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Women's and Gender Studies

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535

South Africa

Tel: +27 (0) 21 959 2234

Website: www.uwc.ac.za

Name: Geraldin Wanelisa Albert

A thesis submission at the University of the Western Cape

for the fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

An encounter with the structural and spiritual violence of coloniality: Intersectional understanding of Black students' experiences of exclusion in higher education

Supervisor: Prof. Tamara Shefer

Date: 04 November 2022

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Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535

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University of the Western Cape
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Telephone: ++27-21- 959 2255/959 2762 Fax: ++27-21- 959 1268/2266
Email: jvanbeverdonker@uwc.ac.za

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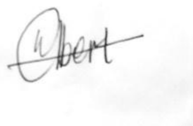

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“Ndim lo ndim iqhawe

Iqhawe

Ntsikiz’ eyonzakeleyo amaphiko

Ndim ndoyidiliza lentaba

Ndofa ndizama

Ukuphila obenzolo nzolo

Ndim lo ndim ndiliqhawe

Qhawe elonzakeleyo

Zubhale ngam…

Ndophuncuka ndibhabhe

Ndontinga ndim iqhawe

Wandinikelan’ amaphiko?

Gqib’ undifak’ emgodini?

Wandiyekelani ndatshona?

Undinikelan’ amaphiko?

Xa ungafuni ndiwasebenzise?…

Ndim lo ndim

Ndim lo wanele

Ungandibambezeli

Ndim owanele

Ndim lo ndoyidiliza lentaba”

-Simphiwe Dana - Ndim Iqhawe Part 2

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An opening prayer

[Let us take off our shoes and kneel in front of the white candle]

Siyacamgusha kooXaba. ooNonkosi, ooNonxa asikhathali, ooNomjoli, ooLinda, ooMwelase, ooMlotywa, ooShwabada, owashwabadel'inkomo neempondo zazo. Apho kungavalwa ngamivalo kuvalwa ngamakhand'amadoda. aMahlubi amahle!

Siyacamagusha kwamaMfene. ooHlathi, ooLisa, ooJambase, ooSanzanza, ooCanzi, ooHlangomva eliweni, ooMsuthu, ooNtsilane

Lededi. Motshweneng. Motshwene, Tsholo, Ntsime, Ntsimana, Nkoti, Kgamadi, Morure Lekokoto, Kgiba, Pati.

Lesedi

Siyacamagusha kooThangane, Krila, Mtengwana, Rhaso, M'bamba, Bodlinja, Gobingca. Inkomo ezibomvu namathole azo.

Makudede ubumnyama, kukhanye ngunaphakade.

To the ancestors who visited me, I am thankful and filled with sorrow. Mntu omdala Booi and Mntu omdala Malibongwe, I pray that your families may be led to the unmarked graves where the Apartheid government hid your bones. I pray that you journey forth in great power into the afterlife. To dearest Philela, may your sweat, your tears and your love for Black people always envelope every victimised Black child on these God forsaken campuses. May you rest in eternal light and power. All of you live in the small space in my heart where Black Love carpets over my scorching rage. Camagu.

[1]Bantu abadala, I stand as a prayer. The fact that I have survived is a testimony. Every decision not to jump over those buildings at UCT is an answered prayer. The discarded tablets that did not culminate in an overdose is an answered prayer. I should not be alive, yet here I am. A testimony of many entities, spirits and elders who pull me down and root me to the great Divine.

[1] My spirit allies and ancestors

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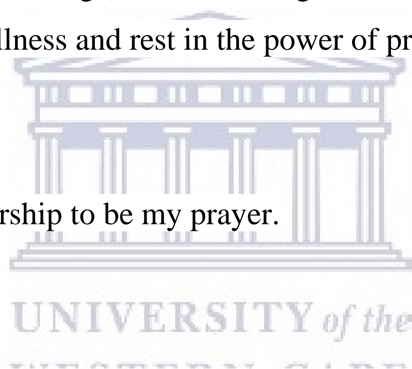
With this in mind, Bantu abadala, I know that the people and the journey's I have encountered through this work were chosen by you. I would like to petition to you elders, the elders of the people I spoke to and to the Divine, to please intervene in their lives. Where the enemy and whiteness has closed doors and disenfranchised, I pray that you do not only open them but burn the buildings that house doors that keep Black students from fulfilling their destinies. Burn it to the ground. I pray you give us the courage to stop begging whiteness to let us in and that you give us a new vision to build a new thing. A new thing does not alienate us from you, our elders and to the great Divine. A new kind of education...an education that says "as you are, you are worthy of belonging and love".

I thank you for the lessons. I thank you that this process is illuminating my trauma and discomfort when I am requested to intervene in prayer and the work of ushering the light (as opposed to mobilising because of destructive rage). I am learning to trust you. I let go of trying to control everything. I sit here in the stillness and rest in the power of prayer.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I release and allow my scholarship to be my prayer.

I pray that this work reaches the people who need it. I pray that this work reaches the people who are looking for it and the people who may not be. I pray this work will be a seed, the rain water and the sunlight. I pray that this work makes a Black child feel seen, understood, believed, advocated, loved and prayed for.

