmed through their interactions with others. It is in such a case that "personhood" is acquired through socialisation where identity is created. When this identity is lost, there is obvious depersonalisation through creation of other identities which refer to such individuals by what it is that they have done to lose their "personhood". According to Kagame (1989), a Rwandan linguist and philosopher, Bantu groups typically view a person as having three

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key components: a physical body, intelligence, and the heart (not the organ). For Kagame (1989), individuals who commit immoral or heinous crimes may be stripped of their personhood and seen as less than human, for example, heartless, monsters or animals. From a young age, individuals are raised with a sense of belonging and solidarity with a large network of kith and kin (Janzen, 2023). This social structure is based on a system of reciprocity, where each individual is obliged to others and receives the same from them in return.

In African philosophy, the concepts of person and personhood are often considered related but distinct. While "person" is often associated with a sense of community, "personhood" tends to be discussed in terms of individual achievement within (Gyekye, 1996). Gyekye (1996) argued that an individual is considered a "person" when they display moral behaviour which is judged as virtuous and an epitome of goodness in the community. However, Mbembe (1992) held that personhood has been affected by the legacies of colonialism and post-colonialism. He concurred that the concept of African personhood is rooted in traditional African thought and accentuated the interdependence of individuals and communities.

Mbembe (1992) also argued that this concept has been influenced by colonialism and resulted in the emergence of a new understanding of personhood shaped by Western concepts of individualism and subjectivity. He held that the Western emphasis on individuality has led to a view of the African person as an autonomous, independent individual, rather than as part of a collective. This change can be perceived as the reason to focus on the individual's personal choices and actions rather than the social and cultural contexts in which they exist. However, scholars such as James and Kihato (2012) held that social media has allowed for a hybrid form of citizenship to emerge, which combines elements of Western and African identities. According to James (2002) and Kihato (2012), African humanism has evolved to adapt to new technologies. For these scholars, African humanism is not a static set of values, but rather an essence of an ethics of care that is now expressed in various and alternative ways (James, 2002: Kihato, 2012).

Nyamnjoh's incompleteness and conviviality

The concepts of conviviality and incompleteness enable one to conceptualise African personhood in a more dynamic manner (Mbembe, 2001: Nyamnjoh, 2012). Nyamnjoh (2012) discusses

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incompleteness as the central concept of African personhood which enables diverse and complex ways of being. He argues that personhood is always in process, never fully complete or static and that one is always in the process of becoming. Nyamnjoh (2007, p.33) defined conviviality as "a relaxed engagement and enjoyment of difference", which is a way of living together that underscores openness, hospitality and mutual understanding even in the face of difference. These concepts have been utilised to analyse how migrants and refugees integrate into their host communities, and how they interact with local residents. They have also been utilised to explore the role of religion and spirituality to foster a sense of community and belonging (Nyamnjoh, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 2001). In his book "African Modernities: Entanglements of Self and World", Nyamnjoh explored the experiences of African migrants in Europe, particularly in relation to issues of citizenship and belonging. He suggested that the notion of conviviality can assist to comprehend the complex and diverse ways in which migrants negotiate their identities and construct new forms of belonging. Similarly, a study conducted by Ong (1999) utilised the concept of incompleteness to analyse the experiences of Asian migrants in the United States. She proposed that the process of migration is often characterised by a sense of "unfinishedness" as migrants attempt to navigate between multiple cultures and identities (Ong, 1999, p.20-23).

Ong (1999) stated that Asian migrants in the United States create new forms of community and kinship based on shared experiences and cultural traditions. Nyamnjoh (2012) drew on examples from a range of African communities, including the Bemba of Zambia to illustrate how notions of incompleteness and conviviality are embedded in local understandings of personhood and that personhood is not simply an individual matter, but intertwined with social relationships and interactions. The experiences of Asian and African migrants are particularly relevant to comprehend the concepts of incompleteness and conviviality. Migrants from both these groups often emanate from cultures which accentuate collectivism and family obligations, which can lead to a sense of incompleteness when they migrate to Western countries that tend to underscore individualism (Wu and Wong, 2007). The experience of incompleteness can be mitigated by a sense of conviviality, co-existence, and collaboration with other migrants. These concepts have been utilised to analyse how migrants and refugees integrate into their host communities, and how they interact with local residents. They have also been utilised to explore the role of religion and spirituality to foster a sense of community and belonging (Nyamnjoh, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 2001).

In practical terms, Nyamnjoh (2012) described conviviality as a willingness to engage with others who differ from oneself, without attempting to homogenise and assimilate them. It involves an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of human life, and a recognition that not a single perspective is able to fully capture the whole human experience. Instead of imposing a single and fixed idea of personhood or community, conviviality calls for a more open-minded and dynamic approach (Nyamnjoh, 2012). Overall, the concepts of incompleteness and conviviality are intertwined and offer a better understanding of the nature of personhood, identity and belonging.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, selected key debates related to sociality were defined. The chapter argued that meaning is central to sociality. Furthermore, how meaning is produced through representation and linked to power was demonstrated. Ideas of how meaning links to power developed through notions such as ideology, interpellation and discourse was outlined. In this chapter, I also explored how the nature of networked digital sociality has been tied in the literature to Western modernity and the increased individualisation of Western societies through the notion of networked individualism. In contrast, in this chapter I have considered notions of community and African socialities based in the notions of ubuntu, incompleteness and conviviality. I have also considered how African modernities have both resembled and differed from Western modernity. This literature therefore, provokes the question whether digital socialities in the African context would predominantly take on an individualist character or whether they would more closely resemble African socialities. This question will be explored in the findings, but the next chapter will focus on another central focus of Western digital sociality, which is its focus on political deliberation.

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CHAPTER THREE: DEMOCRACY, DELIBERATION AND DIGITAL SOCIALITY

3.1 Models for sociality

In this chapter, I will set out various models scholars have proposed for how people might relate to each other in modern societies which focus on political deliberation. Many of these models have also dominated discussions about the nature of digital sociality and are concerned with how people might interact rationally. The digital and online space is shown to have disrupted some of these models for rational deliberation and have resulted in new models for digital sociality.

3.1.1 Public sphere

The idea of the public sphere, which was developed by German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1962–1989), continues to be a key concept to comprehend public communication and discourse. It is a concept that is both normative and historically descriptive. It describes a cultural evolution which emerged among a certain section of society in late 18th-century in western Europe and offers a blueprint for what a desirable society based on democratic deliberation ought to look like. The public sphere, according to Habermas, is where private individuals would meet to discuss matters of public interest. It differs from the state, which would, in an ideal world, execute decisions made in the public sphere. The state would in this conception of the role of the public, not even be involved in the decision-making process to seek solutions (Burger, 1989, p.30-31). The public sphere, according to Habermas, is a fundamentally co-present space in which citizens can express and debate reasoned democratic views. Habermas spoke of a public sphere rooted in time and place. Habermas discusses a public sphere rooted in time and place, and to illustrate this, he presents various public spheres, including French salons, British coffee shops, and American town halls (Burger,1989, p.36).

Today, the need to re-examine the idea to better fit in with our changing digital reality has become evident. The current public space we create should not be thought of in traditional terms since it does neither occupy a physical space nor is it geographically constrained. This is in contrast with Habermas' presentation of various public spheres, for example, seeing the public sphere as a space which is framed and shaped by the functions of the mass media, primarily print and broadcast, as well as where "mediated political communication" is executed by an elite" comprised of journalists including public actors to whom journalism or the media provides an opportunity to speak

(Habermas, 2006). On the contrary, ordinary citizens (public), are given the role of audience members and considered passive recipients of the messages being broadcast (Habermas, 2006, p.415).

The public sphere as a model for mediated society was particularly valid around the 1950s and 1960s, at the height of the mass media era, when a small number of mainstream media organizations were established as highly influential and agenda-setting, by adhering to this highly hierarchical, top-down model (Silverstone, 2007). Top newspapers at the time could justifiably claim to have created a "virtual stage" where everyone could watch national and foreign politics being played out in front of a national audience, and thereby create a shared attention space which was akin to the ideal public sphere envisioned by Habermas (Habermas, 1989, p.140). These similarities between Habermas's concept of vibrant 18th century coffee shops and 20th century mass media were however specific to the 20th century mass media era. In most developed countries, the dominance of a small number of public and commercial media organisations has now reduced substantially, while a multitude of widely accessible alternative media constitutes an essential component of the media landscape (Couldry, 2012, p.125). During the pre-digital era, access to broadcast or print content from outside one's geographical region was incredibly difficult. This allowed the media organisations to have greater power and influence (Habermas, 2016).

While the public sphere is often perceived as an ideal space for political deliberation, scholars like Nancy Fraser (1990) argue that a unified and homogenous space might not be as beneficial for marginalised people and there is a need for multiple counter-publics that operate outside this sphere.

3.1.2 Nancy Fraser's counter-publics

In her counter-publics theory, Nancy Fraser argued that society comprises of multiple "publics" or groups of people who often do not share common concerns and interests (Fraser, 1990). These groups are inherently in conflict with each other, and marginalised groups are often not as powerful and still learning to develop strategies to challenge hegemony. Instead of encouraging a single public conversation, encouraging marginalised groups to form public sphericles that exist outside of the dominant public sphere, make them powerful agents of social change, because they can develop strategies to challenge dominant ideas and values (Fraser, 1992: Howley, 2007).

The counter-publics are often perceived as a critique of Habermas' public sphere who saw this as a unified space where rational discourse could take place. Fraser (1990) argued that the public sphere was actually divided into multiple competing publics.

In her critique of the public sphere, Fraser also critiqued Habermas' idealised view of rational discourse, and held that emotions and affect play a key role in public life. Similarly, online platforms are argued to be more like counter-publics than the public sphere for several reasons. Firstly, online groups or communities often cater to specific identities or interests, which is more like the multiple competing publics which Fraser described. Secondly, online communities can be very emotionally charged, which also aligned with Fraser's argument that affect and emotion are important aspects of public life (Fraser, 2016). Lastly, counter-publics are often more about expressing personal opinions and experiences, rather than engaging in rational and logical discourse which was rooted by Habermas (Fraser, 1997). Similarly, Castells (2009) argued that online communities are "emotions communities" where users share their feelings and experiences with each other, rather than engage in more rational forms of discourse. There are also some parallels between Fraser's ideas of affect and emotion, and Papacharissi's theory of "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2015). Both Fraser and Papacharissi accentuated the role of emotions and affect in public life, and both argued that these factors are equally important as rationality and logic (Papacharissi, 2015; Fraser, 2016). Fraser (1990) held that not all communication can be considered "reasoning" in the traditional sense because it is often defined by dominant and hegemonic frameworks which privileges certain voices and excludes others, and thereby lead to a narrow view of what counts as "reasoning" and excludes voices of marginalised groups.

However, there are differences in the arguments held between Fraser (1990) and Papacharissi (2010). The former focused on the existence of multiple competing publics, while the latter on the concept of "private sphere" where people create their own personalised publics through digital media. Mass personalisation is a term which describes how digital media has transformed the public sphere to allow people to create their own personalised networks and communities (Papacharissi, 2010). This is in contrast with the traditional idea of people being exposed to the same information and discourse (Hay and Couldry, 2011). Mass personalisation instead allows people to curate their own information and experiences and connect with others who share the same interests and values (Papacharissi, 2010). Facebook has been likened to mass personalisation

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because users create or join groups which are tailored for their specific interests, share information, and remain connected with others who share the same interests (Chadwick and Howard, 2013). These groups can be considered personalised publics, because these are built around individual interests and identities, rather than around a single mass public (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

3.1.3 Bakhtin's Carnivalesque

Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory is a complex and nuanced concept, but its core proposition is a challenge to the rationality at the centre of Habermas' notion of the public sphere, suggesting an alternative more affective form of relating called the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is a "popular festive form, a special world, separated from the official and serious world" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.7). Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque posits that during the period of carnival, normal rules and social structures are inverted and subverted, creating a temporary space for radical change. The carnivalesque is considered a way of thinking about the world that challenges and subverts the dominant norms and hierarchies of society (Bakhtin, 1984). In carnivals, ranks of people were no longer valid as every participant was seen as equal, thus the human experience was lived in what Bakhtin (1984, p.10) refers to as "temporary suspension", a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order: it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions". In other words, during this period of carnival, people are free from normal rules and social hierarchies that govern their everyday lives, giving people the opportunity to experience alternative ways of living. In the carnivalesque, humour and laughter were often used as a way to question or subvert the existing social order (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, people would mock others in authority or the established hierarchy, and allow them to express ideas, feelings, and perspectives they would normally be unable to express. According to Bakhtin (1984), humour and laughter also served as a way to establish bonds with the community, solidarity, and lighten the carnival mood.

Bakhtin (1984) argued that the carnivalesque involved an element of what he called "grotesque realism", a type of humour that deals with, *inter alia*, crude jokes, distorted depictions of the body and other types of vulgarity. These aspects of the carnivalesque were thought to represent a rejection of the idealised view of the body which is prevalent in mainstream culture. Bakhtin argued that that this was subversive because it challenged the norms and values of society. Scholars such as Ahmed and Tazbir (2018) likened the carnivalesque and grotesque to social media, which

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allows users to challenge and subvert dominant and traditional norms and power structures. For these scholars, social media resembles a carnival because people were doing that they would never do in everyday life, and say things which they could never say and act as if they were never be in the real world. According Shirky (2008) and Phillips (2015), online communities create a carnivalesque space where political messages can be shared and spread through memes, images, texts and other types of content. This content can both entertain and inform, as well as have a powerful effect on public opinion and political discourse. In this way, carnivalesque qualities of social media can be utilised to challenge and critique authority and promote new ideas. The connection between the carnivalesque and online messages and memes can be understood through the concept of "appropriation", as described by Burgess (2008) and Meikle (2014). They argued that social media users often appropriate and remix existing content, for example, casual internet jokes to create new meanings and messages. It is this process of appropriation which is similar to the way that the carnivalesque inverts and subverts established norms, traditions and societal structures.

Suler (2004) utilised the "online disinhibition effect" to analyse similarities between Bakhtin's carnivals to social media. The "online disinhibition effect" is an idea that people feel freer to express and do things online which they would not in real life, because they would not face the social consequences in the same way. This plays a positive role for people to express themselves freely, however, it has also been linked to negative behaviour, for example, online harassment, cyberbullying and the now widespread "cancel culture" (DiResta, 2019, Phillips, 2020). The cancel culture pushes back the online dis-inhibition effect because people get "cancelled" for their words or actions online (Phillips, 2020). This has had a both positive and negative impact. On the one hand, it can be a positive tool for accountability, while a deterrent for others who want to behave in harmful behaviour. However, on the other hand, it could result in "online vigilantism (Zuckerman, 2003: Phillips, 2020) and "censorship". The idea of being cancelled for past mistakes or missteps is a cause for concern for many users. It has been argued to lead to a culture of conformity where people are afraid express their actual opinions in fear of being judged or punished online (Phillips, 2020).

Shifman (2013) proposed that generating and sharing memes is instrumental to bypass censorship because the latter are ambiguous and what one perceives as a political claim, another may interpret

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it as a light-hearted joke. This makes memes an effective tool for communication against repressive and dictatorial regimes. However, there are some scholars, for example, Stuart Hall who have critiqued Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. In his essay "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular', Hall (1981) challenged Bakhtin (1965)'s view that the carnivalesque is a purely liberating and subversive force. Hall (1981) argued that while the carnivalesque has subversive potential, it can also be neutralised by the dominant power. The example of the "official carnivalesque" in contemporary society, which is often organised and controlled by the state or other powerful institutions was utilised. Hall (2007) held that the official carnivalesque is often utilised to promote consumerism and an illusion of freedom and liberation. This, according to Hall deprives the carnivalesque of its subversive potential. Eagleton (1989)'s critique of Bakhtin's theory was centred around the idea of "sublime grotesque". He argued that Bakhtin's focus on the carnivalesque as a form of joyful subversion ignored the darker side of grotesque. He utilised Hieronymus Bosch's painting of "The garden of earthly delights", which features images of the grotesque alongside horrific images of suffering as an illustration. With this in mind, he held that the carnivalesque was more complex and ambiguous than Bakhtin chose to allow, and it could be both terrifying and liberating (Eagleton, 1989).

3.2 Communities manifesting online

The widespread utilisation of the internet has led to the rise of a number of online communities. People can connect and communicate with others globally. Online communities are groups of people who come together online to share common interests, experiences or gaols (Rheingold, 1994). According to Rheingold (1994), an online community is a "social structure that arises when people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace".

3.2.1 Virtual communities

Rheingold (1993), an early advocate of virtual communities, defined virtual communities as having the following characteristics: net/cyberspace, public discussion, and personal relationship. By net/cyberspace, he referred to activities which take place in cyberspace, and separates these from traditional community activities. Public discussion implies that individuals interact to share opinions, information or similar interests. This was also supported by Wenger, McDermott and

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Snyder (2002, p.4), Roca, Chiu and Martinez (2006) and Casaló and Flavián (2010). Early researchers Hagel and Armstrong (1997) revealed that people's interactions in virtual communities is motivated by four basic needs: interest, relationship, fantasy, and transaction.

According to Hesse (1995), a virtual community replaces physical buildings and streets with computers and cyberspace. His definition highlighted how technology was utilised to move information rather than people or products and enabled its 'virtual' aspect. On the virtual community, he obviously took a more technical than social approach, though it was suggested that given adequate time, users can forge long lasting bonds with each other. Jones and Rafaeli (2000) utilised the term 'virtual public' to refer to a 'virtual community.' In their own words, 'virtual publics' are symbolically computer-mediated spaces which enable groups of people to participate and engage in a similar set of computer-mediated interpersonal interactions. Romm and Clarke's (1995) definition focused particularly on the communication aspect, which included the utilisation of electronic media. This concept may not fully differentiate the virtual community from other online platforms. However, there are similarities with other definitions, for example, social groups which reflect interaction between participants and electronic media as well as indicates technology's facilitation of communication.

All the definitions presented above have one aspect in common: a virtual community exists online in computer-mediated spaces. This is where the distinction between a virtual community and a physical community is established. In contrast to the traditional concept of "community," which assumes the existence of a physical boundary and communication bounded by the geographic location, virtual communities do not have boundaries since these are located online and there are no borders (Moffitt, 1999). A boundary is typically thought of as a means of separating time, space and place in geographical configurations. According to Batty (1997, p. 337), as computers and digital computation became more popular, "traditional bounds posed by the constraints of space and time are fast being changed, in scale and scope, qualitatively as well as quantitatively". Simmel (1950), Tönnies (1957) and Durkheim (1984) held that modernisation had eroded the unique form of collective solidarity and conformity which is prevalent in traditional, face-to-face, and homogenous communities, while more specialised, exchange-oriented metropolises are characterised by atomised individualism and instrumental relationships. This is supported by sociologists who held that industrialisation and urbanisation has led to the weakening of

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community and family ties (Parigi and Henson, 2014). For example, Fischer (1982) argued that personal networks in urban areas are less dense but not smaller compared to those in rural locations. This is significant because it demonstrates that modernity has created numerous new socialities and drastically modified traditional socialities in many societies.