Makube chosi, kube hele

Camagu

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Abstract

Since the fall of Apartheid, the new mandate of the democratic South African government has been to provide equal quality education for all and to desegregate the education system. However, the national government's refusal to decolonise the country, the colonial stronghold of the university, structural racism, and systemic violences strategically remove Black students from the university space. This study examines the structural and spiritual violences experienced by Black South African students in higher education that resulted in their inability to graduate. First, this study gives a historical account of the origins of the identity 'Black' in colonial discourse, then it traces how the historical construction of Black as inferior justified the exclusion of Black people in education while coloniality destroyed indigenous ways of knowing. The study utilises Black Consciousness, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Decolonial theory, Decolonial Feminism and theories of Shame and Vulnerability as a framework illuminating the multidimensional way coloniality affects Black students in higher education. In line with the theoretical framework, this study utilises decolonial feminist research methodologies and introduces indigenous spiritual methods utilised during the study to produce knowledge that is sensitive, ethical, vulnerable and resists reinscribing coloniality. The key finding of the study shows how Black students' progress academically is undermined by violent institutional cultures. The findings also show the way in which continued logistics of coloniality destabilises students' spiritual health and how all these challenges result in students' inability to graduate. The findings also illuminate multiple and diverse examples of students' activism, resistance, victories and the value of Black student communities. The key recommendations of the study are a review of education policies and for the government to consult with student collectives (like The Trans Collective, Pathways to Free Education etc) that provide decolonial and tangible solutions to challenges in higher education. The government must provide institutional support to ensure NSFAS loans reach students on time. Universities need to ensure trans students are safe on campuses (including residences) and provide scholarships that can further support the unique economic needs of trans students. I also recommend that universities (and staff) be equipped to deal with students who are going through trauma, staff to undergo mandatory diversity training (grounded in critical race theory) and that there is a need for future education scholarship that take the spirituality of Black students seriously. The limitations of the study are the overrepresentation of cisgender voices, the invisibilisation of neurodiverse students in the discussion about disability and the discussion about the impact of COVID on Black students' academic careers was limited. I have placed a prayer at the beginning of this study to assert that as an African, my spirituality is integral to my decolonial knowledge production, to invite readers who will engage with the study to do so from an embodied and connected place outside the combative disembodied barren place we often engage with knowledge as a result of coloniality. Lastly, the prayer is an intercession for light, a plea for intervention in the lives of all Black students whose intellectual and spiritual worlds have been violated by colonialism to (again and always) walk within their intergenerational and ancestral abundant legacies.

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Umbulelo Ongazenzisiyo [2]

I would like to honour and thank uQamata for my very difficult and blessed life. Without God, I am nothing but delusions of grandeur and revolving projections. Thank you for gifting me with life, a fighting spirit and pursuing me with love.

My ancestors, I think about you all the time. I imagine the worlds you have occupied here on earth. My elders, I think about those of you who inhabited the world before colonialism. And when I think this world might succeed in killing me, I draw love and fire from you. I think about my elders who survived slavery, colonization and apartheid and I plant my roots deep in your resilience. I also think about the elders who did not survive colonialism. I hold you close and will myself to heal your grieving hearts. We grieve together. I am my ancestors' vessel of great possibilities. Thank you for loving me and fighting against coloniality so that I don't lose my connection with you. My honourable and powerful community of spirit allies, camagu.

Thank you to my beloved dad, Zolisa Zonyane for fighting for my righteousness in the spirit realm. Thank you for giving me my spiritual name, Gcinizulu. Ndingu Gcinizulu wakho.

Thank you to my beloved Mom, Nomsa Sylvia Albert for giving me life and my activist spirit. Thank you for borrowing a train ticket every Tuesday so we can go to the library. Thank you for encouraging me to read. Thank you to your late friend, Sis Nomdoyoyi, for never growing tired of us needing the ticket nor of our poverty. Rest in power.

To the research participants, there are no words. There are literally no words to thank you for your generosity. For trusting me with triggering and hard conversations. Thank you for expanding my mind and heart with your wisdom. I honour your journey and the ancestors who have held you in your journey. Ndiyabulela zihlwele.

To my family, friends and mentors: Iyabulela ilali. Azile, Luthando (Samba), Gciniwe, Tshepi, Vels, Ukhona, Roger, Aaron, Pralini, Tigist, Ntombi, Noosim, Peace, Emma, Nomtika, Sanelisiwe, Peter and so many people all around the world who lift me up daily. Azola Anele

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[2] Acknowledgements

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Goqwana, thank you for loving me chomam. This one honours all our conversations about the violence you also endured in the education system.

Nomxolisi (my Yappingstock), thank you for seeing me in the best possible light. You are proof that love is able to transform and deeply heal. I cannot wait to attend your graduation soon. You are my lifeline.

Thank you to Usapho lakwa Rolomana. Thank you to my healer and mother, Mam'Avukile (vangile gantsho). You remain the embodiment of courage, stillness, wisdom, integrity, Black love and ubulekese. Enkosi to Makhululu wam, one nyawo ezintle. Camagwini emaYirheni. ooZondi. ooZiyeka. Sampu. Gigaba. Thambo lenyoka elihlab'elimzondayo.

Sisibully, enkosi Titibully ngokundithanda. To both my grandmothers, Thembeka Skefile and Nomgcobo Mpahlana, enkosi ngobubele nothando. Nomzamo Madikizela Mandela, thank you for living your life in the precise and intentional way that shifted histories. I love you.

Last but not least, my dearest Tammy. Thank you for loving, supporting and encouraging me throughout my PhD journey. Thank you for leading with kindness and gentleness. When I think of you, I think of integrity and consistency. Thank you for pushing my scholarship and for challenging me to be a better scholar and human. After the trauma I have experienced in academia, meeting you has been a healing and restorative experience. Thank you for being the very few people in academia who remain safe for scared, traumatised and disillusioned Black students. I pray that God constantly renews your spirit and pours ten fold back to you what you pour unto us. I will never stop saying this: thank you so much for advocating for me in so many different rooms. Ndiyabulela

Camagu zihlwele

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Chapter one

Introduction

Do not believe anyone who seeks to dismiss your search for a psychology that centres your experience, your knowledge, your cultural connectedness, your being as a person living in an African country... not only because you may be made to lose the original language of your dreams – you will have to always remind yourself to see with your own eyes, remind yourself that you are entitled to being in the world. That way of seeing and acting comes from challenging the Euroamerican traditions, concepts, approaches and findings that engulf psychology in Africa (Kopano Ratele, 2019: xii).

This PhD thesis is a love letter to all the Black women in my bloodline who have carried us till now. Physically, I come as one; yet contained within the one are the "we" located in many hearts of women in my family: women who have existed before the grip of colonial violence and who house libraries of pre-colonial archival wisdom; the women who lived through colonial violence and vowed to keep us alive in order to see the current fissure in the colonial armour. As this settler colony and its colonial legacies combust into mysterious fires, as the archives burn and as whole provinces implode into anarchy, as light workers, we adorn our beads, burn impepho[3] and white candles, and let ancestral-led scholarship usher in light.

Coloniality asserts that knowledge production is devoid of the spirit, the divine and the ancestral. It deceives us into thinking that knowledge exists outside of our bodies in clinical silos of "objectivity" and "rationality". As African people, we are deeply rooted in oral traditions, storytelling and poetry, divine dreams, a stomping of the feet and a communal song. Our knowledges are deeply located within our bodies, are informed by nature and respond to the needs of our social environment. Like Ratele (2019) encourages, I bring my history, traditions, ancestry and my authentic self to this thesis.

I re-remember who I was before the 'language of my dreams' was whipped out of me at the University of Cape Town. I, too, was once a bright-eyed scholar with elaborate plans to change the world. However, I quickly learned that expressing that authentic self was awarded with humiliation, punishment and low grades. Coloniality had done the groundwork of skinning me alive. Removing the skin from my bones was the easy part of the colonial process. Out went my poetry, dance, dreams and my songs. Consequently, it has taken me three years into my PhD

[3] An African herb similar to sage used to cleanse auras, space, heal ailments and used to connect with ancestors

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research to use the word ‘I’. Coloniality made me loathe, distrust and devalue myself. When we discard ourselves due to colonial violence, we also lose our spiritual selves that connect us to our ancestors and the Divine. When we lose our connection to our ancestors, we lose the umbilical cord to our history and many indigenous knowledges that can be passed down through oral traditions, poetry, song, dreams, dance and divination.

This process of re-membering has felt like the rebirth of an old soul. The semi-autobiographical nature of the research meant that I had to re-remember when exactly I learned it was not safe to be Black, woman, queer and poor in university. Amidst the search, I am remembering who I used to be before it was unsafe to assert my embodied knowledge, and I am also acknowledging the moments I resisted coloniality even within the disembodiment. I am also encouraged to dig deep into African spiritualities, indigenous knowledge systems, my own innate knowing and ancestral wisdom in order to produce decolonial African scholarship that seeks to affirm our humanity. I believe this project to be very ambitious and perhaps too grand? However imperfect and unrealistic, I am certain that epistemic healing is a possibility for Africans.

Coloniality is much more than systems and institutions of colonial subjugation, but it is a spiritually dark violent hub. As spiritual beings (whether we believe in a God or not), coloniality also negatively affects our spiritual world. Therefore, as a spiritual being, my ‘data collection’ process has been an engagement with participants’ personal trauma and their ancestral trauma. Moreover, it has been an engagement with their embodied wisdom and their ancestral wisdom. I deeply believe decolonial research can be utilised as a spiritual intervention to disrupt whiteness and coloniality. Again, I believe in the possibility of epistemic healing.

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Decolonial research that disrupts whiteness and coloniality is a scholarship that engages with the cultural situatedness, the spiritual landscape, of African people, the ancestors they walk with, their embodied knowledges and their truth, even when it goes against national rhetoric that protects coloniality. Within coloniality, the hierarchical valuing of the state and institutions that embolden colonial logic are privileged; however, my research seeks to prioritise the truths of those relegated to the margins by coloniality. Reflecting on Mam’ Noni Jabavu’s erasure in South African literature, Xaba and Masola (2021:82) assert their reasoning, ‘[Mam’] Noni’s columns offer a more complicated narrative about the Black experience during Apartheid and they disrupt the grand narratives of history which tends to be interested in political history rather than the intersection of everyday narratives alongside grand historical narratives’.