Castells uses the 'transformations of space and time' to distinguish between the "space of places" and the "space of flows" (Castells, 2010). The former refers to the traditional sense of space as an essential material in social interaction and architectural modulation into 'place,' whereas the 'space of flows' referred to a form of spatiality related to social interaction which was fundamentally modified by advanced communication technologies and characterised by simultaneity, irrespective of geographical distance. This is related to Castells' concept of ‘timeless time’ (Castells, 2010) which is seen when traditional time sequences are blurred, such as in virtual communication. Drawing on Castells' concepts, Wellman holds that technology has shrunk everything. He explained how communities had become global than local and connected by technological not geographical ties. According to Wellman (2001), Castells' studies have significant ramifications for what community implies in modern society.

Some scholars argued that because of the abundance of social interactions offered by the internet, social relationships had become superficial (Turkle, 2011). Others suggested that frequent internet use comes with the substitution of a larger set of weak ties for a small group of strong (local) ties (Chen, 2013; Rainie and Wellman, 2014). In other words, fears of negative consequences of the internet have largely moved from negative effects on the total volume of social interaction to negative effects on the number of strong ties and quality of relationships.

3.2.2 Networked publics

The term “networked publics” (boyd 2010) shows that online publics are essentially very different from the rational public sphere that Haberman imagined which did not possess the potential for the massive amplification of one person’s ideas due to network power (Castells, 2011). Networked publics “are publics that are restructured by networked technologies…they are simultaneously (i) the space constructed through networked technologies and (ii) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practices. The 'imagined audience' produced in networked publics is one of the key characteristics that sets networked publics apart

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from the Habermasian public sphere (boyd, 2010). When we express our ideas and thoughts in a traditional offline public space, we are generally aware of the audience we are speaking to or addressing. The audience in online networks, on the other hand, is indeterminate. Hence, we seldom know who would read the published content (Turkle, 2015). We can only imagine what our audience may look like thus, an 'imagined audience' (Carey, 1989: boyd, 2010).

Key characteristics of the networked publics which set them apart from the traditional physical public spaces include persistence, searchability, replicability and scalability and (boyd (2010). These characteristics of networked publics enable unpredictable irrational phenomena such as trolling, instant fame and celebrity, online stalking, cancelling, viral memes and the emergence of influencers. It clearly does not fit the rational and equal model of the Habermasian public sphere, especially since the strongest ideas are now increasingly determined by algorithms, not human rational debate. Building on boyd's (2010) concept of networked publics, Papacharissi (2015) developed the concept of affective publics to analyse the connection between politics and networked publics in the digital era and the impact thereof on structures, storytelling, sentiment, and the mediality of events disseminated across many platforms. Papacharissi (2015, p.125) utilised the 2011 Egyptian revolution to define affective publics as networked publics which are "mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment". Papacharissi (2015, p.18-21) concluded that the quantity of repetition and re-articulations of re-tweets does not serve as an informative role, but rather fosters a "contagious" stage of affective togetherness, solidarity, and belonging.

Searchability is a key characteristic of networked publics. Digital bodies are searchable, and unlike the largely anonymous early online social networks, such as Mxit**,** MySpace, Reddit which were characterised by nicknames or pseudonym culture as well as freedom to play identity-changing games (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). Modern social media profiles require users to utilise their real offline identities (Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, 2008). Unlike Twitter and Instagram, which do not have any rigorous rules regarding names, Facebook enforces real name legislation that compels users to utilise. However, the majority of users on these social media platforms still choose to utilise their full names (Kaarakainen and Hutri, 2016).

Since the lives of social media users are being documented, they can now access digital traces linked to each other's identities (boyd, 2010). Similarly, Papacharissi (2015) asserted that

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affective publics leave digital footprints, that is, a single expression becomes an integral part of flow generated by retweets and mentions. This claim is based on her analysis of the Twitter feed, which implies that users will become mindful of the effects of their life-logs on social media. Furthermore, the persistence of digital traces may result in time-dependent self-importance issues. Although most people have fragmented memories, which may allow them to forget unpleasant events, social media stores everything that has been uploaded. Wang, Lee, and Hou (2017) argued that since time-stamped information in social media is searchable, this may have an impact on people's memories and experience. The re-occurrence of old content may be positive like good recollections, but it can also affect present identity performance. Mantelero (2013, p.230) concurred that the development of life "without being perpetually or periodically stigmatized as a consequence of a specific action performed in the past" is an essential need.

Networked publics furthermore depend on replicability. Technology has created a number of methods which enable users to replicate material. It has become difficult to identify the difference between the original and the copy due to the ease with which anything said can be screengrabbed, copied, pasted, and moved from one context to another thanks to digital technology (boyd, 2010). The replicable nature of content in networked publics, as described by boyd (2010), implies that what is copied may be altered in ways which people find difficult to grasp. This is due to the ease with which bits can be updated and content may be amended, and thereby make it difficult to discern the original source from the alteration.

Networked publics are lastly defined by their scalability. Technology has made it possible to spread content more widely, either by increasing the number of people who can view real-time events or by widening access to copies of real-time events. Scaling in networked publics is dependent on the 'possibility' of tremendous visibility rather than the certainty thereof. Hence, while the internet is claimed to enable many users to share content and build publics, it does not guarantee an audience (boyd, 2010). The funny, crass, embarrassing, cruel, and bizarre are said to scale more in networked publics, and range from ‘the quirky and offbeat, to potty humour, to the bizarrely funny, to parodies, through the acerbically ironic’ (Lankshear and Knobel, 2008). Despite the possibility of not attaining the expected scale, users continue to share their thoughts and opinions in networked publics.

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3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined various models for examining democracy, deliberation and digital sociality in modern society, both online and offline. These models served as a guide for analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The next chapter is the Methods chapter in which I set out the methods I used in this study.

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CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The study investigated the various types of sociality which have emerged on the UCKAR Facebook group and how students' meaning enables processes to constitute such sociality. It investigated the meanings they give to group membership; how they perceive the group's function in their everyday lives and in society; and how such perceptions may shape this sociality. This study examined how students interact in groups and relate to their meaning; how they understand their own role in the group; how that relates to their digital practices, as well as the meanings they utilise to inform their understanding of how they should interact with each other in the group. To deal with such concerns of meaning, this study conducted a qualitative inquiry.

This chapter outlines the research methodology and designs adopted in the study; strategies and instruments for data collection; and methods utilised for analysis, as well as outline the stages and procedures in the study. Furthermore, the chapter also expounded on the reliability and validity of the study, validated the data collection and data analysis methods including the method of sampling.

4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative methods are adopted in studies which endeavour to understand how public interactions are informed by meaning-making and as well as studies which examine sociality and belonging, because these provide a great deal of insight into the nuance and detail of people's lived experiences. This is based on an interpretivist approach (Deacon et al., 1999) which acknowledges participant subjectivity as well as the researcher's membership and understanding of the group.

Qualitative research is defined as a process of collecting, analysing and interpreting areas of human behaviour that cannot be quantified (Purmessur and Boodhoo, 2009). It is utilised to understand how individuals subjectively perceive and give meaning to their social reality (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is conducted under natural settings through uncontrolled observation to understand or interpret the meanings people give phenomena. Since this study examined the way UCKAR group members understand the group and the meanings they attach to their participation therein, qualitative research was considered appropriate. It sought to respond to questions such as ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2013). One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it generates rich data (Hashemnezhad, 2015), because it allows the participants to discuss issues in-depth, utilise their own words, and assist the researcher to make sense of a person's understanding of a situation (Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey, 2016). Qualitative research also works with the universe of meanings, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which indicates a deeper space of relationships and processes (Maxwell, 2013).

This study employs three primary qualitative research instruments for data collection: observation of the UCKAR Facebook group through immersion of several months of digital ethnography; individual scrollback interviews and focus groups interviews. The qualitative approach was adopted for two major reasons. Firstly, this study was not primarily concerned with numerical measurement or make generalised hypothesis statements, but the meaning of the UCKAR members’ personal experiences of a phenomenon. Qualitative methods provide insight into the nuance and detail of people's lived experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The focus of this study is on how the Facebook page represented various digital socialities and facilitated interaction, how participants understood the group, how they drew meaning from their association with the group and relate to each other meaningfully in the group, how they interpret the feelings evoked during their interactions. Such detailed interpretive explanations, therefore, require a sample which is relatively small (Charmaz, 2006).

Although qualitative research methodology might be the appropriate tool, it has weaknesses. The reliability of qualitative research designs is often questioned because they involve smaller samples which may not represent the broader population (Anderson, 2010; Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault, 2015; Baran and Jones, 2016). Other scholars have criticised qualitative research for its lack of objectivity, rooted in the fact that the reliability of interpretations is highly limited as knowledge influences personal experiences, and opinions impact conclusions (Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey, 2016). However, this study did not seek an objective approach to generalise the experiences of all members of the group. The study focused primarily on understanding digital sociality as emerging from a process of meaning-making on Facebook as well as link this to how members utilise Facebook to mediate their sociality. In this instance, shared subjectivity with the participants

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was developed by actively listening and posing probing follow-up questions to understand their broader frame of meaning-making.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, when this study was conducted, qualitative research became complicated. Face-to-face interactions was restricted, and this had a negative impact on the process to establish rapport in research projects (Douedari et al., 2021). In qualitative research, rapport is essential to establish trust and a sense of comfort with the researcher, which is critical to elicit honest and in-depth information from participants (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). The researcher is a key instrument in qualitative research, because their rapport with the participants influences the process to share meaning (Bloor and Wood, 2006). It is, however, one's responsibility as an interviewer to establish and maintain rapport with the participants (Field, 1985: Bloor and Wood, 2006). The COVID-19 conditions demanded stringent approaches when the study commenced. Although the restrictions no longer apply, precautions were adhered to in case the situation worsened during the course of the study. An online approach was necessary for safety reasons. However, certain participants who are geographically displaced, studying from home and restricted by travel limitations were efforts to inhibit the spread of the Coronavirus. This study employed focus groups, individual trace interviews via video conferencing (Zoom) and WhatsApp video calls and observation. These online solutions helped to gather data from dispersed geographical areas, even after the lockdown circumstances. This online approach has certain challenges, for example, to gather rich data without meeting the participants face-to-face.

For online interaction, the issue of video and aural presence might be relevant, however, there is also an issue of a metered approach to data (Chetty et al.,2011) and how this can create anxiety and limit the quality of the data. There is also the concern of language. For this study, exercises were utilised to establish rapport, limit anxiety and encourage interaction. One of the exercises which were utilised was the "common ground" which involved finding commonalities between the researcher and the participant, for example, shared interests and experiences to make the participants feel comfortable as proposed by Woolgar et al. (2002) and Woolgar et al. (2013). A listening strategy was also implemented, after selected participants preferred to turn off their videos during the interviews. This was permitted one to increase their sense of comfort and openness. General descriptions of rapport include "getting along with each other, a harmony, with,

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a conformity to, and affinity for one another" (Seidman, 2013, p.98) and "conveying empathy and understanding without judgement" (Patton, 2015, p. 458), while provide a general sense that rapport requires an engaging and pleasant attitude from the researcher. In this study, silent feedback was provided, for example, through nodding to signal attentive listening as suggested by Holt (2010). Furthermore, to not disrupt the audio connection and blot out the participants' responses on the recordings. I also had to keep on re-assuring the interviewees had to be continuously encouraged to be open and comfortable as possible because their identities would remain confidential and anonymous contributors, and nothing could be used against them. Since the interviews were conducted online, the interviewer needed to create rapport to win the trust of the interviewees. Unlike in other circumstances, the interviewee would have been able to see the interviewer, which would enhance trust which is necessary for rapport building (Stacey & Vincent, 2011).

While the online method has numerous benefits, it also has several shortcomings which should be considered. One of the critiques of online focus groups is that interactions feel "more task-oriented and less interpersonal" (Fern, 2001, p.68). As the primary instrument of this qualitative study, my role was to show my ability to listen and not judge as well as try to understand their frame of meaning-making.

4.3 Reliability and validity

Literature by Golafshani (2003) qualified good research as characterised by two criteria: reliability and validity. According to Seale (1999), the 'trustworthiness of a research lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability'. Reliability is defined as "the extent to which a measure is free from error" (McHugh, 2012, p.18). He explained that reliability is important in research because it helps to ensure that the outcomes of a study are accurate and can be trusted. Under qualitative research, reliability does not speak to replicability such as in quantitative research but refers to trustworthiness, neutrality, dependability, precision, and applicability (Long and Johnson, 2000). Reliability determines the credibility of the research and generates an understanding of the qualitative approach to researchers (Stenbacka, (2001).

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On the other hand, validity is defined as the extent to which the measuring instrument reflects the true meaning of the concept (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Validity is “the degree to which the interpretation of data, derived from the use of a specific research instrument, provides a correct representation of the phenomenon that the researcher intends to measure” (Nielsen, 2007, p.425). In other words, it is important to consider whether the data collected through a particular method accurately reflects the phenomenon of digital sociality. Nielsen (2007) accentuated the significance of designing research methods which can measure the intended construct, and the gathered data is interpreted correctly. According to Leininger (1985), the term validity in a qualitative sense means gaining knowledge and understanding of the nature (*i.e.,* the meaning, attributes, and characteristics) of the phenomenon being studied. As important as it is to highlight the fact that philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research have generally led to questioning of validity and reliability of qualitative research findings, Maxwell (Cited in Strelitz 2005, p.65) argued that there is room for validity in qualitative research if one applies the concept primarily to accounts instead of methods.

Scholars Denzin (1970) and Waterman (2013) suggested that the issue is whether one is acquiring responses which actually relates to one’s question, or are the answers not related to one’s question at all. For example, one could argue that a study examined privilege which examines the bank balance of a person is valid, while a study that examines the star sign of an individual to examine their privilege is invalid. For a quantitative study, validity is often achieved when the terms of the study are operationalised correctly. McHugh (2012) underscored the significance of considering both reliability and validity when evaluating research. He noted that reliability is necessary but not sufficient for validity. Furthermore, valid measures must also be reliable. In other words, a study that is unreliable cannot be valid, although a reliable study may still not be valid. Studying digital sociality through a qualitative approach focusing on meanings emerging from the actual Facebook group’s posts as well as interviews with members of the group would be valid, since I am focusing on a conceptualisation of sociality that foregrounded meaning-making.

4.4 Sampling

For this study, a sample of 16 participants was purposively selected from the UCKAR Facebook group based on their activeness in the group, either through posting, involved as an administrator or commenting. In the sample, a smaller sub-set in the focus groups who were interviewed individually using the scroll-back method was identified. The scroll-back method is a qualitative research methodology that involves a researcher examining the participant's social media history by "scrolling back" through their profile (Robards and Lincoln, 2019). The main aim was to focus on the research participants as creators of their own digital traces including the digital media they consume and produce (Robards and Lincoln, 2017). Facebook's algorithmic measurement of participation was utilised to identify the sample. For example, Facebook has labels such as "conversation starter", which recognises members who start meaningful group discussions, whose posts receive the most likes and comments and "top fan", a badge given to one of the most active followers on a page or group, which includes liking, reacting, commenting on or sharing posts. These labels helped to select the most active members of the group. Also, rather than solely depend on identifying "conversation starters" and "top fans", the study combined these with information provided by the group administrator of the most active members. The latter was as a result of the group settings as a 'public closed group' which only allows the administrators to access to such statistics. The group administrator utilised "group insights" to examine what percentage of the members are active in the group and who were the top "posters" and "commenters" and also capture "traces of activity".

As important as it is to draw data about the entire UCKAR group from a subset of that population to help construct a broadly representative sample, it is not the main focus as this study is not meant to generalise and document the most common experiences that emerge on the Facebook group but instead to interpret – therefore in this case it explains how processes of sociality are linked to contextual meaning-making. This study's main focus is understanding how different socialities emerge in response to different but related discourses promoted by the group and how members make sense of these; therefore, it makes sense to work with the most active members in the process of meaning-making.

While this group does not only comprise of Rhodes students but former students, employees, and students from other universities, the selected participants emanated exclusively from current students at Rhodes University. Furthermore, no particular level of study or degree was required. Furthermore, no particular level of study or degree was required. This study included both on and off-campus students (popularly known as oppidans) to examine whether their engagement differed because they may have different degrees of access to the internet. An effort was made to acquire at least one non-Black student's perspective, because this study sought to comprehend how the sociality of the UCKAR group might be informed by notions of African sociality. A non-Black African participant would help understand whether there is a difference in the way they understand their association with fellow group members. Also, this sample recruited both male and females to acquire a sense of balance because the conclusions reached with only one gender would not be representative of how the other gender experiences activities or life in general. There are different approaches to sociality amongst men and women (McCallum, 2020).

This study also considered to include an international African student, (preferably a Zimbabwean given the university's long association with Zimbabwe as described by the Rhodes University Dean of Humanities, Professor Msindo) participate in the interview to establish whether their experiences differed from the local students. The presence of another African student allowed me to explore whether the UCKAR group has a very particular type of sociality informed by the local context, or whether it speaks to broader meanings of sociality informed by broader concepts of African personhood informed by notions of incompleteness. Also, included in the sample were group administrators who could possibly not have been interactive but active behind the scenes, because they are responsible to either approve or disapprove posts, delete posts and mute individuals whom they feel do not adhere to the group's rules. This highlighted the importance of group administrators on Facebook to set the general tone of the group discussions and the meanings which are circulated therein (Walton and Leukes, 2013).

4.5 Research methods

This study adopted three methods: digital ethnography, online focus groups and individual online trace interviews. As a Rhodes University student, I joined the UCKAR group to stay informed about Rhodes University issues and Makhanda in general. I spent several months systematically checking the Facebook group every few days and making notes about my experience. I also captured screenshots of posts and comments that I found specifically significant. I, therefore, relied on my own interpretations of the content of the newsfeed based on my immersion of the group and my emic understanding of the space and its values. The themes I identified included fellow student sociality, student activism, community, sense of family, a hustle sociality based in promoting entrepreneurship and a hedonistic “groovist” sociality. I used these themes to formulate interview questions.