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South Africa is not good at complicated everyday narratives which contest our national political victories. Black students who have been systematically excluded from university complicate the Rainbow Nation discourse that the African National Congress (ANC) has de-racialised and desegregated education, and Black students have equal opportunity. As such, they become inyala[4] that must be hidden before they tarnish the Mandela legacy. Like Mam' Noni Jabavu, their everyday complicated intersectional experiences in education do not align with the public face of South Africa. The State and the colonial university are a well-oiled propaganda machinery that has been skilled in spinning mass academic exclusions, financial exclusions and colonial violence as 'drop-out rates' (read Black incompetencies). Might we consider that the very thing (education) which has been hailed to take a village boy and make him president (Mandela, 1994), in contemporary South Africa is a cause for psychological and spiritual violence? More than that, is it able to produce critical thinkers who can contribute to the collective wellbeing of the country?

1.1 Statement of the problem

Recent student movements and political action in universities have created awareness of the various challenges that currently affect Black students in South Africa (Albert, 2018). One of the main challenges in higher education is the large numbers of students who leave university before obtaining their degree (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; CHE, 2016). Currently, 'transformation' is measured by the numbers of students enrolled into higher education; however, there is a need to focus on how many students graduate (Shay, 2017). My research will examine the various challenges Black youth face that cause young people to leave university before they complete their degrees, and will provide a critical lens into Black students' experiences and challenges within universities in South Africa. The aim is to understand how racially exclusive Apartheid education legacies and the ANC's failure to fully transform higher education affected Black students who were unable to complete their university careers.

During the Apartheid era, institutions of higher learning in South Africa were segregated according to race. The National Party (NP) institutionalised the policy of separate development by creating different departments for 'Native', 'Indian', 'Coloured' and 'White' people to administrate social services separately. Basic education was divided by the Coloured Persons Act (No. 47 of 1963), Indian Education Act (No. 61 of 1965) and Bantu Education Act No. 47 of

[4] A shameful thing that must remain in the dark

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1953. Institutions of higher education were also segregated according to the stipulated races in compliance with the Extension of Universities Act No. 45 of 1959. By the beginning of 1985, 19 universities were exclusively for 'Whites', two for 'Indians', two for 'Coloureds,' and six for 'Africans' (Bunting, 2006). The purpose of this separate development was to 'consolidate white identity and the economic, social and cultural domination' in South Africa (Reddy, 2004: 9). The implications of such institutionalised racism resulted in an imbalance of power, and Black people purposefully relegated to unskilled labour (Reddy, 2004). The legacy of Apartheid, as it pertains to higher education, means that South Africa currently faces the challenge of a racially fragmented higher education system (Badat, 1999).

Since the first democratic elections of 1994, policies such as the Higher Education White Paper (1995 and 1996) have been implemented, and the National Commission on Higher Education (2001) was established with the goal of making higher education equal in South Africa. The Higher Education White Paper aimed to restructure higher education into a single nationally coordinated and consolidated system, as opposed to one defined by segregation according to race. It also suggested that higher education contribute to and support social transformation (Reddy, 2004). The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was formed to advise the Minister of Education on restructuring higher education. It sought to provide all institutions of higher learning with equal resources and redress historical inequalities by ensuring representation of all races in higher education. Since 1994, the South African higher education sector has seen an attempt at "Africanisation" in previously Coloured, Indian and White institutions (Cooper, 2015). However, regardless of these efforts for transformation at a national and institutional level, the legacy of Apartheid still exists in higher education and other sectors of South Africa. Moreover, these legacies are not limited to race; they intersect with gender, class and sexuality (Carolissen *et al*., 2015; Albert, 2018; Soudien, 2010).

The failure to radically transform higher education has affected Black students negatively. The purpose of my study is to explore the various challenges faced by Black youth in university, and how these challenges impact their ability to obtain their degrees. Due to the intersectional ways that inequalities affect Black students in higher education, my study will explore how race intersects with other identities such as gender, class, sexuality, and language to form part of the challenges that hamper successful graduation. I will also explore how the spiritual nature of coloniality (within university) affects the spiritual lives of Black students when they encounter it on campuses.

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1.2 Rationale and significance of the study

To accompany the policies in place, there has been much research on social transformation and the high level of 'dropout rates' amongst Black South African students in universities; however, there remains a need for research that prioritises the narratives of Black South African students. Most studies present generic findings which fail to account for the racial compositions of youth who do not graduate. However, research by the likes of Cooper (2015), Kiguwa (2014) Cornell and Kessi (2017), Carolissen and Kiguwa (2018), Shefer (2017), and many other scholars, continuously demonstrates that research that prioritises Black students' lived experiences provides a deeper understanding of the challenges in higher education. As an addition to the work of the aforementioned scholars, and a growing body of literature in this area, my research also explores whether Black students are allowed to claim citizenship in the university. Moreover, my research seeks to explore whether spiritual freedom and spiritual citizenship for students, who exist in a context where their culture and spiritualities are erased by colonial and eurowestern logics (still prevalent in the university), is possible in an anti-spiritual environment like the academy? In addition, my research asks whether African spirituality can exist in a colonial context that has previously demonised and criminalised African spirituality.

My research will offer an opportunity to document Black students' experiences of their identity (imposed or held), and link their experiences to the broader debate of transformation in universities. This research seeks to assess whether Blackness as a historical racial construct affects their university experience negatively. It is imperative to assess if and how a historically exclusive site of knowledge production, like the university, can be hostile to certain people who hold particular identities, such as the Black identity. This study seeks to understand how the challenges experienced in relation to their identity shaped their inability to graduate. The dominant narrative about 'drop-out rates' often blames Black students or perpetuates racialised ideas about Black intellectual inferiority and laziness (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). However, the findings of the proposed study will bring new insight into Black students' subjective experiences and the external challenges that disable young people from finishing their degrees. This will bring new insight for future interventions for transformations in higher education, which will be able to speak directly to Black students' experiences.

Most studies examining challenges in higher education (or the lack of transformation) focus on students currently enrolled in university, but there is a gap in the literature, as few studies focus

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on the challenges faced by past students who did not graduate. As argued by Shay (2017), enrolment cannot be the only measure of transformation in higher education, especially when it is estimated that only 45% of contact students, and 55% of overall students enrolled in higher education, will graduate (CHE, 2016). These statistics alone are cause for concern, and further demonstrate the importance of this study to examine the narratives and challenges faced by Black students who have fallen through the cracks of transformation in higher education in South Africa.

With the advent of the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movements in South Africa, the issue of funding in higher education was foregrounded as one of the main factors that resulted in Black students being unable to finish their degrees. High levels of poverty and socio-economic disparities (due to Apartheid legacies) make the financing of higher education a necessity. In 1991, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Act was passed, and NSFAS was the government organisation tasked with assisting the growing need to fund higher education. NSFAS has been the primary organisation tasked with meeting student financial needs (CHE, 2016).

However, in 2011, NSFAS made 221 653 awards to students in universities, compared with a total undergraduate enrolment of 703 747. This number decreased in 2013, as NSFAS made 194 923 awards, with a total enrolment of 800 955 (CHE, 2016). As indicated, NSFAS is not able to meet the funding needs of Black students. In addition, the 'fundamental problem which NSFAS has been faced with since its inception is that the funds available for awards are inadequate for creating reasonable equality of opportunity, despite very rapid growth in NSFAS funding over the last twenty years' (CHE, 2016: 364). In 2013, NSFAS had less than half the funds it needed to be able to cover all qualifying applicants (CHE, 2016).

In addition, NSFAS is not a bursary, but rather a loan that is required to be paid back once the student is working. However, if the statistics show that 45% of university entrants do not finish their degrees, then certain assumptions can be made about their ability to find meaningful employment in a country with high levels of youth unemployment. This means that Black students who do not graduate face high probabilities of unemployment, compounded by massive student loan debt. Moreover, the loan given can only finance a portion of the awardees' full cost of studies, therefore students continue to be underfunded (CHE, 2016).

Government has not been able to provide any concise leadership in reforming the funding crises in higher education. In 2014, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

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published the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training: Building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system*. In the White Paper, they outline expansion of academic programmes, grants for three new universities, more foundation programmes, and academic staff development. Moreover, they promise new student housing, increase in research capacity, and progressively introducing free undergraduate higher education for the poor. However, DHET provides no financial plan that outlines how the department will meet these objectives (CHE, 2016). Instead, the South African government vilified and brutalised student activists who fought for free education for the poor (Isdahl, 2016).

The newly elected post-Apartheid government asserted that education is a social justice issue; therefore failure to radically transform coloniality in higher education contributes to an unequal society. Historically, Black people (and, by extension, Black students) were on the lowest rung in the racial hierarchy of Apartheid. This also means that Black people were the most disadvantaged and academically excluded in education during Apartheid. These factors make Black students an important demographic when examining transformation in higher education. Black students possess enough diversity in socioeconomic status, the rural/urban divide, gender and sexual diversity, and spiritual beliefs (amongst other identities) to offer rich narratives for the study. I will use an intersectional lens when exploring the multi-layered challenges faced by Black students. Intersectionality (comprehensively defined and discussed on page 31) becomes useful as an 'analysis of overlapping, non-reducible oppressions, multiple gazes and entwined discourses of non-transformation' (Cornell *et al*., 2016: 100).

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1.3 Research topic:

An encounter with the structural and spiritual violence of coloniality: Intersectional understanding of Black students' experiences of exclusion in higher education.

1.4 Research Questions

My research seeks to explore five areas in relation to Black students' experiences in higher education. First, in what significant ways are Black students' intersecting identities (race/class/gender/sexuality/ability) shaped and reshaped by their university environment? Second, how do Black students negotiate the university environment? Third, what are the challenges Black students face in university? Fourth, were these challenges associated with Black

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students' inability to complete a university degree? Finally, does coloniality affect the spiritual wellbeing of Black students in university?

1.5. Research Objectives

My research sought to gauge the ways that Black students' intersecting identities, such as race, class, gender, sexuality and ability, are shaped and reshaped by their university environment, as well as how Black students negotiate their way through the university environment. I also examined the various challenges Black students face in university, like coloniality, institutionalised racism, othering, patriarchy etc. I also wanted to ascertain whether these challenges are associated with Black students' inability to complete their degree. Lastly, I wanted to explore how coloniality affects Black students' spiritual well-being and whether this results in their inability to finish their qualification.