Digital ethnography enabled an emic perspective, which is an insider perspective which one can only develop by developing strong rapport with your participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). It demands that one places oneself in their shoes and adopt their perspective of the world. The goal was to investigate various types of sociality that emerge on the UCKAR Facebook group; how students' meaning-making processes, including how they perceive the group's role in their lives and in society could shape this sociality; and how digital media might influence the form such sociality takes. The first step was to contact the administrators of the group one intended to research. The group administrators were contacted during the research proposal phase of the study to ensure that consent had been granted to continue the research on the group. Permission was granted to continue the study.

Another concern was that although the group was accessible publicly, blurred boundaries between public and private have always been issues of concern in social media (Quinn, 2016). Heath et al. (cited in Grinyer, 2007) have questioned whether the availability of data on the Web automatically makes it “public”. Hence, concern of ethics and “lurking” and accessing already available information online was a major concern. This nagging feeling persisted even when I knew I was not lurking, although I had permission from the administrators and had posted about the research on the group. To protect anonymity and confidentiality, I never explicitly quoted from the Facebook posts verbatim, but instead chose to paraphrase them. I also chose to describe interactions and photographs instead of reproducing them except when it was a popular meme that was already viral in the public domain and clearly not linked to a specific individual.

4.6 Online focus groups

Initially, for this study, after 7 months of digital ethnography, focus groups were conducted, followed up by individual trace-based interviews A detailed study of the site was utilised to inform the interview process. Furthermore, there was hesitation because it was the first time that I would conduct online interviews and certain participants would not have adequate data for the hour-long

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Zoom interview. Such ethical concerns were addressed by informing group participants of their participation and the purpose of the study prior to the interviews. They were also provided an opportunity to provide informed consent as suggested by Townsend and Wallace (2016). A focus group interview generates data from communication between research participants (Kitzinger, 1995). Gill et al. (2008) defined a focus group as a group of individuals with similar characteristics assembled to discuss a specific topic, and draw from their personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes through a moderated interaction (Hayward, Simpson and Wood, 2004). Initially, focus group discussions were held in face-to-face interactive group settings (Kitzinger, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2014). The introduction of the internet and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown have made it possible to adopt research methods and instruments from adaptations of traditional methods to the online environment. In this study, online focus groups were utilised (Dubois et al., 2015; Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson, 2016; Ybarra et al., 2014). Online focus groups require more directing than face-to-face groups, because the moderator needs to have the ability to control the group, guide the discussion and ensure that the conversation remains within the confines of the topic and flows without diversions (Murgado-Armenteros, Torres-Ruiz and Vega-Zamora, 2012).

One advantage of online focus groups was that one did not have to manage complex logistics to assemble the participants in a physical space. Focus groups can be conducted online on various devices (Hill and Patterson, 2013). However, online focus groups can be difficult to control and manage at times, especially to encourage people to participate (Denscombe, 2007). Since this study was about sociality in the UCKAR group, it sought to create a similar communal environment conducive for interaction through the focus group interviews (Kitzinger, 1994). Also, since sociality is about understanding what we mean when we say "we" or "us" and the nature of interpersonal understanding, social interaction and social participation (Szanto and Moran, 2016), it may be more productive to interview participants in a group setting. This allowed the participants to compare their experience of the focus group with the broader UCKAR group and discuss their understanding of what they mean by "we". Although focus groups offer a conducive environment to the participants in certain respects, the group context may also create a sense of public vulnerability (Ransome, 2013). According to Ransome (2013, p.41), "in individual interviews respondents are protected by the relative intimacy and privacy of the interview situation. In a focus group session, in contrast, respondents are under pressure to perform (and possibly to conform) under the scrutiny of fellow participants".

For this study, each focus group discussion was conducted through Zoom. The two focus groups comprised of four participants. Two focus groups were selected because the interviews were held online, and there was a possibility that certain participants would not be able to attend. Hence, it was safer to have two than one group. The focus groups were small, because bigger groups tend to be difficult to control and manage and challenging to encourage the participants to actively participate. Moreover, it easier for a participant to lurk and for their reactions remain unseen (Denscombe, 2007). Sandelowski's (1995) argument supported the assertion that in qualitative research, samples tend to be small to support the depth of case-oriented analysis which is a fundamental mode of inquiry. In these focus groups, the role as facilitator was to ensure that the discussions remained focused, all the participants contributed to the discussions, and everyone was permitted to express their views as well as discussed in a fair and reasonable manner (Smithson, 2000). The participants were allowed to introduce themselves and share their expectations of the interview to create a respectable atmosphere where their ideas are valued and deemed necessary (Kitzinger, 1995). These focus group interviews were limited to 60 minutes and a focus group guide was utilised to guide the group discussions. These online focus groups were conducted initially, followed by individual trace interviews during which selected participants were interviewed to further explore their digital footprints (posts, likes, comments, shares) they had left behind on the group.

4.7 Online individual digital trace interviews

Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has evolved into a digital diary of its many members' activities and life events, chronicling major relationships, educational milestones, youth politics, and sharing images, memes/jokes, and comment threads (Ball, Ranim and Levy, 2015). Facebook has enabled users to reflect on how their use of the social media has grown to symbolise a life story as well as allow them to access digital recordings of their lives (Trepte and Reinecke, 2011). In general, in today's mediatised world, digital records of networked behaviour abound, and social media provided readily available content (Reigeluth, 2014). Facebook features like the 'timeline' provides users a place to reflect on their digital life, which provides rich data for the researcher to utilise.

Apart from social media platforms, such ethnography might utilise the richness of digital resources available in chat rooms, online forums, or smartphone log data (Ørmen & Thorhauge, 2015). Most social networking sites offer rich digital traces, which has resulted in what Bowker (2007, p.34) referred to as a "new regime of memory practices".

According to Wesler et al. (2008), as humans navigate the digital world, they leave behind digital records which provide some of the most valuable digital data that makes it possible to track patterns of interaction. This procedure was utilised to guide the research interviews. The concept of a “digital trace” has generally been utilised to call attention to inscriptions in the media that reflects human activity: digital traces are “records of activity undertaken through an online information system” (Howison et al., 2011, p.769). According to Hine (2015), internet ethnography may engage with at least two types of traces: those readily available on social media platforms, for example, and those that the ethnographer forges through interventionist strategies to represent activity and make it available for collaborative interpretation. The phrase "digital trace" has primarily been applied to texts or symbols in the media that reflects human activity (Howison et al., 2011, p.769).

Internet ethnography, according to Hine (2015), includes at least two types of traces: those which are readily available on social media platforms such as Facebook and those the ethnographer has to find and avail for collaborative interpretation. However, in this study, the participant was the one who provided permission on the types of posts or comments they preferred to discuss. This approach was adopted to give them with more agency and deal with issues of embarrassment and shame over posts or comments they made in the heat of the moment. Furthermore, their views could have changed over time. Basically, the postings shared on the group were explored and these were incorporated into the interviews. Since digital traces are essential aspects of the media spaces which people utilise on a daily basis. The incorporation into the interviews was important to determine what these spaces meant for their users. Moreover, in terms of media as social places, these digital traces are the building material of what is viewed as online presence and an aspect of sociality (boyd, 2010, p.24). boyd’s (2010) argued that digital traces, such as status updates, photos, and other social media content, are the raw materials which users draw upon to construct their online identities and represent themselves to others (Bail, 2017; Milan, 2018). The

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participants selected the posts they preferred to share for the interview. They were informed to feel free to tell the story of how they became active members of the community in their own way. All expressed their willingness to discuss all their posts. The interviews were designed to take the participants back to when they first joined the group and establish why they had joined, their initial interactions, and when they were active.

Doing such trace interviews implied that one could gather richer and valid data, because the traces serve as particular prompts for the interviewees to respond to. In their reflections of the validity of qualitative research, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, p.244) stated that "an important way of providing credibility of findings is by collecting rich and thick data, which correspond to data that are detailed and complete enough to maximize ability to find meaning". Furthermore, as much as the individual interviews could provide information on the participants' social media usage and insight of their experiences with the group, it was not expected to yield an adequately detailed account of their daily practices. Thus, semi-structured interviews were complemented with digital traces.

In individual interviews, an interviewing style could easily be modified to meet the interviewee's needs (Gray, 2009). Although individual interviews are known to provide in-depth data, the participants' words may not accurately represent their inner experiences because they may choose to withhold certain details or alternately exaggerate them, especially if it affects their preferred self-image (Fielding, 1994). As much as researchers may endeavour to be neutral, they may unintentionally prefer a particular standpoint and, by so doing, the findings could be biased (Knapik, 2006). To eliminate bias, an interview schedule was formulated beforehand and closely examined to avoid bias such as pose leading questions.

This study integrated individual and focus group interviews to enhance rich data (Lambert and Loiselle, 2008). The focus groups and individual interview data was combined to triangulate and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Barbour, 1998; Tobin & Begley, 2004). These individual trace interviews included a discussion of the participant's engagement on the group followed by the digital traces they had left behind (posts, comments, likes/reactions). Here, the participants spoke of their somewhat online ties or interactions, and perceptions of their group's

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nature. Follow-up questions were posed based on issues which were raised during the focus groups interviews.

Due to lockdown regulations, the best alternative to face-to-face interviews was video calling (Zoom/WhatsApp). Notwithstanding problems such as participants difficulty to cope with poor WIFI connections, video-calling was the only alternative to in-person interviewing. It enabled one to gather data over large geographical areas although social distancing measures had been implemented. The participant's screen was recorded because they did the trace interview online. This enabled one to revisit the gathered data. Initially, there was concern of whether the participants would be to participate freely during the interviews, because Zoom displays the active speaker by default, which includes the software's ID, which is often a name and surname. Therefore, the participants identity would be revealed and stored in the recordings.

4.8 Data analysis

Qualitative data is rich, subjective and comprises of in-depth information presented in the form of a text (Myers, 1997). Qualitative data analysis is the process which classifies and interprets linguistic material to make statements of meaning-making structures of the material and what is represented in it (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005); as well as ties data to the evaluation questions being studied. According to Crowley and Delfico (1996, p.18), data collection requirements merge with data analysis because the latter process is a continuation of the process of data collection. Data analysis involves the compilation of a vast amount of gathered data to identify similarities and differences, develop categories, and find things (Ngulube, 2015). According to Spencer et al. (2014), data analysis does not just begin at the end of the gathered process but is an ongoing aspect of the process which brings together all aspects of the study.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis method, to identify patterns and themes in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: Clarke and Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis involves systematically coding and categorizing data to uncover underlying themes and meanings (Patton, 2002). The analysis followed a step-by-step process, starting with data familiarization, where the researcher immersed themselves in the data to gain a deeper understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data was narrowed down into parts that represented segments of raw data and the global categories retrieved from that data were narrowed into smaller sub-units (Braun and Clarke, 2006). When units for analysis became fewer, emerging categories were continuously refined and compared against each other until saturation was reached indicating that no new themes emerged from the data (Guest et al., 2012). Throughout the analysis, the researcher engaged in ongoing data analysis and memoing, documenting decisions and insights to enhance transparency and trustworthiness (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The final themes were then defined and named, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

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CHAPTER FIVE

EXPECTED SOCIALITIES- FINDINGS PART 1

5.1 Introduction

The findings from the study are shared in this chapter. The chapter sought to explore the various socialities which emerge on the UCKAR Facebook group. Facebook is a social media that enables representation, therefore, this study focuses on a definition of sociality that focuses primarily on meaning-making, not on other definitions of the term that associate with it, primarily with social practices. I therefore adopt an understanding of sociality as what we mean when we say "we", so, constituting a meaningful relationship between ourselves and others while at the same time providing us with a notion of who we are through our relationship with others (Amit, 2015). One of the most important clues for recognising the various socialities presented on the UCKAR Facebook group was the ways that students addressed each other. They called each other terms like comrade, my leader, bawka, bhuti , sis'wam and groovists among others.

In the theory of interpellation, the various ways in which people are addressed or referred to or hailed enables them to be woven into the various ideological fabrics of society and they simply become who they are invited to believe they are (Althusser, 1971). In this way, they identify with the ideology, which implies that the members of the group identify themselves by being "hailed", that is, they recognise the term and respond thereto. The "hailed" individual becomes the subject of the ideology suggested by the form of address by either responding or acknowledging the "hail". Althusser defines ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1968, p.109). The key term here is "imaginary". On the UCKAR group, the way people address each other calls them to become specific kinds of people and adopt various imaginaries of who they are, how they should relate to others in the group, and relate to the broader society. The forms of address utilised in the group provided the first clues to identify and understand the various socialities within. The forms of address utilised in the group provided the first clues to identify and understand the various socialities within. These clues were further explored through a qualitative analysis of the gathered interview data and Facebook posts. The majority of the data emanated from the Facebook posts. However, the interviews provided important insight into the socialities which were observed in the group. The interviews were

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especially useful to comprehend the nuances of these socialities and how they are understood and experienced by the members of the group.

The first sociality I observed on the Facebook group has been labelled a “Rhodent sociality”. This sociality is based on a shared identity as students of Rhodes University. Next, “comrade sociality”, include members who conceptualise themselves as comrades and relate to others based on notions of shared activism. This was juxtaposed with “hustle sociality”, where members perceive each other as part of a supportive marketplace. Next I identify ubuntu sociality, where members remind each other to aspire to relationships of care modelled on an ideal of an African family. Finally, it was also observed that a groovist sociality, comprises of members who conceptualise others to share an identity shaped by alcohol consumption which is associated with being fun-loving, social, stylish and disdainful of bookish respectability.

These socialities are broader social and cultural contexts of meaning-making in South Africa through notions of race, class and gender. This indicates that socialities are deeply contextual, and that they can change over time in response to various factors. The chapter therefore explains the meanings students draw on to inform their understanding of sociality and how they should relate to each other on the group and to understand their own role in the group. These findings emerged from a thematic analysis based on data collected from members who showed regular participation in the group and was then categorised and analysed. As I discussed extensively in the methodology chapter, in order to preserve confidentiality, I resolved not to reproduce screenshots of Facebook posts or comments nor to quote these directly as they were searchable, but rather to describe them. I also did not share any photographs posted on the group as this would make participants identifiable, however, I decided to share images of memes as these are so ubiquitous that they cannot be traced to any of my participants.

The socialities I identified in the UCKAR group are however not mutually exclusive, and individuals can and do occupy multiple socialities within the group. It is common for members of the UCKAR group to adopt or occupy multiple socialities, or even shift between socialities depending on the concept and experiences. The UCKAR group is designed to recognize the diversity and complexity of individuals, and to allow for the expression of multiple identities. Therefore, it is to be expected that members of the group will exhibit multiple socialites. It is also possible for individuals to only take a few socialities and still be active members of the UCKAR group. These socialities may at times complement each other or might contradict each other, but they co-exist as different ways in which members of the group can conceptualise each other and imagine relationships with each other. In this chapter, I will show that a variety of socialities are constructed within the UCKAR group.

5.2 Rhodent sociality and notions of identity

In this section, referred to as *Rhodent sociality*, a type of sociality where people perceive each other as students attempting to navigate the institution and one is expected to share their experience with fellow students is expounded upon. Members perceive each other as comparatively experienced to navigate the Rhodes University space and be at various stages of learning and understanding of how to navigate the Rhodes University environment. Many scholars have discussed how universities in South Africa can be places which alienate and make one feel unwelcome, especially for Black students. This is due to the dominant white culture and the legacy of apartheid (Ratele, 2015; Guzula, 2019), an unwelcoming environment for Black students at South African universities (Ratele, 2015). Ratele (2015) describes how Black students often feel alienated from their peers, as well as from the curriculum and the institution itself.

He also highlights the ways in which the university system perpetuates the exclusion and marginalisation of Black students and that this must be addressed if universities are to become truly inclusive and representative spaces. Building on the work of Ratele (2015), Guzula (2019, p. 138) explores arguments that Black students are subjected to a "neoliberal pedagogy of dispossession", which alienates them from their cultural and historical context, and from their own sense of self. This, in turn, has a profound impact on their sense of identity and belonging within the university system. The *Rhodent sociality* appears to offer a way for Black students to find support and community within this alienating and unusual environment. This theme allows students to build their own sense of belonging.

A group admin described the UCKAR Facebook group:

> Admin: It's a "safe space where students can freely express themselves without fear of judgement or exclusion because we are all in the same boat or we understand each other".

This quote needs to be understood in the context of the #Rhodessowhite protests which took place at Rhodes University in 2015. The students opposed the lack of diversity and support for Black students (Ngcobozi, 2015) and called for increased representation including support for, as well as changes to the curriculum to better reflect South Africa's diverse population. These protests highlighted how the university environment could be alienating and exclusive for certain students. The arrests and expulsions from university premises further exacerbarted these sentiments. Online platforms like the UCKAR Facebook group provide a counter-space for marginalized students to share experiences, connect, and mobilize for inclusivity

The administrators underscored free expression in the UCKAR Facebook group which is also supported by the description "this page is for students of the University Currently Known As Rhodes who refuse to be silenced". The term 'UCKAR' (University Currently Known As Rhodes) emanated from the #RhodesMustFall movement, which was catalysed by the continued presence of a statue featuring colonial leader Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town (O'Halloran, 2016). As awareness of the protests spread on social media, it resulted in a student-led call for the renaming of Rhodes University in an attempt to transform and decolonise the institution. The #RhodesMustFall movement aimed to improve the experiences of Black and working-class students, who often felt alienated and underrepresented in the university (Laurore, 2016: Ahmed, 2019). Although the term has largely been dropped from everyday speech in the university community, the UCKAR group continues to claim the name because it symbolises a commitment to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students. Despite the insistence on referring to the university as UCKAR, instead of Rhodes University, ironically there was frequent mention of nicknames which were traditionally associated with Rhodes University.

The UCKAR group frequently used terms such as "Rhodents", "Purple family", "Purple University" and "leaders" to refer to fellow members of the group. I see using these names as an act of reclamation and resistance. The group members referred to themselves as "Rhodents" to express their shared sense of humour and camaraderie. One of the group members in a light-hearted post referred to themselves and other group members as "Rhodents" who needed "cheese" to feel better. Other group members responded with playful comments that supported and expanded on that poster's metaphor. One comment agreed that they definitely needed a "non-dairy" cheese. This could be considered a reference to the number of highly conscious activist students who have embraced veganism at Rhodes University. The exchange demonstrated the group's ability to utilise humour and camaraderie to build a shared positive identity and find strength in each other. Other posts which addressed "Rhodents" were in a positive and complimentary sense. Some of the contradictions associated with the UCKAR group's strong sense of identity as "Rhodents" was evident in their reaction to a post by a first-year student who addressed them as "Rhodesians", another collective term derived from the name of Rhodes the colonial leader, but here referring to Zimbabwe's former colonial country name. This incident highlights the contradiction in the students embracing the term "Rhodent" and the work of representation that has been invested to craft a meaning for the term Rhodes University that is not associated with the colonial past.