1.6 Conclusion

I opened this chapter invoking Ratele (2019) and his spiritual intervention, which reminds us how a colonial education can violently make us forget the language of our dreams. I see this research as a testimony to how colonial violence in the university makes us lose our embodied knowledges, and rich intellectual and spiritual knowledges. Most often, the discourse about Black students starts at the end. The end does not account for colonial violence and systematic exclusion, and this results in a blaming discourse. The research rationale, the research topic, the questions explored, and the objective of the research seeks to qualitatively outline how Black students get to the end: without an undergraduate degree. How does the university make us lose the colour in our tongues and the fire in our hearts? I view this research as a small instrument that joins a mighty symphony of Black and indigenous voices (ancestors and living) who have worked hard to remind us that colonial patriarchy seeks to violently quieten our dreams. The next chapter outlines some of the Black and indigenous thinkers around the world who have contributed to Black consciousness, critical race theory, decolonial feminism, and decoloniality, and have contributed to helping us re-remember and rearticulate the language of our dreams.

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UmuNtu ngumuNtu phofu ke

KungenxayabaNtu

Ephefumlelwe nguQamata

Kwaye ebunjwe ngesizathu

Apho sahlonipha izihlwele, xasinqula sikhulula izihlangu

Kuvulwe incwadi engcwele liXhwele kuqhunyiswe ngengcambu

Kube cosi kube hele

Livumile neCamagu!!!!

Kuthwaselwe kwimilambo

Kuphunywe kunxitywe iintambo,

Kuvunyiswe ngamthambo,

Kungxengxezwe kulomathango,

Kurhatyuliswe kwithamo, amakhwenkwe anikwintamo,

Nalomsebenzi ugqityiwe mawatshishwe lomathambo![5]

Camagu - DRIEMANSKAP

(Time stamp 02:44)

[5] "A person is a person in relation to the community. Breathed life by God. Created and designed with purpose. Where we honour our ancestors. When we worship, we take our shoes off. The healer opens the sacred text and we burn the sacred plant. Let our prayers be uttered in the shrine. Let it be peaceful and let it be so. When we are initiated as healers, we disappear in the rivers. Then we reemerge wearing beads. We do divination with scared bones. We apologise and appease the ancestors at the kraal. We drink our traditional beer. We give the boys the neck. This traditional ceremony was a success. Let us burn the bones". Translated from isiXhosa. This is a loose translation and the significance of the song is hard to translate, as it is deeply rooted in African traditions and spirituality.

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Chapter Two: A Theory that Offends and Interrupts

'When we write these PhD's, our voice is completely divorced from our work' (Tigist Shewarega Hussen, 2021).

Coloniality as a spiritually dark violent hub. Data collection as an engagement with ancestral trauma (and wisdom). Decolonial research as spiritual intervention. I invite my ancestors and their wisdom into my PhD (online diary, 2021).

Like MacLure, we agree that the value of theory in our work 'lies in its power to get in the way: to offend and interrupt… to block the reproduction of the obvious, [and to] open new possibilities for thinking and doing' (MacLure in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012:720).

Introduction

My research is a conversation between myself and all those who have passed on in my bloodline. I carry the ancestral trauma of many who have been violated, excluded and erased by the colonial university in Africa and, as such, the lenses through which my study explores intersectional understandings of Black students' experiences in the university must prioritise indigenous ways of knowing, African spirituality and ancestral wisdom. This undertaking requires theoretical frameworks that understand that traditionally, Western knowledge devalues spirituality, and indigenous methods of passing archives (e.g. knowledge passed through dreams) (Xaba, 2021). In addition, my research requires theoretical frameworks that have a commitment to dismantling coloniality, as well as the foresight to envision a world where Black humanity thrives. Decolonial theory encompasses a lens that enables a critique of coloniality, encourages an understanding of the world outside of coloniality, and provides tools to remember our ancientness while encouraging us to create a new decolonial reality. My study will accompany the decolonial lens with Black consciousness, critical race theory, decolonial feminism, intersectionality and vulnerability theory. This chapter outlines the principles of each model, a discussion as to how it relates to my research topic, and the tools each model provides in order to utilise my (decolonial) research as spiritual intervention in higher education.

Most research about Black students' experiences in higher education only unpacks the structural and psychological challenges they face. Their spiritual selves, and their intergenerational and ancestral trauma are rarely discussed to provide a fuller picture of colonial violence in higher education. For example, one participant, who is now an indigenous healer (Igqirha), had

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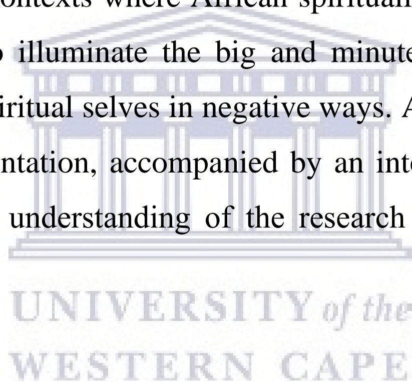
resources to navigate the university successfully; however, their inability to finish the degree was due to their spiritual/ancestral calling. They needed to heal ancestral trauma caused by coloniality (the criminalisation and outlawing of African spirituality and culture); therefore, navigating a historically white university (and its colonial violence) resulted in spiritual discord. This discord manifested as what western medicine understood as psychosis and mental illnesses. This is why a decolonial lens is imperative to understand the spiritual lives of Black students in higher education. Failure to account for how spirituality and ancestral trauma impacts Black students' ability to complete their degrees means we might reproduce a scholarship that victim-blames Black students when their challenges do not fit our narrow conceptualisation of what constitutes colonial violence.

While many Black decolonial scholars have done ground-breaking research about the material and psychological conditions in higher education that exclude Black students from owning citizenship in South African universities, we must also ask ourselves: what does spiritual citizenship mean in colonial contexts where African spirituality was criminalised? Throughout this thesis, I will continue to illuminate the big and minute ways coloniality affects Black students' psycho-social and spiritual selves in negative ways. A decolonial feminist and a Black consciousness theoretical orientation, accompanied by an integration of principles of African spirituality, enables a deeper understanding of the research participants' journeys in higher education.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2.1 Black consciousness

Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness movement played a pivotal role in my political consciousness during my undergraduate days at UCT. I can still remember the Friday afternoon I went to buy *I Write What I Like* (1969) in April 2010. Consequently, I had a meltdown and was unable to leave my flat the whole weekend. The words. His words cut through me like a sharp *okapi*.[6] It was the first time that I was confronted by my self-loathing and how, up until then, I had sought to deny anything that linked me to "Black". It was an embarrassing process to admit my self-hatred and aspiration to whiteness. But Steve Biko, as an ancestor, held me with harsh truth and tenderness. To me, Black consciousness has always been about tenderness and vulnerability. Tender in the way it unveiled whiteness and my implicatedness in the psycho-

[6] A German folding lock knife very popular in South Africa

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spiritual harm, and vulnerable in the way it dared to dream about a different kind of Black: an alive Black. What is more vulnerable than dreaming and plotting towards a healed integrated self, deeply connected within a healed physical and ancestral community, especially when the colonial world seeks to obliterate your existence?

Black consciousness (BC) holds a dear place in my journey, Steve Biko holds a special place in my work as an ancestor who left us an archive and, as such, my research always uses his work as an integral part of how I make sense of the student narrative. The BC movement (BCM) arose on South African university campuses as a continuation of the ANC, Pan-African Congress (PAC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) fight against the racist Apartheid regime (Dolamo, 2017). Although Steve Biko, Mamphela Ramphele, and Barney Pityana have emerged as the hypervisible icons of BCM, the movement was comprised of many young people.

It played a pivotal role in student activism and my understanding of the Black student experience (see Biko's (1969) chapters one to four). Most importantly, the relevance of the BC movement, and Biko's writing in contemporary "free" South Africa, serves as a reminder that time is not linear. Biko (1969) advocated for the integration of Black academia and the Black struggle. As decolonial scholars, we pick up the work of our ancestors and elders, and we reincarnate to finish the work from our past lives, or our ancestors heal their trauma from their past lives through our work. This is the complicated relationship between the university and decolonial scholarship that takes African spirituality seriously.

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During the 1960's, the BCM sought to challenge racist constructions of Blackness and assert Black humanity. The movement emerged after the banning of the ANC and the PAC, during a time where political resistance was almost non-existent in South Africa (Ranuga, 1986:182). At the height of brutal repression by the Apartheid government, BC offered a bold voice and a desire for Black liberation. Black consciousness also created a new language to conceptualise, articulate and express Blackness. This new Black identity was embodied and associated with rebellion against oppression and psychological subjugation (Mngxitama *et al*., 2008:5). As Biko (1969: 49) puts it, 'Black people--- real Black people---are those who manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the White man.'

Therefore, according to Biko and other BC thinkers, liberating South Africa entailed first liberating the Black psyche from an inferiority complex resulting from centuries of oppression. Biko believed that the liberation movements of the time only dealt with the physical conditions

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of Blackness, and did not deal with the psyche of Black people. The psychological emancipation mentioned above could be achieved through ownership of one's Blackness, Black pride and the subversion of negative historical constructions of Blackness as sub-human. Biko (1969: 49) writes, ‘Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being’.

It is important to note that the construction of Black people as subhuman or inferior was not arbitrary, but deliberate, in order to justify the oppression of Black people. Apartheid racist laws that restricted Black people, and created poor living conditions, poor wages, slave labour and poor education, formed part of the institutional racism that oppressed Black people at the time (Biko, 1969). The institutionalised racism that Biko alludes to is defined by More (2012) as the historical, social, political and religious processes and practices that have forced Black people to internalise their identity as sub-human. For Biko, Apartheid was two-fold, because it institutionalised the oppression of Black people, and psychologically oppressed them, so Black people do not feel empowered to revolt against their oppression.