Similarly, the terms "purple family", "purple university" and "leaders" or "my leader" were frequently used by members of the UCKAR group to refer to themselves and each other. The use of the colour purple is an allusion to the university's use of the colour purple in its branding, while "leaders" is a reference to the university's motto, "Where leaders learn". These terms create a sense of shared history and common purpose with the broader university within the group and can be seen as an act of reclamation and resistance. By reclaiming and redefining these terms, the group is reimagining an inclusive university and refusing to be defined by the university's history of racism and exclusion. Appropriating such symbols can be viewed as a form of empowerment, as they are reclaiming the power to define themselves and their experiences on their own terms. In simpler terms, the UCKAR group members are re-inscribing Rhodes University's symbols with new meanings.

One of the frequent jokes on the group was referring to Rhodes University as "Harvard", invoking the academic excellence, historic buildings, and prestige of Harvard University. In one post, a member joked that Walter Sisulu University (WSU), Nelson Mandela University (NMU) and University of Fort Hare (UFH) students should study at a real university like "Harvard" once they are done playing games at what they consider universities. In this post, the UCKAR group member is making an ironic comparison between WSU, NMU, and UFH (which are all historically Black South African universities) and Rhodes, which it is playfully associating with Harvard, a prestigious American university. The group member's use of irony and understatement suggests that they do not consider the historically Black South African universities to be as prestigious as Harvard, which they consider similar to their own university, Rhodes. This suggests, in their

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opinion, the other universities are not as prestigious or rigorous as Rhodes University, and their students should consider attending a more highly regarded university if they want to receive quality education. However, they make this comparison without explicitly stating that they are referring to Rhodes university when talking about Harvard in the post, instead allowing the reader to infer it from the context. The post generated great engagement, with 191 reactions, 20 comments from students who agreed and laughed and 8 shares. This suggests that the comparison resonated with the audience, who were able to infer the intended meaning from the context.

A participant in the focus group stated:

> Buzwe: "For us, calling Rhodes University 'Harvard University' and joking that the likes of WSU and Fort Hare are not in our league is just our way of saying we are proud of our university".

However, this comparison also highlights the underlying whiteness associated with Havard and other elite universities. It is ironic that while the UCKAR group is using terms of resistance and reclamation to empower Rhodes University students, they are also drawing comparisons with a degree of pride to an institution that may be seen as the embodiment of the very system that they are resisting. While the UCKAR group's use of terms like "purple family", "leaders", "Rhodents" etc. may be empowering, the group's comparison of Rhodes University to Harvard also reinforces and celebrates the colonial and elite status of Havard and other universities like it.

In using the term Harvard, they are not only celebrating academic excellence, but also foregrounding the work that still needs to be done to decolonise the university, as Qhama explains:

> Qhama: "It has nothing to do with undermining these universities cause I'm sure we all know that Harvard has roots in colonialism and in reality, we are still fighting Rhodes' whiteness".

Qhama is suggesting that the term "Havard" therefore, also invokes how the students have found themselves at a place where they do not fit in, a place they have an ambiguous relationship with as they look up to its excellence but also have to challenge its inherent colonialism.

Members of the UCKAR Facebook group further identify with the university's official calendar of events and discuss, organise, and celebrate university events such as intervarsity games and graduations. For example, in one post on the UCKAR Facebook group, a member congratulated the Rhodes University teams that had won in the Eastern Cape province competitions. The post

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further encouraged more students to attend upcoming games and to support the university teams. This strong identification with the university sports teams suggests that when students participate in or celebrate intervarsity sports, they are not only competing against other universities, but claiming a sense of belonging in the space despite the sometimes-alien culture of the university. They are asserting their right to be part of the university community and to be proud of their achievements, regardless of what has happened in the institution in the past. By celebrating their victories and successes at intervarsity events, the students make a statement about their place in the university and their worth as students. The celebration of graduations on the UCKAR Facebook group is another example of how students are claiming their belonging in the university space, despite the university also being conceptualised as problematic/a site of struggle. For students, graduation is a time when they are recognized for their hard work and achievements, and it is a moment of pride. In the UCKAR Facebook group, graduations are celebrated with numerous photographs of special events like graduation parties. These are ways for students to come together and celebrate their accomplishments as a community.

> Tsotlhe: This [is] how we come together to celebrate our wins, you know, rather than simply receiving a degree and moving on. At least we understand how we have come this far together, yeah, we can all relate".

In addition to celebrating such milestones, the UCKAR members also share day-to-day student experiences and the various rules that apply on campus and off-campus.

5.3 Comrade sociality

In this section, I will discuss a particular type of sociality that emerges on the UCKAR Facebook page that I have called *Comrade Sociality* which is primarily associated with understanding the Facebook group as a space for activists championing social justice. The use of the term "comrade" by members of the group signifies the practice of hailing each other into this comrade sociality, where hailing is a process which Althusser described as being "interpellated" into a particular ideology or subject position (Althusser, 1971, p. 167). The UCKAR Facebook group is considered to be a space of activism for social justice where comrades can depend on each other for solidarity and may be asked to call out others or to participate in protests. I will show that particularly due to the practices associated with this form of sociality, the Facebook group may take on some of the characteristics of a networked public. However, I also argue that *comrade sociality* is not

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necessarily always expressed as militant activism but may include apolitical and mundane ways of relating to each other that still invoke a comradely culture of robust deliberation and equality that historically emerged from the liberation movements (Fraser, 1997). It appears that when the term “comrade” is used outside the context of activism, its purpose is to draw a person into a space of robust, unemotional rational debate where they can interact like a responsible committed democrat.

Political Nostalgia

Due to its ability to identify and quickly connect like-minded students and allies, the UCKAR Facebook group has been an important tool for social mobilization. During the research period of 7 months, I noted 153 promotions of protests. The topics discussed range from bread-and-butter issues to more principled stances such as gender activism. In promoting these protests, students would remind each other about their responsibility to show solidarity with each other, occasionally explicitly referring to each other as "comrades". Activism on the group was evident when the EFFSC (Economic Freedom Fighters Students Command) and SASCO (South African Students Congress) used posts, campaigns, and hashtags like #FeesMustFall #RUShutdown, #EnoughIsEnough, #NotInMyname, #Asinamali (we don't have money) and #Sizofundangenkani (we will study by force) and to share solidarity and raise awareness of social justice issues on campus. These protests included lists of demands such as free registration, allocation of NSFAS funds for students, clearance of historical debts, suspension of academic exclusion, and an end to the university rape culture. The protests mobilized students in the group both virtually and physically to ensure that their problems were addressed and resolved. Protests posts and their comment sections became a safe space for students to debate, discuss and challenge institutional problems they are facing.

It is notable that many of the hashtags that were commonly used on the UCKAR Facebook group had emerged during the #FeesMustFall era, and at the time they had united hundreds of thousands of students around a shared cause (Bosch, 2017). The hashtags therefore invoked a more militant time during the fees must fall era and thus encouraged students to identify with the commitment to activism of those times. However, it should be noted that hashtags and hashtag publics are more common to Twitter (Bruns and Burgess, 2011), Instagram (Highmore and Leaver, 2014) and TikTok (Kaye et al., 2022) and not used so much on Facebook. From interviewing UCKAR

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members, I got the sense that they are used in the group not so much to create current "hashtag publics" (Bruns and Burgess, 2011: Bruns et al., 2016) but rather to refer back somewhat nostalgically to those times of activism that played out predominantly on Twitter at the time, where these hashtags became viral. According to the interviews, the admins explicitly used these hashtags to invoke nostalgia for a previous era of activism.

> Phila: "When we use hashtags for example #FeesMustFall, we are not just talking about the present situation but the past as well. Well, that's what I think, not sure if others see it that way but it's like we are including our past in our present".
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> Amo agreed: "I agree with Phila, he is making sense. It's basically saying we are remembering the activists and movements that came before us, before we even came to varsity, and we are trying to continue their spirit 'cause we are still experiencing what they were experiencing".

Besides being key to invoking the #Feesmustfall era and student commitment to protest, the term also featured significantly in political posts, most notably by the SASCO (South African Students Congress) and EFFSC (Economic Freedom Fighters Students Command), the student movements associated with the political parties of the ANC and the EFF respectively. One example of such usage of hashtags is in a post in which SASCO called students to an urgent mass meeting on one of the university lawns. "Revolutionary greetings, comrades," the post started, and concluded with "yours in struggle". In the era of writing, letters were often signed off with the phrase "yours in struggle", especially in the revolutionary and anti-colonial movements. This was a reflection of the social and political climate of the time, when many people were engaged in the fight for freedom and equality. The phrase functioned as a potent symbol of solidarity and camaraderie among those who were fighting against Apartheid. This was particularly evident in Nelson Mandela's autobiography, "Long Walk to Freedom" and "The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela". Mandela's letters to his wife, political prisoners, activists and supporters outside Robben Island, where he was imprisoned, often concluded with the phrase "Yours in struggle" (Mandela, 1994: Mandela, 2018) and signify their shared struggle against apartheid. It is very interesting that the closing address of a letter, something that was characteristic of an era of letter writing and is now carried over into social media. The closing address of a letter would also create a relationship with the reader, showing their relationship - whether it was sincere "sincerely" or warm "warm regards" or a loving relationship "love". Here by using the conventions of letter writing, one could also argue that the words invoke another era and a nostalgia for the past.

The use of “Yours in Struggle” invokes the term "the struggle" which was used to describe anti-apartheid protests and thus establishes a clear link between today’s protests and apartheid times, challenging the notion that much has changed during the democratic era. Members of the UCKAR Facebook group therefore draw on political traditions from the apartheid era and based on the usage of these terms, it appears as if apartheid still exists for them though legally abolished. The post in the UCKAR group elicited a number of reactions and comments. Some students were confirming their attendance, while others invited others to come read the post. Others inquired about the meeting's specifics and purpose, which turned out to be a march to the police station to lay a charge at the police station. In contrast to the normal light usage of the term "comrade," the remark "revolutionary greetings comrades" establishes a tone of urgency and underlines the urgency and political nature of the message, through invoking the past.

In another post, an EFFSC member encouraged students to petition for the rights of those students who were arrested, expelled, and suspended for participating in the #FeesMustFall movement several years ago. The author of the post was specifically campaigning for Khaya Cekeshe, who had been sentenced to 8 years in prison for public violence and malicious property damage. Cekeshe dropped out of Unisa and was studying at Foot Print Media but was arrested after joining the University of Witwatersrand #FeesMustFall protest. The post received 148 sad and angry reactions, 11 comments and 19 shares, with many asking for the link to the petition and stating things like "free our leader," "our leaders are being arrested for our rights," and "national leaders have failed the youth”. The author of the post pointed out Cekeshe’s commitment to the student community as even though he was not a student at Wits University, yet he felt compelled to join the fight against fee increment and financial exclusion. The author of the post was encouraging UCKAR Facebook group members to join “the struggle”, whether or not they were directly affected. Students in the comments section appeared angry because they identified so strongly with the #FeesMustFall movement. A distinctly critical statement pointed out that the ANC has failed South Africans and is continues doing so, especially since they are condoning the sentencing of a student who is fighting for what is right. Similar comments were made that “good people” and “true freedom fighters” suffer or get arrested for their good deeds. These comments reveal some of the ideology behind this comrade sociality which clearly refuses the myth of the rainbow South Africa and challenges the gains of democracy. Instead, it portrays the current era as an extension of apartheid that continues to affect students and the South Africa as a whole. While this “comrade sociality" is associated with political expression, it can also be seen as a way of embracing the practice of rational debate and organic South African intellectualism, allowing a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a "comrade" politically and in other spheres.

Rationality and an organic South African culture of intellectualism

On the UCKAR Facebook group, the concept of being a comrade included frequent references to being a part of a rational debating or intellectual community. Noted in the group were frequent usage in the replies or comments of debating terminology like "on the point of order and correction" or "order, comrade", "point of order", "I beg to differ". Such terminology structure the conversations and ensure that members are heard and can be considered evidence of what Marks (2005) calls activist rationality. Activist rationality is a particular way in which South African anti-apartheid activists have used logic and reason to support their causes and engage in political debate (Marks, 2005). Such rationality being associated with the assumed gender of the comrade, which was invariably male (Marks 2005). It is characterised by a focus on evidence-based arguments and a willingness to engage in logical, respectful and thoughtful discussion. In the case of the UCKAR group, such terminology was evident in both their online and offline conversations. Such debating terminology hailed comrades into the disciplined respectful political traditions that emerged from a long history of struggle, which prevented debates from degenerating into emotional volatile spaces. It was for that reason that Mxolisi considered such debating terms as "safe words".

> Mxolisi: Sometimes I don't even know the guy's name, but I'd rather use safe words to avoid making him feel disrespected or undermined. I always joke 'the fastest way to earn a kick is to attack his masculinity or manhood especially in a public platform'.

Despite the fact that the notion of a comrade was generally associated with being male and hence a very male notion of rationality (Marks 2005), there was one incident on the UCKAR Facebook page where women were clearly embodying such rationality while men were rejecting it. In one UCKAR Facebook group post, the author was calling for manpower to fight crime on campus, and in the comments male students adamantly supported physically fighting criminals while female student commentators called for a calmer approach of giving the responsibility to the security personnel to do their assigned job. These women student commentators advised against engaging in vigilantism and instead suggested involving Rhodes University security personnel. Thus,

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women appeared to be the voice of reason, arguing that students should avoid taking matters into their own hands, risking suspension or expulsion.

Seeing women being the voice of reason challenges the literature of male rationality and that women are more irrational and emotional. It does however support the notion that the Facebook UCKAR group provides a space for rational debate and where participants are encouraged to engage in critical thinking and sound judgement. However, it is interesting that in this space, being a comrade was not always associated with the rationality observed in the past (Marks 2005), but the question of emotionality was evident in posts where female students used the term comrade along emotive language like “lovies”, “xxx” and blowing kisses.

A study on South African university students concluded that males often claim that women do not have the mental capacity to remain unemotional, objective and in essence make sound judgments (Oxlund, 2008). While male students tend to assume a strong connection between rationality and masculinity (akin to the connection brought out by Seidler (1987) in Western Europe since the Enlightenment), males often regard women as belonging to a world of emotion and passion. Gqola (2015) argues that the idea that women are more emotional than men is only stereotype used to justify violence and oppression against women in South Africa. She goes on to say that this stereotype is based on patriarchal ideas of women as being weak and incapable of rational thought, and that it ignores the experiences of women who can remain calm and rational in the face of adversity. In effect, the women are asking not to be attacked personally but for their words to be taken as loving contributions to the discussion. For example, in one post where a woman was called a comrade since she was on the SRC. This woman was clearly respected for her leadership position.

5.4 Comrade sociality and notions of race and black solidarity

In the UCKAR there is some acceptance of the non-racial nature of the term “comrade”. Usually, most posts would associate the political struggle with amaXhosa anti-apartheid struggle, so foregrounding the Black majority experience. In a post, a member posted song lyrics with megaphone emojis. The lyrics read "Thina siyazalana mama (we are born from the same mother!), and this is not just any song, but "igwijo" (a Xhosa practice of collective singing deeply embedded

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in African culture used to celebrate, protest, resist or reclaim), claimed as healing anthems of South Africa by singer and certified Trauma Releasing specialist, Jeremy de Tolly (2020). The Facebook post elicited a high volume of reactions and responses, demonstrating that members fully comprehended the author's point that a protest was needed to call for financially excluded NSFAS students to be listened to and to be allowed to register. The students' understanding of the post was shown by members finishing off the song lyrics, "zumpeeeee mntakamama!" (Yes, my mother's child!) in the comment section. The implication of "igwijo" is that it's an effort to address historical cultural scars, heal racialised apartheid trauma and nurture a sense of shared humanity (de Tolly, 2020).

In their Facebook posts, one can clearly observe how these UCKAR "comrades" define their own idea of comradeship to align with the political culture that has shaped them. Other militant songs like "ayasaba amagwala, dubula dubula" (the cowards are scared, shoot shoot) and "nobody wanna see us together" were chanted in the comments. These militant songs are still popular at national rallies by political parties like the ANC and EFF. Given that these two political organisations are the mother branches of student organisations active at the university, as SASCO is ANC-aligned and EFFSC is the EFF's student wing, it makes sense that students inherited "amagwijo" from these political parties. These students associate igwijo with protests or demonstrations where they are trying to fight the socio-economic aftermath of the apartheid, which continues to affect Rhodes students and the South African youth at large. The lyrics of the song "thina siyazalana" invoke a deep bond by comparing it to siblings who share a mother. They not only inherited "amagwijo", but they also embrace the language emerging from political traditions that existed during the apartheid political era. These are evident when students in the UCKAR greet each other with political language like "revolutionary greetings comrades", "engaged citizens", "yours in struggle", "leaders" and "cadres". This presents a picture of solidarity, affection, and brotherhood among UCKAR members who share a common history and potentially a common future.

What struck me was that only twice was the term "comrade" used by a white student. It was more common for this student to use the term "my leader," and both instances occurred during SRC elections when the white student was presenting his voting manifesto and soliciting votes. He responded to comments with "thank you leadership" to those who backed him up or promised to vote for him or recommend him to others. This student was clearly taking on the discourse of the

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Fallist student movement and associating himself with this politics. While he seemed to be using other terminology common to the discourse, he seemed to be avoiding the term comrade. What is interesting about the term comrade is that it expresses a sociality - who "we" are - so he might have felt unclear whether he, as a white person could assert that right of being one of the comrades.

However, during the months of my research, it was only once that a white student was awarded the title "comrade" by others on the UCKAR Facebook group. This white student shared a heartfelt post acknowledging his advantages as a "privileged white student" who attended the best schools and lived in the best neighbourhood where his parents have a large amount of commercial land and therefore had no tertiary debt. He explained that he nevertheless had learnt to sympathise with the majority of UCKAR members who experienced a life that was "totally opposite". His post called on white students to at least sympathise with their struggling neighbours and "bleeding society" instead of trying to pretend that there was equality in South Africa. His appeal was for privileged white students to support #FeesMustFall, whether they are affected by financial exclusion or not, to align themselves with humanity and justice. This post received 1100 likes and heart reactions, 100 comments and 268 shares. The comments applauded the author of the post and in one, he was labelled a hero and a "true comrade" and an acknowledgement of such sentiments showing the values of belonging in South Africa was expressed through one commentator stating, "you deserve the land". This was the only case when I saw a white student being called a comrade, though several white students would respond to posts that are addressed to "comrades". The examples above seem to suggest that white students can be embraced as fellow activists and indeed as "comrades" but that such belonging has to be earned. However, it is notable that the participant did not seem to be consciously avoiding usage of the term. When interviewed, the participant expressed ignorance of how the term was used in the group, and explained that e was just sympathetic to his "neighbours", resisting how society was trying to separate them, and he felt accepted because of the positive comments.

> Admin: I honestly never paid attention to people using the word comrade, I mean I'm not the sharpest tool in the politics shade. I would not say I'm big on politics, but I can see when something is wrong in the society, and we are all suffering, but others are suffering way more than us. I'm just lucky I'm well-off but majority of students are in the pits".

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Group members calling him “comrade” is consistent with Gordimer (1990)’s story that the white characters who identified as “comrades” had to earn this title through their commitment to the struggle against apartheid. The racial concept of “comrade” in non-Black students raises questions about whether it is something that must be earned through solidarity with the Black struggle or can simply be claimed by anyone in the group. The posts and comments in the UCKAR suggest that white members are rarely associated with the word unless they explicitly support Black struggles. The question around the racial concept of comrade reflects the complex and nuanced nature of identity and allyship (Edwards, 2006). It is clear that the concept of comradeship, as it is used in the UCKAR group, is deeply intertwined with issues of race and Black solidarity.

Networked publics, trolling and call-out culture within comrade sociality

On the UCKAR Facebook group, being a comrade meant holding each other accountable and calling out bad behaviour. It meant being part of a community that was dedicated to doing the right thing, even if it meant opposing the rest of the group members. In the UCKAR Facebook group I observed how comradely students challenged a case that involved homophobia, toxic masculinity, and misogyny. One member's timeline was filled with homophobic and sexist posts, which were uncovered while he was running for an SRC position in the group. In one of his posts, he mocked and insulted a gay man who was pictured cross-dressing as a child. In another, he claimed that women belong in the kitchen, and they are responsible for the erosion of societal standards and the increase in “gay boys”. Students who discovered this were outraged and shared screenshots of his posts to the group for all UCKAR members to see the kind of "leader" who would represent them and his extremist beliefs. This prompted a virtual and physical student protest, causing him to withdraw from the SRC campaign list and be "cancelled." He was disqualified on the grounds of his prejudice and discrimination. This behaviour by the comradely students contrasted with the SRC candidate’s toxic internalised patriarchal masculinity (Edström, Das, and Dolan 2014).

> Karla: We are already going through a lot mentally, academically, “relationship-ically” and for a potential president to display such ignorance was a low blow. We have been fighting suicides left, right and centre. I guess you can say he opened a can of worms because what he represented is exactly what we have been fighting at Rhodes. I had to show Rhodents the kind of person we were going to deal with for the next full year”.

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The post criticising the SRC candidate was a great illustration of how boyd's (2010) concept of "networked publics" can play out in real life, creating new types of public interactions based on words that due to the nature of social media reach unintended audiences, are copyable, permanent, and searchable. In this situation, the group members' search for and sharing of the individual's content made it easy for others to find and access information that they might not have found otherwise. This created a situation in which information from one context (the individual's timeline) was brought into another context (the group), resulting in unintended consequences for the individual (boyd, 2010), as he most likely posted for one intended audience (friends, fellow conservatives, since he refers to himself as an African conservative). This scenario shows how searchability and context collapse (ref) can lead to complex and challenging circumstances, such as the individual facing backlash and petitions against him. This is a great example of boyd (2010) and Mayer-Schönberger's (2011) observation that the internet never forgets.

Ordinary comrades

The most surprising aspects of my research was the observation that the term "comrade" was used in a conventional and non-ideological manner in the UCKAR. This was unexpected given the commonly held assumption that the term is closely linked to socialist ideologies. This observation aligns with Wellman's (2001) concept of "networked individualism, which posits that online groups can form without the need for shared ideologies or beliefs. In a post made in the UCKAR, a female author addressed members as comrades and was asking for help regarding a course change where the modules were clashing. The post ended with "xx" meaning kisses, a common light-hearted way of expressing affection, sincerity, or friendship. Such usage of "comrade" is typical in the group, another similar post was made by a female, addressing members of the group as comrades, requesting help searching for transportation to travel home and the post ended with "thanks lovelies". The post received a number of comments from both genders and group members responded without commentary about the way they were addressed, simply sharing individual experiences and knowledge to provide suggestions about transportation options. Responding to this post, in such a mundane manner, the group members illustrate how the term "comrade" has become a common way of appealing for assistance from others without necessarily sharing any particular political beliefs.

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The post also seemed out of place as its use of flowery emotive language “lovelies” and kisses, it did not embrace the rationality that Marks (2005) describes as typical of discussions between comrades. Such usage of the term strays away from this standard notion of a comrade and the association with typically masculine modes of communication through debate that is rational, deeply loyal, and excludes playful and frivolous displays of affection. It is therefore intriguing that women in the UCKAR group use the term in a highly feminine tone, particularly since in South African politics, women have historically been marginalized in politics. The use of the concept of comrade in such an apolitical and flowery tone suggests that women are challenging the disembodied rational sociality associated with the term comrade. According to Bradbury and Mashigo (2018), women who find themselves in political spaces within institutions of higher learning experience lines of disidentification and misrecognition because of the confluence of gender and class. In this case, male students see themselves as being much more rational and in control of their emotions than their female counterparts (Bradbury and Mashigo, 2018). Discourses around masculinity and student activism have often intertwined (Oxlund, 2008). The different ways of using the term comrade suggests that the term may indeed be an example of polysemy as it is common in both political and apolitical day-to-day conversations. The way that comradeship plays out in networked publics highlights the complex ways in which gender and power intersect in online spaces creating gendered concepts of comradeship.

Comrade sociality as a contested gendered terrain

There were several traditional titles that were used alongside comrade in the UCKAR Facebook group like "chief", "bawka or bawokazi" (father's older brother), "dyani" (Xhosa word for "man") and “my leader” or “leadership”. The gendered traditional titles invoke the notion of the ideal African family where men are in respectful relation with each other, carrying responsibility for the broader group which includes the responsibility to take political action. Such male terminology is, however, problematic as it seems to exclude women from political action. In the group, males would comment on memes or posts made by women, who were using the term "comrade" to refer to all group members, but male commentators rarely addressed female commenters as "comrade"; instead, merely responding without identifying the female author as a comrade. In a post featuring an advertisement for Cuban cigars that were claimed to be custom-made for Fidel Castro, the majority of respondents who commented were males who addressed one another as "comrade".

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This post was very popular and generated 55 comments and 25 reactions and someone responded with “viva comrade” and there were several responses and reactions under his comment. Female commenters were however mostly simply addressed by their profile names, except for a female former SRC leader who was the only woman who was addressed as comrade in this post. The male group members called her a comrade as they challenged her comment questioning the relevance of the meme where she commented on how pricey cigars were and that students were not an appropriate target market. One responder used the phrase "I beg to differ, " to refute the “leader's” statements. Such rational debating suggests that her role in student activism prompted other students to respectfully challenge her. It is notable that she had added "comrade" to her Facebook username, thus, it is possible that they called her as such because it was part of her Facebook identity. The gendered usage of the term "comrade" made me question if it was an earned title for women taking on leadership roles in politics, or if women had to identify as a comrade in their profiles in order to be recognised as one. The posts and comments in the UCKAR Facebook group suggest that female members were rarely associated with the sociality of comradeness unless they occupied a political leadership position or were politically active, and this association is not always deliberate. Interestingly male participants denied that its usage was gendered.

> Mshengu: “Maybe the term appears like it’s used to address to men, but I don’t believe it’s the case. I mean, we all share the same goal and experiences in the page, so to think that by saying comrade I’m only talking to men is going on a tangent”.

> Tsotlhe: “Personally, I think there are more women than men at Rhodes, which might be the case in the UCKAR page, so saying that women are not and cannot be comrades does not sound right. I mean we have about 10 female SRC members and 6 males, that should speak volumes”.

These male students seemed not conscious of the way the term is being used in the group. This could be because men are oblivious and less sensitive to gender disparities (Radke et al., 2018). While the UCKAR group’s understanding of comradeship may be contested in terms of gender, it also raises questions about the ways in which members benefit from liberation. The next theme addresses the notions of reaping the rewards of liberation.

Reaping the Rewards of Liberation

The contested meaning of being a comrade was evident in various posts and comments on the UCKAR Facebook group, particularly in the Cuban cigar advertisement. One member referred to Castro's presence in the ad with "viva comrade" and this elicited a number of responses and reactions under his comment. Although the post was not a political call to action, it was evident from the comments on the cigar advertisement that Fidel Castro, a socialist Cuban politician and revolutionary, was being invoked as a hero for students. The image is especially ambiguous because the cigars in association with Castro evoke not only Cuba and socialism, but simultaneously also luxury and leisure, as they were clearly overpriced for the student population, who mostly rely on the NSFAS bursary scheme. This relates to Iqani's work on the meanings associated with luxury and consumption among Black South Africans (Iqani, 2017). She argues that Black South Africans' increased consumerism following the demise of apartheid is not about trading political values for acquiring material goods; it is indeed about making a statement about their newfound freedom (Iqani, 2017). Because this emerging Black middle class now has access to goods and services that were previously unavailable to them, they have used their consumption to affirm their identity and to represent their freedom from apartheid (Iqani, 2017).

It is however important to note that in South Africa, such associations with consumption are being challenged and more recently excessive consumption has been associated with corruption through new policies like lifestyle audits (Shaw, 2013). The country has experienced high levels of systemic corruption or state capture in recent years, and the government has introduced lifestyle audits for politicians and government officials to identify corruption through excessive consumption.

Facebook groups recently acquired a new affordance to allow members to take on identities that do not require real names. Because the UCKAR Facebook group provides an "anonymous" option for users who do not want their identity known, some members choose pseudonyms for fun rather than necessity or privacy. It is very common for members to use funny or creative pseudonyms as a way to express their personality or sense of humour, and they are usually inside jokes, personal references, or just plain silliness. The UCKAR Facebook administrator cautioned that they all still go through a verification process to check their identities and intentions for joining the group. An account using the pseudonym "Gupta Familia" trolled the author of the cigar post, saying that such things were for rich people like himself, not Rhodes students.

Using the Gupta family (profile) as an avatar highlights that such luxurious consumption is a clear sign of corruption and reserved for corrupt people like the Guptas. It therefore challenges the students who celebrated the cigars as a sign of the rewards of freedom to instead scorn them as a sign of corruption. Based on the inside jokes referring to student life they have previously posted the “Gupta Familia” troll is probably either a senior Rhodes student or a former Rhodes student, and a Xhosa speaker. This profile had previously made various multi-lingual posts holding the SRC accountable for their actions. It is notable that the use of memes in this post allows users to engage in “playful politics” (Mortensen and Neumayer, 2021) by adopting the role of the Gupta persona with an element of irony and satire and create a carnivalesque subversion (Bakhtin, 1984).

The “Gupta Familia” comment in this case sarcastically challenges the representation of freedom in the post and instead suggests that such luxury is based in corruption. The statement therefore seems to undermine the socialist values of the comrades, suggesting that they are supporting corruption due to their love of luxury goods. It resonates with Thabo Mbeki’s (2006) cautionary words about other ANC “comrades” who abuse their positions of power for their own financial gain. The discussion on the UCKAR Facebook group therefore shows how meanings linked consumption enable the notion of the comrade to be contested.

5.5 Hustle sociality

In this section, I will be exploring what I have termed the “hustle” sociality on the UCKAR Facebook group which is the expression of a group identity in which members conceptualise each other as part of a marketplace which is supportive of Black entrepreneurship. I will discuss how this sociality is characterized by a sense of community and trust, as members work together to ensure that scams have no place there. Finally, I will explore this sociality and its implications for understanding the intersections of student life, commercial interactions and neoliberalism subjectivity.

A total number of 63 posts in the duration of my research were made in relation to supporting “Black business” and “supporting local”. In one post, a member posted an advert for her food

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business and described her restaurant as the very first Black owned kasi food restaurant in Makhanda serving proper traditional foods. The post was also described as having "student friendly prices" and ended with a #supportBlackbusiness and #supportaBlackchild hashtags. The post received 292 reactions, 81 comments and 62 shares and was one of the popular posts in the group. Some comments mentioned and tagged friends excitedly to spread the information about the place and the "heritage" food sold there. Using "student friendly" prices is an attempt to woo students as the target market. In the post, members of the group use informal language that is more commonly used in online spaces, like "hmu" (hit me up), "DM" and "TIA" (Thanks in advance). Such language is not formal or business like, but it serves the purpose of communication within the group. While the phrases like "Black business" or "Black child" may have the potential to be exclusionary, the interviews revealed that they were not intended to exclude businesses by other people of other races and ethnicities or a call away from certain businesses. Rather, it was conceptualised as diversifying shopping as students would invariably be supporting big commercial chains like Pick n Pay, Spar and Woolworths, thus, this strategy would enable them to actively expand the range of shops they visited to include small Black businesses.

> Qhayiya: "When we say Black business, we don't really mean Black, as in Black skin. It's more like saying support upcoming entrepreneurs and baby preneurs, by mentioning Black we are just looking at those who have been or still are oppressed the most. Like Shoprite or Checkers, they are already rich mos so here we are just trying to make fellow students get support nyana. Like levelling the playing the field if you would".

The notion of "hustling" in the context of the precarity of South African township society, as set out by Mbembe (2019), does not take on the negative meanings associated with the word in other contexts, but values an individual's ability to succeed despite incredible odds. The members post about their own products and services, as well as links to their own social media profiles and websites to promote their entrepreneurship. Walters (2019) explains how neoliberalism has created subjectivities where entrepreneurship becomes everyone's primary identity and competition shapes people's identities. She critiques how such neoliberal subjectivities where people identify as competitive entrepreneurs rather than citizens with collective rights engender an unequal, hyper-individualistic society where inequalities are justified as variations in business acumen. If people are not successful, they are blamed for not working as hard or having as good a brand as others they need to compete with, even if these are massive corporations. Neoliberalism fabricates a sense of fairness in a very unequal society where the successful are seen as more deserving than others (Walters, 2019). In this context, “supporting Black businesses” emerges as a counter-discourse questioning the neoliberal myth of a level playing field and highlighting the enduring legacy of structural inequalities that shape and constrain the opportunities and outcomes of historically marginalized groups. By bringing attention to the need for affirmative support of Black businesses, the discourse dissects the myth of meritocracy, suggesting that equal access to opportunity and success is not guaranteed by a neoliberal free market system. Instead, it demands recognition of the unique struggles and challenges that Black entrepreneurs in particular face due to entrenched systematic racism.

A critical attitude to entrepreneurial identities as oppressive, as Walters (2019) suggests, may not be relevant in South Africa where entrepreneurial identity needs to be considered in the context of the history of South Africa. Black entrepreneurship was completely eradicated under apartheid (Mbeki and Rossow, 2010). It was movements like the Black Consciousness Movement which resisted the patronising attitudes of white liberals and their limited critiques of petty apartheid and instead placed Black agency and Black ownership and entrepreneurship at the centre of liberation.

In another UCKAR Facebook post, a member shared information about a Black Management Forum at Rhodes University, urging members of the UCKAR to join. The platform was described as dedicated to “Black excellence” aiming to assist young “hustlers” and aspiring business leaders by providing opportunities for members to gain managerial skills to kickstart and maintain their professional careers and enhance their leadership skills. The post also generated a number of reactions and comments of students booking their spots and one commented on how it was “about time” they received career guidance because of how tough the employment sector was especially for Black students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who are nevertheless still usually expected to own a car for even entry level jobs. Black consciousness terminology such as “Black excellence” invokes Steve Biko’s Black Community Programmes (BCP). For Biko (1998) the aim of the BCP was to engage in welfare work and programmes of self-help run by Blacks for Blacks. As Biko in Bizos (1998, p.43) explains:

> “Essentially to answer [the] problem” that the Black man is a defeated being who finds it very difficult to lift himself up by is bootstrings. He is alienated”. He is made to live all the time concerned with tomorrow”. Now we felt that we must attempt to defeat and break this

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> kind of attitude and instil once more a sense of dignity within the Black man So what we did was to design various types of programmes, present these to the Black community We believed that we are teaching people by example."

These programmes aimed to create a sense of agency and self-reliance, to improving the lives of Black people. Thus, the use of similar phrases "Black child you are on your own" is mentioned in a number of posts in the UCKAR group; it resonates with Biko's solution to Black problems in the 'township economy' in South Africa (ROAPE, 2018). Therefore, the UCKAR Facebook group are not only supporting each other in their individual pursuits but are also building a sense of community and solidarity. By sharing resources and promoting or "plugging" each other, they are helping to level the playing field for everyone in the group. They are not only focused on individual gain, but also helping others and creating a space where everyone can strive. An akin example is the group's decision as stated by an admin in the interviews to charge external businesses who were active member of the Facebook group but who were not students to advertise. This decision demonstrates that the UCKAR Facebook group prioritises the needs of students over profit. By providing free advertising for students and charging businesses, they would be able to generate income and support students in need. Such policies support individual growth and success, but they also create a supportive community.

In addition to this kind of support, members of the UCKAR Facebook group also work together to protect each other from scams and other forms of exploitation. For example, they expose scammers and frequently warn each other about potential scams. This collective vigilance helps to protect the group and its members from harm.

> Admin: It's our responsibility to protect our members. Sometimes that's challenging cause we can't screen everyone who promotes their businesses, but should we discover that you are scamming the students, we ban you from the group and warn the others...Of course, this happens after we have verified the accusations or complaints."

This quote by the admin emphasizes the group's commitment to protecting its members and working together to create a safe and supportive environment. It shows that members of the group have a sense of responsibility towards each other, and that they are committed to protecting each other from scams and other forms of exploitation. Despite the hustle sociality being arguably individualistic, focusing on individual achievement, there is also a sense of community and looking

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out for each other reminds us that success comes from supporting and caring for others. These different representations of care coexist in the group, corresponding to Mbembe's (2001) claim that post-colonial care blurs the lines between the personal and the political in what he refers to as "fusionist." He asserts that fusionist form of care is characterised by its “intensity,” intimacy,” and “improvisation.” In other words, it is deeply personal and intimate type of care that also has the potential to be improvised and creative in the face of struggles.

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CHAPTER SIX

UNEXPECTED SOCIALITIES - FINDINGS PART 2

6.1 Introduction

This chapter continues setting out my findings on the various socialities I have observed on the UCKAR Facebook group and provides a detailed discussion and analysis of the final two socialities which I call ubuntu sociality and groovist sociality. In the ubuntu sociality, I discuss how members of the group remind each other to aspire to relationships of care modelled on an ideal of an African family. I start by conceptualising the term “ubuntu”, then discuss family and shared struggles and then ubuntu sociality and gender relations in the family. Lastly, the groovist sociality where members conceptualise others as sharing an identity shaped by alcohol consumption and being fun-loving, social, stylish and disdainful of bookish respectability.

6.2 Ubuntu sociality

In this section, I will discuss a type of sociality that plays out on the UCKAR group inspired by ideal models of the African care family and ubuntu that I have called “Ubuntu sociality”. Below I will show how the UCKAR Facebook group serves as a platform for members to support and care for each other in both material and emotional ways, as well as providing academic support. In this way, the group functions as a space where members are able to rely on each other, creating a sense of mutual care and interdependence. I also assess how these ties among group members are conceptualised as familial links. Then, using concepts such as decoloniality, ethics of care, gemeinschaft, and gesellschaft, I show how the concept of family enables a model for a virtual community based on relationality and notions of care.

Conceptualising ubuntu

In this study, ubuntu sociality refers to the way that the concept of “ubuntu” is applied to social relationships and interactions in the UCKAR group. In African societies, the concept of ubuntu is deeply ingrained in the way people relate to each other and their environment. It is based on the principle of “I am because we are” (Tutu, 1999, p.106), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of people and the importance of the community over the individual. The concept of ubuntu has been linked to the idea of African personhood. In traditional African societies, the idea of personhood is often understood in terms of one's relationship to others and to the community (Maphalala, 2011). Mudimbe (1994, p.15) has stated how African personhood is a "complex of an 'I' and a 'we…the individual is not just a 'commodity of power', but also part of a greater 'we' where the individual is a 'node' in a network of relationships." Mudimbe (1994)'s understanding of African personhood centres around the distinction between the "I" and the "we." He argues that in Western thought, the "I" is seen as a separate autonomous entity, while the "we" is a social construction that is secondary to the individual. In contrast, in African thought, the "we" is primary, and the "I" is dependent on and exists within this "we." Thus, the African individual is "caught up in a network of relations" and is "imbued with others" (Mudimbe 1994, p. 29). Nyamnjoh'(2002) argues that care is a fundamental aspect of African social life. For Nyamnjoh (2017), African care is characterised by a sense of "incompleteness" – a sense that ones' identity is not fixed or static, but is rather fluid and dynamic. This idea of incompleteness is related to the idea of "conviviality", which Nyamnjoh defines as "living together in ways that are characterised by inclusivity, tolerance, hospitality and generosity" (Nyamnjoh, 2017, p.4).

Not only is the concept of ubuntu based in building strong relationships (Ramphele, 1995) but it is also rooted in caring about humanity, sharing resources and working together to support the well-being of the community as a whole (Mkandawire, 2006). Similarly, Steve Biko talks about ubuntu as based on extending the imagined bonds of family relationships more broadly to others in the community (Biko, 1978). Maphalala (2011, p. 30) defines ubuntu as a way of living that "acknowledges the fact that we are born into existence through and because of other people, and therefore, we exist for other people and not ourselves". This quote highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of individuals within the ubuntu worldview. It emphasizes that our identity and existence are shaped by our relationships with others.

Scholars have argued that ubuntu is a way of relating or a sociality that might enable us to address social challenges. Ubuntu, a philosophy based on respect, compassion and community can be used to address social challenges, heal divisions and build a better society (Ramphele, 1995: Mkandawire, 2006) and Ndlozi (2016) who argue that it can help address development challenges in Africa and the legacy of apartheid and colonialism in South Africa. It could be argued that there are some notable differences between earlier and contemporary conceptions of ubuntu. Earlier conceptions of ubuntu were more focused on the idea of community and collective responsibility, while recent applications of the concept have been more focused on ethical behaviour and individual responsibility (Eze, 2019). Additionally, earlier conceptions of ubuntu were more closely tied to traditional African communities and customs (Ramose, 2004), while recent applications of the concept have been adapted to fit modern, globalized society (Ramphele, 1995; Mkandawire, 2006). Finally, earlier conceptions were less explicitly political, while recent uses of the concept have been explicitly linked to social justice and equality (Ndlozi, 2016). This section will discuss how the UCKAR Facebook group invokes the ideal African family.

Family and shared struggles

Members of the UCKAR group share a sense of belonging and support that resembles the belonging and support evident in an ideal African family. This is evidenced in the way members of the group frequently use terminology to address each other such as “mntase” (sibling), family, “bhuda/bra” (brother), and “sis'wam” (my sister), as well as the way they support and care for one another in times of need, placing emphasis in the group on mutual encouragement and assistance which points to the relationality evident in an ideal family and kinship.

The group is a space where students could ask for help, where admins and fellow group members encouraged the group to help others and where students who were helped could express their gratitude. Support for students in need works on this group and they have a project called the United Student Movement (USM). Students openly and anonymously ask for help in the group. Such ubuntu sociality in the group differs from the notion of charity as members of the group focus on mutual support and seek to address the root cause of social issues and promote social justice (Hanson, 2015). On the contrary, charity is a Western way of conceptualising helping others which reinforces social hierarchies where some people are considered morally superior to those they are helping (Hanson, 2015).

A member's post expressing gratitude to the administrators and other group members for helping them at a time of need illustrates such ubuntu sociality. The post began with "Greetings UCKAR family" and goes on to describe how the “UCKAR family” came to the rescue of other students who were without food due to power and water outages. One of the members even volunteered to make arrangements for the student in need to come and shower at his house. The post therefore

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shows how a notion of group sociality is based on the familial model of referring to one another as family, demonstrating empathy and understanding.

The metaphors of care however, extended beyond notions of family to suggest political solidarity. The same Facebook post also referred to UCKAR members and admins as "indeed leaders" who worked diligently to raise donations for "injured soldiers, an interesting metaphor for students in need. Using the metaphor “injured soldiers” for students facing economic difficulties created a range of associations. It conjures up images of vulnerability and a temporary condition, suggesting that the “injured soldiers” needed care, support and rescue. It also implies that their economic struggles are a temporary condition, a result of circumstances beyond their control rather than personal failures.

The post shows how the notion of the family is associated with the revolutionary leader and soldier, so foregrounding a notion of caring that is not simply about nurturing, but also with resistance and fighting for others. The post concluded with the phrase "no student is left behind" a common slogan in the USM project which assists students who are unfunded or struggle with daily necessities such as food, toiletries, and sometimes bus tickets. The post's mix of compassionate and political language produces a complex and thought-provoking contrast. Using "family" alongside terms and terms like "leaders" and "injured soldiers" emphasises the caring language's emotional and personal aspect while simultaneously disclosing the post's political and societal nature.

The sociality expressed here appears to have linkages to “comrade sociality” in the sense that fraternity, and comradeship are linked to care and family. Caring for students who are struggling due to a lack of resources or funding is thus seen as a means to fight the colonial system that has created or is still causing these students in the post above to struggle. Caring for others is thus potentially a kind of activism and a means of challenging the present political system. Care has indeed been conceptualised as a strategy to oppose colonial systems of oppression, and ties to Lorde's (1982) work linking notions of care with decolonized politics. According to Lorde (1982), caring for oneself and others is a way to resist oppressive structures and establish more equal and just communities.

Resisting oppressive spaces also meant reinscribing and reappropriating meanings and claiming ownership of institutions. Through claiming belonging at Rhodes University, this contributes to a

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strong sense of community and family within the group. For example, someone commented on the above post with purple hearts, a symbol associated with the university's colours and identity. This suggests that the students associate such solidarity and communal care with the university and the UCKAR group. I have discussed this reappropriation of university symbols in the previous chapter as part of Rhodent sociality. Such appropriation of university symbols is also evident in other posts linking being part of the university with being part of a family in phrases such as "my blood will forever be purple," and "purple fam". With this framework, care is seen as an essential part of daily life, and relationships are based on mutual support and responsibility.

In the interviews, the admin stated that the funds used to help struggling students are raised by charging advertising on the group and that it sometimes comes from their own pockets because for them, the UCKAR Facebook group is one family, helping each other during rough times because they know the group members would do the same if they were in a similar situation. During interviews, group members shared the same sentiments that they have found a “family” in the UCKAR members.

> Simthandile: "I feel like we are family away from home and each other's keeper. For instance, I'm the first one in my family to attend varsity and sometimes my family does not understand some challenges I go through the way a fellow Rhodes student will, I mean these are the immediate people that can help me before my family tries to come up with a plan.”

In the above post, the idea of being each other’s “keeper” creates a specific meaning. The biblical phrase “brother’s keeper” has been understood as having responsibility to look after each other even if one is not family and this links to notions of ubuntu (Scholarship Institute, 2024). Such shared lived experiences can often create stronger bonds than families who do not understand the new worlds their sons and daughters have entered. The idiom “having your back” means looking out for someone in case they need assistance, and it invokes the idea of protecting someone who is being attacked from behind. The idiom likely has a military origin and in this quote, we see both this notion of protecting each other from attack and the notion of care linked to family.

The interviews seem to reveal a different form of caring that includes nurturing and support. These different notions of care may seem contradictory since, on the one hand, care is associated with very personal forms of giving, encouraging, or donating, while on the other, it is associated with war, soldiers, and revolutionary.

Another illustration of the caring family sociality is a post by a member encouraging students to study more, not give up, and to ensure that their grades improve the following semester. The author referred to the group members as "bantase" (siblings), suggesting that studying is presented as a shared struggle, not a competitive one - students are resisting any sense of shame for bad marks. Such notions of shame may make mental health struggles harder (Vizin et al., 2015).

The post received 226 likes, 51 comments, and 13 shares. One member related her story of how she had failed a module and needed this push to not drop out due to family pressure. Several students responded with motivational messages, with one offering free tutoring and another offering emotional support if they needed someone to talk to. The comments went on to discuss students' mental health and how such good advice might sometimes benefit individuals who are on the verge of quitting school. This post demonstrates how members of the group care for each other emotionally and mentally.

These forms of support are slightly different. The support we have seen included material help, such as in the assistance shown in the above post, or encouragement for maintaining a sense of self-respect in the face of academic shaming and other mental health challenges, and lastly you will focus on solidarity and taking on someone else’s fight as another form of care. In another post, a member of the group asked fellow students to assist and support "one of our own" who had been sexually assaulted on campus. The message urged students to take action and challenge the management for doing nothing to ensure the victim's safety. A number of students agreed with the author's opinions and wished to see justice served and a conviction obtained both on campus and in court. In the comments, some members threatened to spam Rhodes Administration emails and march to help “one of our own”. This shows how far group members were willing to go to fight for their fellow students. In an interview, one of the group members who previously had a 'justice hashtag' dedicated to her, remarked that she had been suicidal after the assault and the students' support made her feel loved, believed, and inspired.

> Stompie: “You have no idea how many times I considered un-aliving myself because of the fear and anxiety of being shamed and living with the stigma of sexual assault.

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> Some members offered me accommodation because the university had temporarily suspended me to go home because I was suicidal. For the first time, I felt like I had a family that could fight for me when I couldn't"

It is the university policy to send students who express suicidal thoughts back home where they can be cared for by their families. This student clearly considered her fellow students as a more caring environment in which to heal. In this post, we can observe that care is expressed as material support, mental health support and solidarity and fighting external challenges as a group. The findings about ubuntu sociality emerging from the various posts and interviews above show that in this context the notion of networked individualism (Wellman, 2001) does not necessarily apply as a concept and communal place-based solidarity is indeed championed by the group. Members of the group framed the issue of sexual assault in the above post as a shared experience and a collective action, rather than focusing solely on the individual experience of the victim. The use of statements like "our own" and "support" in the post and comments reflect the values of the group where they are not just concerned with their own individual experiences, but with the collective of experiences of the group as a whole. The fact that the group is online does not negate the sense of place and belonging that is created through the sharing of stories and experiences. The members of the group are still tied to a physical location - in this case, Rhodes University and the city of Makhanda. Because the members of the group share a sense of belonging, identity, and a focus on the group's general well-being as a result of their membership, one may argue that it also exhibits "gemeinschaft" characteristics (Tonnies, 1912). For Tonnies (1912), the gemeinschaft is characterised by feelings of sympathy, personal intimacy, and a sense of community.

The individual stories recounted in posts and comments on the UCKAR Facebook group also show the role of these as a source of inspiration for resistance and activism. In this scenario, their stories bear witness to the experiences of sexual assault and violence, and they can serve as inspiration to others who have had similar experiences. This is supported by Geyekye (1992) who argues that African personhood is defined by a sense or relationality, or the idea that the individual is connected and dependent on others. At the same time, he acknowledges that this does not mean that the individual is not important, but that they are always in relation to others (Gyekye, 1992). It could be argued that these stories and knowledge are shared in a social context and may be seen as ways to maintain relationships and build a very particular form of sociality in the UCKAR group. In this section, when the UCKAR group members say "we", they mean that they see

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themselves as part of a collective, united by a shared commitment to helping those in need. The sense of "we", of sociality, transcends individual interests. This understanding of "we" creates a sense of care, emphasizing the need for collective action to create a more just and equitable environment.

Ubuntu sociality and gender relations in the family

In the UCKAR Facebook group, there was a distinct difference in how men and women were conceptualised in their role within the African family. For example, in a post, a member was advertising fragrances, claiming that her prospective customers would smell like a "rich uncle" if they purchased them. The "rich uncle" statement suggests that the fragrance will make the wearer appear wealthy and successful, reinforcing the link between masculinity and wealth or success. As noted by Mthembu (2019) in African notions of masculinity, the advertising also supports the idea that men's value is based on their ability to provide for and care for an extended family. Smelling like a rich uncle further reinforces Nzegwu's (1998) "Big man" image argument that African men are expected to powerful and wealthy, supporting the idea that wealth and power are essential components of masculinity that also determine their ability to care for their families. Underneath the post, one woman jokingly commented with "indoda must", (a man must) in response to several men's comments requesting contact details in order to place an order. The phrase "indoda must" is popular on South African social media, where many women use it to list the prerequisites they seek in a man or partner. This reinforces traditional views of masculinity, such as the association between men as providers more commonly referenced in relation to African masculinities (Ratele, 2017). In interviews, participants explained the context of this Facebook post.

> Nizole: Someone would say we are putting men under pressure but aowa guys 'indoda must' from time to time. Like 'indoda must' send abo ma e-wallet from time to time, like surprise my stomach with some parmesan what-what, once in a while and let's forget Pothole and Donkey bandla.
>
> Abo: But how will a man take care of you if he can't take care of himself? 'Indoda must' dress good and smell good. I can fall in love with a gent before I even see him, just smelling his cologne. No guys a man must represent himself and his girl and not smell like the environment.

The conversation moved from the notion of men expressing their care through financial support to the importance of men caring for themselves through grooming. It is notable that some types of care are absent. These statements draw on, and perpetuate traditional gendered ideas and expectations of care in familial and societal settings (Nzegwu, 1998). These examples lead to the conclusion that ubuntu sociality manifests itself in several ways; either as material support, emotional support, solidarity in fighting a shared threat, but sometimes it is expressed as gendered care. This indicates that all of these different caring socialities coexist in the community and sometimes exhibit contradictions. Ubuntu sociality provides a valuable perspective on the importance of collective care and support.

This section has looked at a specific caring sociality expressed by the members of the UCKAR Facebook group mean when they say "we". This section explains how the UCKAR is a space where members can establish solidarity and resist oppression and create a community among those who feel marginalised or those who sympathize with the marginalized. The group’s practices reflect the African concept of ubuntu, which emphasizes interconnectedness and interdependence. The sense of “we” helps create a sense of belonging and resistance, while also fulfilling the African ethics of care.

6.3 Groovists sociality

In this section, I will be showing how the term “groovist” is associated with a type of sociality associated primarily with alcohol consumption but also with sociability, glamour and entertainment. I also consider differences in alcohol consumption e.g., tipsy vs passing-out drunk, the importance of style, drinking and camaraderie. I will then show how the meaning of being a “groovist” is expressed on the UCKAR Facebook group in relation to the notions of respectability and social upliftment.

The term “groovist” was frequently used as a term of address for a fellow student on the UCKAR Facebook group. The word “groove” has been popular in the field of music, and it has various meanings depending on description, context and era (Hosken, 2020). “Groove” has been used to describe a specific feeling or mood in music, but this feeling can be subjective and vary from person to person. In the 1940s, the term was used in the jazz and swing scene to refer to a specific music routine or style (Kernfeld, 2002). During this time, the term was often used to describe the

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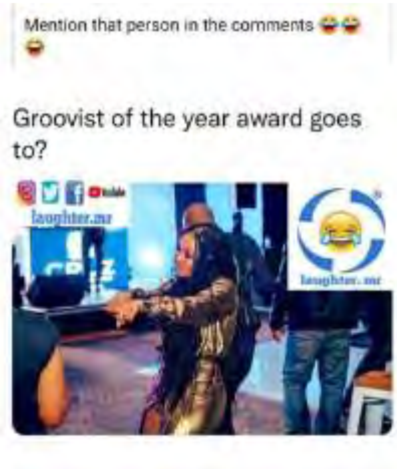
aesthetic properties of the music, such as its rhythm, energy, and impact on the listener. The concept of groove also became associated with genres like funk and soul, particularly in the 1970s. During that time, it also began to be used to describe something that was cool (Hein, 2011). For music psychologists and researchers who have conducted a number of groove-related studies in the last couple of decades, groove is not simply a feature of music, but an experience that combines perception of music with a pleasurable desire to move and emotional response (Senn et al., 2020; Lustig and Tan, 2020; Haugen and Danielsen, 2020). In the South African context, "groove" has become a term given to any place where people go to dance, have drinks and socialize (Ranthako, 2022). In this context, groove is not just a term for music, but a way of describing a whole scene or subculture that is characterized by its focus on having fun and socializing with others.

Despite the popularity of groove culture in South Africa, it has been the subject of debate and controversy since it is strongly associated with alcohol consumption. Some people argue that the culture of drinking and partying is harmful to society, particularly for young people. Groove spots or settings can be associated with drugs, alcohol abuse, and violence (Ranthako, 2022). The tragic deaths of 21 under-age children at Enyobeni tavern in 2022 sparked intense scrutiny and debate about the impact of groove culture on young people (Subramoney, 2022). Others, however, argue that "groove" is simply a way for people to relax and have fun, and that it is not necessarily associated with negative behaviours. They argue that groove culture is a positive force in South Africa, bringing people together and fostering social interaction (Hlalethwa, 2020). South Africans created the term "groovist" to describe an energetic and outgoing person who goes out to "groove" often and loves to have a good time (Urban Dictionary, 2023). In this section, I consider being a "groovist" in the UCKAR group as a particular kind of sociality with its own meanings that specify how to relate to others and to understand the group.

Groove and glamour

A striking example referencing the term groovist was in a meme posted on the UCKAR Facebook group asking users to name someone to whom they would give the title of "groovist" of the year.


Mention that person in the comments 😂😂😂

Groovist of the year award goes to?

The image replicated in the meme features Nomzamo Mbatha, a celebrity in the South African entertainment industry, wearing makeup and a glittery and gold elegant evening gown, seemingly dancing while pointing out someone. From her beaming expression, Mbatha appears to be having fun and is sharing her joy with others around her. She is surrounded by males who are not as well dressed as she is; one is wearing worn-out denim and is not looking at the camera. Mbatha is the only one who is facing the camera, and she looks to be motioning at someone else in the room to dance with her; presumably the viewer of the meme is being called to come forward as the Groovist of the year. These words suggest an awards ceremony. One may analyse this meme by considering its context. It is important to note that Mbatha is an award-winning actress, who was voted Most Influential Young South African in Lifestyle Magazine and also won an international Goddess Beauty Award in Los Angeles, an award that celebrates extraordinary accomplishments of global women who are trailblazers and trendsetters inspiring Black girls and women. The meme therefore suggests that the juxtaposition of the text with the image of Mbatha means that she is calling the viewer to the stage to join her as a celebrity and fellow "groovist". It makes sense that a celebrity meme was chosen because being a celebrity in South Africa is associated with the glamour and sociability groovists aspire to, and Mbatha is the epitome of that. The post received 880 likes, 91 comments, and was shared 83 times, showing that its humour deeply resonated with members of the group. The meme foregrounds the sociability, success, and style of groovists while concealing the addiction and over-indulgence typically associated with groove.

Understanding the amount of influence celebrities have in South Africa helps provide a more accurate understanding of the meme's true symbolism. Mbatha's gold outfit exudes grandeur,

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class, and style. The meme therefore shows that the concept of being a groovist is celebrated and serves as an aspiration. The terms "groove" and "groovist" are frequently used in the UCKAR Facebook group, roughly from my observation on a weekly basis, especially after a weekend when the majority of the group members had gone out to party. Elsewhere on the UCKAR Facebook page, some of the most common postings and profiles of persons referred to as "certified groovists" featured photos of well-dressed students alongside photographs of pricey drinks and students smoking hookah pipes. A particular type of social media post that seemed to be favoured by students on the UCKAR Facebook page who were identified as groovists was the embedding an Instagram Boomerang video (a video loop that plays forward and backward, repeatedly) on the UCKAR Facebook group. The looped image creates a particular affective sensory experience (Leaver et al., 2020), as the images of moments of glamour and indulgence are looped over and over.

I asked my participants to comment on some of the UCKAR Facebook posts about groovists. Groove creates a different world in which students forget about poverty and its challenges. Also, glamour replaces shame to inverse the status of the students like Bakhtin's carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984).

> Ntsika: The way groove is filled with pretty girls, you might find yourself ordering a Remy Martin VSOP with those fire cracking things like they do at Konka, with your NSFAS allowance, for a girl you will never see. Not forgetting that gents at groove try to prove that they have money by buying drinks for girls.
>
> Nizole: Groove is where we all turn up and forget our problems. I can tell you that you can go with R50 and come back drunk and lit. People buy you drinks and imagine not having proof after having a good sip of that Henny, oh and my outfit…My friends have to see how on fire the night was, don't let my parents know this.

It is interesting that the majority of these groovists' profiles shared a similar background - they were all Black, had attended public schools, and were from eKasi (townships populated primarily by Black South Africans) or had village origins. They were therefore, not from established middle class families, but could be understood to be from families who were often struggling to make ends meet. Clearly, despite their humble origins these students saw being a "groovist" as aspirational and something worth celebrating, equating to a good life, success and claiming your space in society. It is interesting that their consumption of alcohol was not associated with the misery of poor communities where alcoholism is common, but instead with aspiration into the middle class and indeed into the elite of the celebrity world.

NSFAS money vs Groove money

In the UCKAR group, the term “groovist” is conceptualised in relation to ideas of spending money. An example is a post where one member asks about when they will be receiving “groove” money and then in the same post, the member pretends that this use of the adjective was a mistake and corrects it to ask when they will be receiving “NSFAS money”. This post elicited a number of witty responses, indicating that this association was a common source of student humour. These suggest that alcohol is budgeted for, in the students' living allowance. This is considered problematic because the students' living allowance is intended to support only essential expenses incurred while studying and is paid from the NSFAS grant established to provide financial assistance to students from low-income households who are attending public universities or TVET colleges. Here, in analysing the meaning of such posts, a binary pair of frugality/excessive consumption clearly emerges. It juxtaposes the earnestness of the associations with the NSFAS grant of social betterment through individual effort and hard work, study and frugality, with the world of “groove” that conceptualises social advancement as arising from popularity with others, glamour and social networks built on camaraderie of the groove.

The humour in the posts functions to subvert the dominant discourses around student progress or social mobility in general. This is because in the university space, the frugal discourses around student social mobility are dominant, but in the groovist space a carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) logic rules where the dominant discourse is momentarily inverted for, and those without power, students from township schools become glamorous social figures of aspiration surrounded by admiring onlookers. This provides moments of relief away from the rigid tradition of attending university, where students from township schools may achieve poor results despite working hard and avoiding distractions, due to their lack of preparedness. The dissonance creates a space which invites carnivalesque laughter (Bakhtin, 1984), in consequence, the humour is able to question or rebel against the institutional discourse of an academic meritocracy.

The majority of respondents who commented on this post on “groove money” were Black as is expected as the majority of NSFAS grantees are Black students. Similar to the example about the groovist of the year, their profiles imply that they have an eKasi backgrounds, attended public schools and appear to be from the lower classes. In these comments, groove life was associated with having a good life, claiming their space, and enjoying whatever measure of success they may have. For groovists, claiming such enjoyments as legitimate and deserved is their central concern. When asked to comment on these Facebook posts from their UCKAR group, Tsothle quoted a popular TikTok earworm that he lives by:

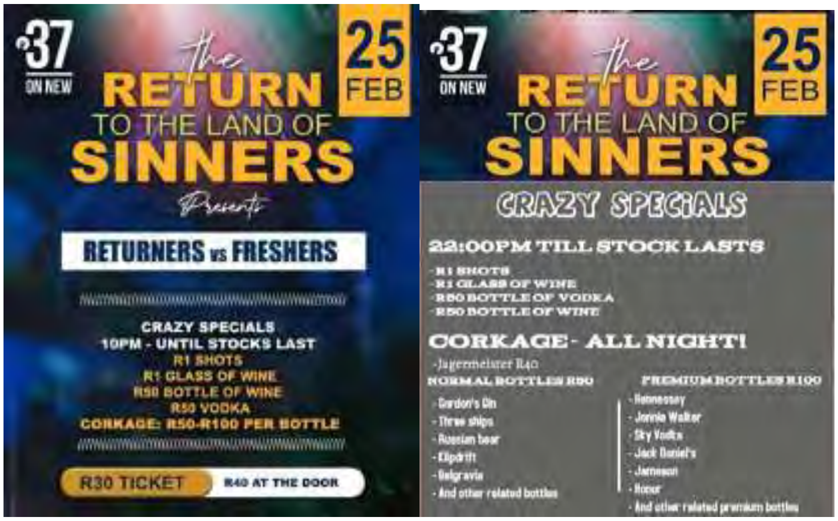
> Tsothle: “Any little money, or little change, na enjoyment."

This quote originates from a homeless Nigerian man on TikTok and has stuck with Tsothle. The audio meme, for him therefore alludes with how being a groovist is associated with temporarily putting aside or postponing financial responsibilities and having fun, enjoying groovist and self-care. The interviewee's reference of a TikTok earworm presents a picture of individuals identifying with those who share their interests. TikTok, according to Zulli & Zulli (2020), is based on affective tastes of expression, play, and memetics, as well as topic interest where users are algorithmically organized into groups based on the other videos they have viewed. These shared affective worlds of taste are based in shared cultural understandings, such as the context of the spaces we occupy, the expectations of the individuals we come together, and the norms we operate within (Goffman, 1959; Hogan, 2010). This is consistent with Hall's (1973) reception theory, which states that media texts contain a variety of messages that are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences. Thus, Tshothle adopts the affective message of the homeless Nigerian TikTok man (producer) because they share similar experiences, culture, and background (being Black and from the lower classes).

Moments of Black consumption should not necessarily be viewed as foolish indulgence, as for many Black South Africans, it is meaningful and considered a statement celebrating freedom and what was denied to Black people during Apartheid (Iqani 2017). Iqani (2017) contests the idea that members of the Black middle-class are superficial materialists who lust after the good life and copying white’s lifestyles. Instead, Iqani (2017) aims to expose the hypocrisy aimed at the Black middle class implying that once they have attained a decent income, they are supposed to resist flashy, materialistic lifestyles and to exhibit a consumer discipline that is not expected from their white counterparts. This provides a context for making sense of why groovists feel the need to assert their place in society and enjoy things they could not previously afford to enjoy, as a celebration of Black freedom and access to a good life that was previously denied to Black South Africans.

Siyaphuza Siyapass'a and the Paradox of Groove Sociality

Being a "groovist" is conceptualised by members of the UCKAR Facebook group as someone who embodies a work-play balance, meaning they know when to make time for leisure and social activities. An advertisement posted on the UCKAR Facebook group for an event called "Return to the land of sinners" was clearly associated with the groovist sociality. It was posted with the caption "siyaphuza siyapass'a (we drink and pass) and dancing emojis were posted on the UCKAR group. For students, this means that groove/drinking and school are not exclusive, that one does not have to choose between them. This siyaphuza siyapass'a slogan resonates with slogans from the #FeesMustFall. The advertisement advertised cheap alcohol that was going to be sold during that all-night party at an extremely lower price than usual.



37 ON NEW
25 FEB
the RETURN TO THE LAND OF SINNERS
Presents
RETURNERS vs FRESHERS
CRAZY SPECIALS
10PM - UNTIL STOCKS LAST
R1 SHOTS
R1 GLASS OF WINE
R50 BOTTLE OF WINE
R50 VODKA
CORKAGE: R50-R100 PER BOTTLE
R30 TICKET R40 AT THE DOOR

37 ON NEW
25 FEB
the RETURN TO THE LAND OF SINNERS
CRAZY SPECIALS
22:00PM TILL STOCK LASTS
-R1 SHOTS
-R1 GLASS OF WINE
-R50 BOTTLE OF VODKA
-R50 BOTTLE OF WINE
CORKAGE - ALL NIGHT!
-Jagermeister R40

NORMAL BOTTLES R50
- Gordon's Gin
- Three ships
- Russian bear
- Klipdrift
- Belgravia
- And other related bottles

PREMIUM BOTTLES R100
- Hennessey
- Jonnie Walker
- Sky Vodka
- Jack Daniel's
- Jameson
- [illegible]
- And other related premium bottles

The caption, "return to land of sinners" sarcastically equates groove with the religious notion of sin associated with overindulgence and addiction. Groovists however, mock the piety implied in the "land of sinners" and instead associate their type of sociality with happiness, fun, and sociability. The advert invokes and satirises such religious discourse not only through the text, but also through the imagery, as we can note in the light shining down in the background of the advert, which is reminiscent of the image used in Christianity to symbolize the light of God coming from above. Groovists here are responding to meanings of piety created by church groups. As 19th century sociologist Max Weber pointed out Calvinism associated piety and respectability with hard work and therefore enabled capitalist exploitation, (Weber and Parsons, 2003).

The advert is clearly satirising those who judge the groovists from the subjectivity of this Calvinist discourse, implying that they are overly religious, boring, prim and prudish whereas groovists are fun, sociable and also courageous in challenging hegemonic notions of respectability. Groovists would construct their identity in contrast to such religious respectability, which sometimes also meant that they aligned themselves in opposition to tradition and with rationality and science, as one of the participants explained when asked about the above post.

> Ntsika: "Christians bore me sometimes. Oh Lord! your kids bore me. They love to act so holy and righteous. You just reminded me of a time, some time back when one of those Mamfundisi wanna bes posted how people who were suffering from depression should come to her church to have depression prayed away. Like make it make sense, people die from mental illnesses, and you hear such an ignorant statement yho!"

Mamfundisi is a term used to refer to a pastor's wife or a respected religious leader. However, in the above quote, it has been appropriated to describe someone who presents themselves as excessively pious or holy, in a way that comes across as insincere. The use of this term in this way is used to mock the individuals who are overly simplistic and dismissive about mental health issues, suggesting that prayer or religious alone can cure mental illnesses like depression. This attitude ignores the complexity of metal health and the need for professional help, support and evidence-based treatment. The quote suggests that being a "mamfundisi" relates to gendered notions of respectability as the title perpetuates a gendered dynamic where women's respectability is contingent upon their support of male religious authority, rather than their own autonomous spiritual practice or their own personal achievements (Dever, 2010).

Such critiques need to be understood in terms of class, thus, relating it to Weber's Calvinist way of thinking. Weber (1905) suggests that Calvinist notions of respectability and hard work serve capitalism more than they serve God. He analyses Calvinism as a discourse that supported capitalism in its focus on hard work, individual responsibility and self-denialism. Weber uses ascetism to explain why such ideas that served capitalism would be appealing to Christians, as the ancient Christian tradition of ascetism similarly promoted an austere life, without luxuries or

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indulging in entertainment. If we understand Calvinism to serve capitalism, as Weber did, then the groovists' critique becomes more meaningful, as we can understand it as a response by those who reject the notions of respectability and meritocracy and its logic (McNamee and Miller, 2004). Such logic resonates with neoliberal ideas and implies that women become the guardians of respectability as they are the ones who police behaviour, neatness and sexual modesty as signs of appropriate class behaviour (Skeggs, 1997). From the "we drink and pass" groove sociality, I move to the short and temporary social interactions that take place at groove but have long-lasting impacts.

Notions of Camaraderie at Groove

The term "groovist" was also conceptualised in relation to ideas of camaraderie and loyalty on the UCKAR Facebook page. In one post, a group member describes the loyalty that strangers have at groove, where a stranger could safely ask you to guard their belongings and you would then guard them with great determination to ensure that no one touches "my stranger's stuff". Using a possessive noun such as "my stranger" shows that, for students, groove was an intimate space where people have automatic trust and friendship. A remarkable number of comments affirmed the post, with one commentator notably claiming that they "become family" at groove. One commentator who was clearly no longer a student expressed a deep longing for "family"—other "groove" members—that they have lost since graduating from university.

Other commentators explained that the influence of alcohol united them and allowed them to have fun in a way that they would never be able to have with their parents around. Clearly, their parents would disapprove of the groove and drinking lifestyle, but for these groovists, such alcohol-infused settings created an overall atmosphere of conviviality that reduced the divisions between people, allowing a space for strangers to freely interact face-to-face with one other without any judgement. Drinking alcohol together at groove allowed UCKAR members to form relationships through generating a different sociality than is achievable in non-groove and sober settings. This coincides with the findings of a study conducted by Sayette et al. (2012) which found that alcohol consumed in a social setting can enhance positive emotions and social bonding and reduces displays of negative emotions. Therefore, increasing the likelihood of "golden moments" (Sayette et al., 2012, p.2). Fairbairn and Sayette (2014), on the other hand, claim that those social bonds created in

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alcohol infused settings are an illusion. They argue that social drinking creates an illusion of belonging and foster social bonds between members of the group. Clearly, for groovists, being in the "groove" creates temporary bonds that are only limited to groove. It's intriguing that strangers at groove provide groovists with a stronger sense of belonging, loyalty and fun than parents. This is perhaps not surprising since in conservative homes, groove has been associated with bad company, substance abuse, promiscuity among others.

These very different moral approaches to alcohol resonate with Swartz's (2009) township moral dispositions. She explains that the township youth space is characterised by four distinct dispositions, of which the most respected moral disposition is that of the “right one” who is not too sheltered and protected although focused on their studies, but also able to embrace street sociability and drink with others on rare occasions. Few people are however able to achieve such balance and potential to achieve middle class respectability as the “right ones”. In contrast the "kasi" boys and girls who roamed at night, drank excessively, partied all the time, and wore expensive brands were considered less moral, however still very much acceptable as typical young people from the township space who were however unlikely to ever leave it (Swartz 2009).

The morality here is not necessarily only about judging overindulgence per se, as it is also about aspiration and the sacrifices involved in attempting a pathway into the middle class to support your family. "Groovists" arguably seem to aspire to the moral disposition of the “right one” described by Swartz (2009) as they aim to "phuza" and "passa". However, the overindulgence in alcohol, partying and sex characteristic of the “kasi boys and girls” can also be observed among groovists. According to interviews, it is popular for groovists to do "ukuwina" (derived from the word winning), an act of "winning" a female at groove and taking her home to have sex. Boys "bayawina" (they win) while girls "bayawinwa" (get won), and it is mainly strangers that meet at groove. It is also notable that groove favours the type of sociality based in networks that emerge from physical space. The university is small, so one can not really create their own groove, they must join the shared groove. To some extent, groovists might become a kind of “old boys” network who would support each other in future, but as most of them are not highly successful or influential, such network power (Castells, 2011) is arguably not likely to emerge.

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Groovist sociality" by its nature means maintaining a level of trust by keeping each other's secrets, resisting sharing images of groove on social networks as images of intoxication are not compatible with networked publics. When images are shared, they are used to discipline UCKAR groovists who had previously presented themselves as dependable and respectable and having the sense of balance that Swartz (2009) associates with the "right one". When people who are not expected to drink to stupor, such as student leaders and activists, drink excessively to the point of passing out, they can be called out on the UCKAR group. An example given for this is when one of the SRC members was mocked for passing out at groove.

> Vuyo: "Come on, you can't be a whole president and be found slumped over the chairs at groove, drunk, who will take you seriously? Not to say a pres must not drink, but guys, you have a reputation to protect, you are not just a Jack and Jill anymore, you are a leader. I know it sounds hypocritic, but it is what it is".

For UCKAR members such an image of an SRC leader was a shame, but for "normal" members, being intoxicated at groove was not as shocking.

This section has critically analysed what UCKAR members who associate with the culture of what groovists mean when they say "we". What this section focused on, demonstrates how different kinds of other socialities on the UCKAR Facebook group may compliment, or contrast with each other but also co-exist at the same time. The sociality of the groove is a Bakhtinian carnivalesque sociality where values of middle-class meritocracy and respectability are inverted (Bakhtin, 1984).

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CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study sought to find out how the UCKAR Facebook group facilitates African digital sociality. As noted in the findings chapters, members of the group rely on the group to organise and communicate with each other, to provide support, entertainment and celebrate their shared identity, but mostly to find ways of surviving materially and psychologically in a culturally alien space. While the growth of the internet and issues like COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns may have played a role in the increased membership in the group, the sense of comfortbelonging, community and family it provides appears to be an important factor in the lives of Rhodes University students. Most notably, however, is how sociality is closely tied to issues of meaning.

Findings show that the UCKAR group functions as a space of belonging where where sociality is facilitated by shared history, shared university experiences and by embracing and also critiquing their identity as Rhodes University students. The digital socialities identified in the UCKAR group are not mutually exclusive, and members can and do occupy multiple socialities within the group or shift between socialities depending on the concept and experiences. Members of the group rely on the platform to organize and communicate with each other, to provide support, entertainment and celebrate their shared identity. While the growth of the internet and issues like COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns may have played a role in the increased usage of the group, the sense of belonging and care, community and family it provides appears to be an important factor in the lives of Rhodes University students. The UCKAR Facbook group facilitates various socialities such as “Rhodent sociality”, “comrade sociality”, “hustle sociality”, “ubuntu sociality” and “groovist sociality”. These socialities are evidentially not mutually exclusive, and members can and do engage in multiple socialities within the group or shift amongst them depending on the situation.

In this analysis, these socialities are linked to the existing scholarship on digital socialities . I showed that “comrade sociality” with its politicised rational discourse is a clear example of a digital counter public sphere, while “Rhodent sociality” is a typical example of a place-based virtual community. The other digital socialities which emerged on the UCKAR Facebook page are however not clearly linkable to the types of digital socialities described in the literature. The groovist sociality in its simultaneous celebration of debauchery and the ridiculing of aspirational

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respectability evokes elements of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Although online parent groups and health support groups enable online relationships of care, arguably the “ubuntu sociality” which emerged in this group was significantly different as it focused on an everyday ethics of care based in notions of a symbolic African family. Similarly, the “hustling sociality” despite its focus on student entrepreneurship, does not foreground neoliberal competition but instead is similarly supportive in nature, and celebrates the economic efforts of members and creates pride around efforts of economic survival. These different socialities I identified could be seen as different facets of an overall digital sociality of resilience and survival. Arguably such resilience to survive in an alien cultural space does not only demand rational political resistance and practical tips to negotiate the space such as we see in “comrade sociality” and Rhodent sociality, but it also requires communal care, economic survival and at times the Bhaktinian carnivalesque as an outlet for coping with what seems like an upside down unjust society.

This study proposes that all these socialities are all part of a broader aspect of survival. In the group, the biggest responsibility in the group is to survive, and members prioritize sharing knowledge and caring for each other to navigate a hostile social environment. Building on Motsemme’s (2011) concept of survival, this research highlights the importance of digital spaces of social support and collective care in online communities, particularly in the face of adversity such as surviving in spaces designed to promote racial privilege.

Recommendations

The main purpose of the study was to explore and define the various socialities that emerge on the UCKAR Facebook group, and how students make sense of these socialities in relation to the broader society and their sense of self. Overall, the findings suggested that there are different digital socialities in the group that exist simultaneously. This study underscores the need for furter research on sociality within the Media Studies field , as the existing body of literature is mostly concentrated in the field of Anthropology. Future research should explore the complex dynamics of digital sociality in particular, to better understand its implications for media studies and its potential to inform innovative approaches to media research.

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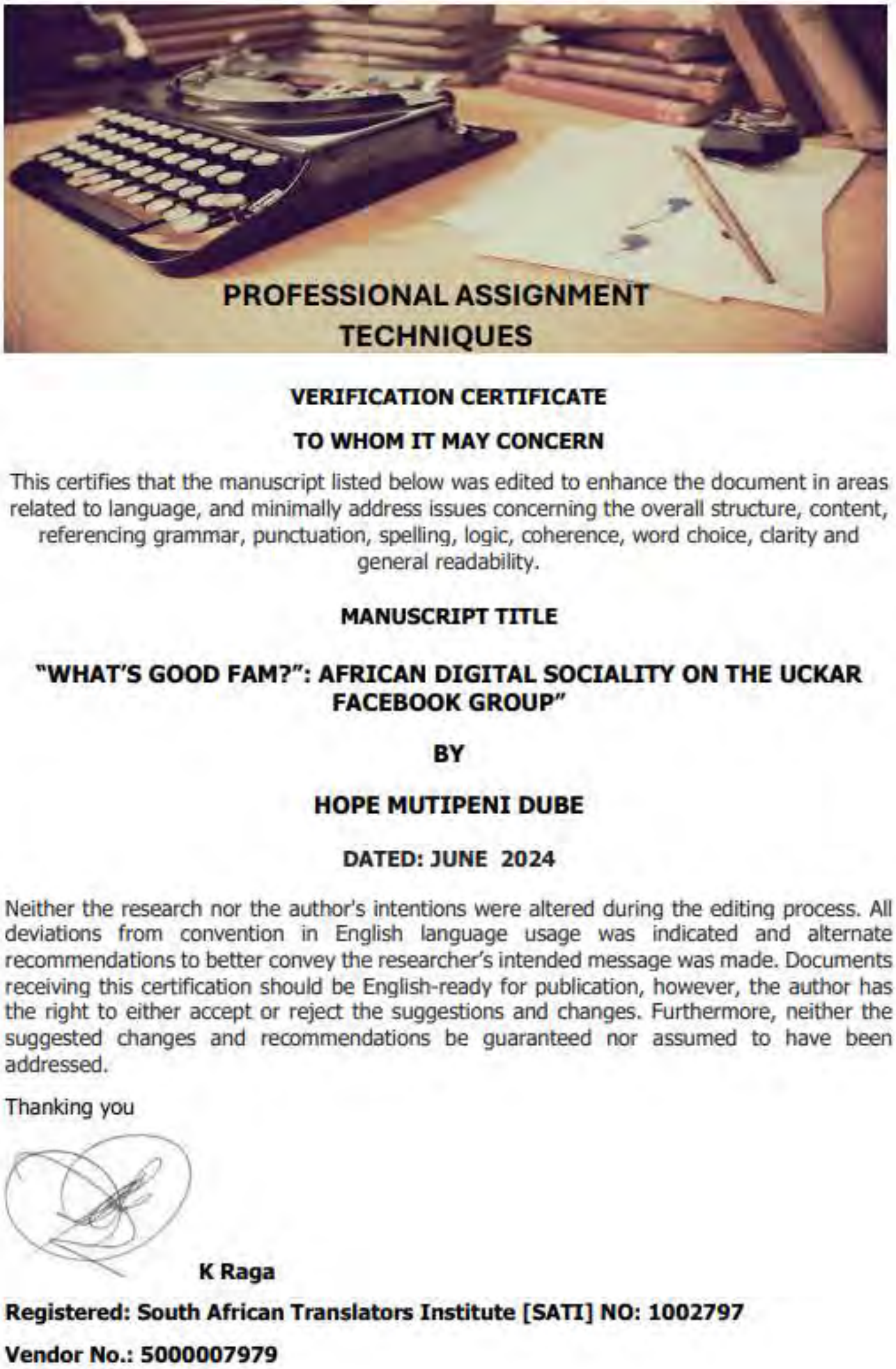
ANNEXURES

9.1 Annexure A: Editing certificate



PROFESSIONAL ASSIGNMENT
TECHNIQUES

VERIFICATION CERTIFICATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certifies that the manuscript listed below was edited to enhance the document in areas related to language, and minimally address issues concerning the overall structure, content, referencing grammar, punctuation, spelling, logic, coherence, word choice, clarity and general readability.

MANUSCRIPT TITLE

"WHAT'S GOOD FAM?": AFRICAN DIGITAL SOCIALITY ON THE UCKAR FACEBOOK GROUP"

BY

HOPE MUTIPENI DUBE

DATED: JUNE 2024

Neither the research nor the author's intentions were altered during the editing process. All deviations from convention in English language usage was indicated and alternate recommendations to better convey the researcher's intended message was made. Documents receiving this certification should be English-ready for publication, however, the author has the right to either accept or reject the suggestions and changes. Furthermore, neither the suggested changes and recommendations be guaranteed nor assumed to have been addressed.

Thanking you

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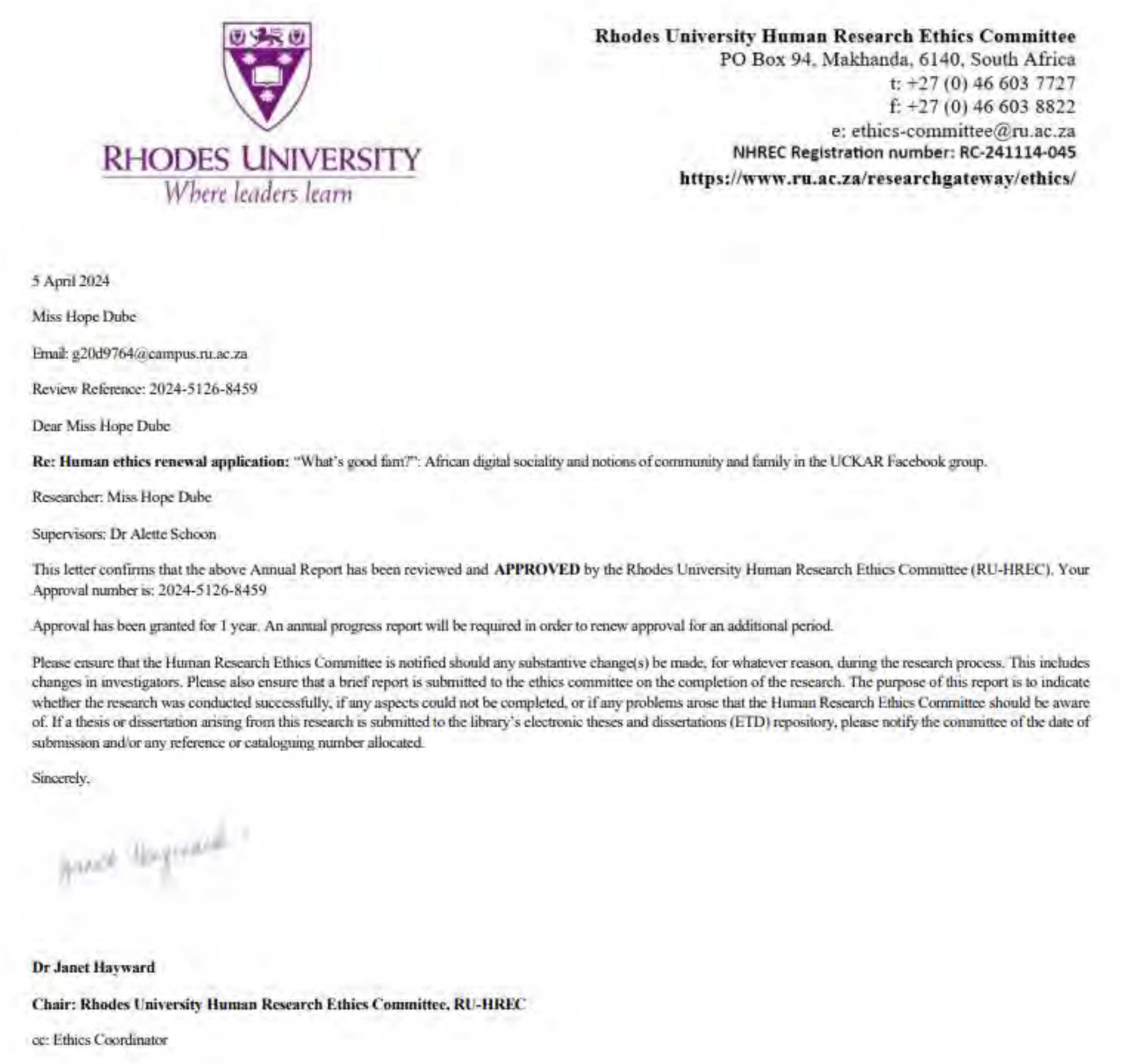
9.2 Annexure B: Ethical clearance certificate



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5 April 2024

Miss Hope Dube

Email: g20d9764@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2024-5126-8459

Dear Miss Hope Dube

Re: Human ethics renewal application: "What's good fam?": African digital sociality and notions of community and family in the UCKAR Facebook group.

Researcher: Miss Hope Dube

Supervisors: Dr Alette Schoon

This letter confirms that the above Annual Report has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC). Your Approval number is: 2024-5126-8459

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period.

Please ensure that the Human Research Ethics Committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Human Research Ethics Committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Dr Janet Hayward

Chair: Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee, RU-HREC

cc: Ethics Coordinator

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9.3 Annexure C: Focus group and interview questions

Focus groups

- Conduct two focus groups (Maximum – 8 members)
- The first group consists of older members, fairly new members, 2 years and less and new ones (all active) **– The main aim is to have diversity, see if older members think the group is the same as it was back then during the initial stages or its now different.**
- Welcome everyone to the interview.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and give clues on the topic to be discussed.
- Set ground rules (what we discuss in the interview stays in the interview room, no personal attacks, comments in the chat box are allowed, raising a hand to indicate what they need to say to the interviewee/host or fellow participants without disrupting the discussion).
- Discuss the participants' experiences in the UCKAR group.
- Talk about particular moments in interacting with other members of the group.
- Explain the importance of the participant's responses.
- Explain that follow up questions will be asked depending on their answers.

FIND OUT THEIR GENDER, RACE, AGE, CITIZENSHIP, NSFAS BENEFICIARY OR NOT, PERSONALITY (INTROVERT, EXTROVERT, AMBIVERT) - to establish class/priviledge)

Degree and level of study?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UCKAR GROUP MEMBERS AND MODERATORS

What do you identify as? He/she/them

1. When did you join the 'UCKAR' group?
2. How often would you say you post or comment on the group?
3. What kind of content do you post or comment on?

Do you like interacting with others (posting, commenting) or you are more of an observer in the group?

Probing guidelines

`

1. What made you join the UCKAR group? Can you share the story of how you first encountered the group and why you decided to join?

Probing guideline: Group pop up on Facebook, Facebook suggestions, referrals, the group was mentioned by a Facebook friend.

2. What kind of space is the UCKAR group for you?

Probing guideline: Entertainment, refreshment, informational purposes,

3. Do you know anything about its history?

4. What role does it play in your life, both at Rhodes (campus life) and in general?

Probing guideline: sense of family, sense of belonging, sense of community, information source, identity.

5. Can you tell us about the last time you posted or commented on the group and what this was about? And have you been consistent with posting or commenting on the group ever since you joined? And if not, what made you change?

Probing guideline: Internet connection, wi-fi or data, interesting topics, busy schedule

6. What kind of content do you prefer to see posted in the group?

Probing guideline: jokes/memes, current affairs (news), university communiques, politics, information, assistance (helping those in need or asking for help)

7. Can you share an experience where you actively engaged with other members of the group and tell us how this made you feel and how you related to them? **(Active engagement I mean Replying or reacting to posts or comments?**

Probing guideline: felt valued, undermined, relevant, misunderstood, respected, disrespected

8. When you discuss issues on the group, do you feel like it is a space where members converse as equals? Please elaborate.
9. Are there any times when you found relating with others in the group difficult? Please show me an example of the interaction that made you feel that way.

10. Is there a time when the group did something humane (kind gestures) for the members? What do you recall about it?
11. Is there any moment you felt you felt like some members of the group did not understand the rules of the group or any moment when someone was called out on the group? May you kindly show me that interaction.
12. In what way(s) is the way you relate with people in the group the same/different as your friends/family members/peers/fellow students and people in the street?
13. Do you feel like the group is a political space? May you show me some of those interactions which made you think that way

Probing question: Are there any political deliberations take place? Please elaborate.

(Use my comments on the individual interviews and apply them here too)

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About the interviews (Individual Interviews)

About the interview (Focus groups)

- Conduct 8 individual interviews, in case some participants fail to participate. Furthermore, some participants may be outspoken on social media but introverted in real life making obtaining rich data from them challenging. It is safer to have more data than less.
- Welcome the participant to the interview.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and give clues on the topic to be discussed.
- Give assurance to the participant (what we discuss in the interview stays in the interview room, no offence intended, comments are allowed, raising a hand to indicate without interrupting the interviewee and vice versa).
- Assure the participant (what we talk in the interview room stays in the interview room, no offence intended, remarks are allowed, raising a hand to signal without interrupting the interviewee and vice versa).
- Discuss the participant's experiences in the UCKAR group.
- Talk about particular moments in interacting with other members of the group.
- Explain the importance of the participant's responses.
- Explain that follow up questions will be asked depending on the participant's answers.

`

Opening questions

1. What is your gender identity? Race? Age? Citizenship? Personality? NSFAS beneficiary or not? (to establish class/privilege) (ask about sponsorship in general)
2. What are you studying and what is your level of study?
3. When did you join the 'UCKAR' group?
4. How often would you say you post or comment on the group?
5. What kind of content do you post or comment on?
6. Do you like interacting with others (posting, commenting) or you are more of an observer in the group?

7. What made you join the UCKAR group? Can you share the story of how you first encountered the group and why you decided to join?
8. What kind of space is the UCKAR group for you?
   Follow up
   - Political space
   - Social space
9. Do you know anything about its history?

10. What role does it play in your life, both at Rhodes (campus life) and in general?

11. Do you think everyone in the group sees its role in the same way or do you think the admins have a particular hope for the kind of space this group would be?

12. Can you share an experience where you actively engaged with other members of the group and tell us how this made you feel and how you related to them?

`

13. Have you been consistent with posting or commenting on the group ever since you joined? If not, what made you change?
14. What kind of content do you prefer to see posted in the group?
15. When you discuss issues on the group, do you feel like it is a space where members
16. How do people treat each other in the group?

    Follow up points

    - Those struggling
    - Those misbehaving/breaking the rules
    - Any kind gestures?
17. Is the way you relate with group members different from your friends/family members/peers/fellow students and people in the street?
18. How do you think group members should relate to each other and why?