Therefore, if Black inferiority was used as a justification to oppress Black people then, by extension, psychological emancipation came as a solution to institutionalised racism under Apartheid. Biko insisted that self-consciousness was a means to an end, with the end being Black liberation:

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> Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish. Such a major undertaking can only be realised in an atmosphere where people are convinced of the truth inherent in their stand. Liberation therefore, is of paramount importance in the concept of Black Consciousness, for we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self (1969: 50).

It would not be enough for Black people to be conscious; the consciousness served as an apparatus for Black liberation. When a person defined themselves as Black and expressed racial pride, they would subvert an identity which was used for their psychological enslavement. Moreover, when they realised they are not inferior, they could rise up and transform the system that oppressed and relegated them to the margins.

Moreover, the identity ‘Black’ was redefined as a positive response to the Apartheid term, ‘non-White, which included Indian, Coloured and African (Mngxitama *et al.*, 2008). The liberation of

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the Black psyche also meant resisting Apartheid racial categories. Apartheid used the tactic of 'divide and rule' in order to suppress the South African community (Mngxitama *et al*., 2008; Mlhawuli *et al*., 2015; Anderson, 2003). The division of the population into four races, and the further division of the African communities into tribes in the Bantustans, meant that further segregation occurred. Blackness, according to Steve Biko, contained the ambition to unite various people of colour so that they could defeat the common enemy of the Apartheid government. In this way, the Black Consciousness Movement was an effective opposition to the government's divide-and-conquer strategy. The division of the population into four races under the Population Registration Act (1950), and the further division of the African communities into tribes in the Bantustans, further entrenched this segregation (Roberts, 1994). Blackness, according to Steve Biko, contained the ambition to unite various people of colour so that they could defeat the common enemy of the Apartheid government. In this way, the Black Consciousness Movement was an effective opposition to the government's divide-and-conquer strategy. For Biko, solidarity amongst people of colour, based on a common aspiration for liberation (as opposed to racial distrust), was another characteristic of Blackness.

As Biko (1969: 53) articulated,

> We have defined blacks as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations. The importance of Black solidarity to the various segments of the black community must not be understated. There have been in the past a lot of suggestions that there can be no viable unity amongst blacks because they hold each other in contempt. Coloureds despise Africans because they (the former), by their proximity to the Africans, may lose the chances of assimilation into the white world. Africans despise the Coloureds and Indians for a variety of reasons. Indians not only despise Africans but in many instances also exploit Africans in job and shop situations.

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Biko (1969) maintained that being Black was not a matter of pigmentation but a reflection of one's mental attitude. Even though Biko articulates Blackness beyond pigmentation, he does make a distinction between Black people and Non-Whites. For Biko, Black people who aspired to assimilate into Whiteness, or served in the Apartheid government, were Non-Whites.

The Black Consciousness Movement provided South Africa with a historical shift in terms of how people internalised and made sense of their Black identity, and sought to shift negative constructions of Blackness and to instil Black pride. If Apartheid had succeeded in establishing Blackness as 'non-being' or, as Biko puts it, an empty shell, BC's premise was to assert the

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humanity of Blackness. Biko writes about the importance of self-knowledge and Black pride. For Biko, BC seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal,' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that, by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white person, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black consciousness therefore takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in making black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook on life.

On a philosophical level, BC felt the need to assert Black people's humanity and assert Black pride. Universities in South Africa have a history of upholding coloniality; thus, this research seeks to look at Black students' university experience through a decolonial lens, meaning that Biko and Black consciousness becomes an important theoretical lens. BC is a philosophy of hope that encourages us to decolonise and appreciate our indigenous knowledges, and is a useful tool when we want to assess whether coloniality still undermines these knowledges, and marginalises Black students. Lastly, the BCM was influenced by local Pan-Africanist thinkers like Robert Sobukwe, while also drawing inspiration from the broader diasporic thinkers challenging white supremacy like Fanon, Aimé Césaire and American Black power activists in the U.S. This international community of Black thinkers, activists and writers, that influenced Biko and the BCM, also informed the principles of Critical Race theory. Taking this into consideration, it became imperative to also include critical race theory as a lens to help me understand Black students' experiences of colonial violence in higher education.

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2.2 Critical race theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement that seeks to understand how white supremacy, as a legal, cultural, and political condition, is reproduced and maintained (De la Garza & Ono: 2016). Critical race theory started off as a movement in law, when legal scholars broke away from Critical Legal Studies to form Critical Race Theory at the First Annual Workshop on Critical Race theory in 1989. Although formalised in the late 1980's, its origins can be traced back to the 1970's, to writers such as Derrick Bell, lan Freeman, and Richard Delgado. Some of the influencers of this school of thought are Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon.

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The theory was popularised by legal scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995), who coined the term intersectionality[7], and other scholars. CRT has expanded from law and been integrated into departments of Education, Cultural Studies, English, Sociology, Comparative Literature, Political Science, History, and Anthropology around the world (Harris, 2001).

CRT scholarship carefully examines the origins and maintenance of white supremacy as a naturalised regulatory social regime (De la Garza & Otto, 2016). Similar to Black consciousness, CRT believes that race and races are not objective, inherent, biological realities, but products of social engineering. Races and racial categories are classifications that society invents, manipulates, or retires when it is convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007: 3). In a similar manner to South Africa, the racialisation of identity in the United States provided an ideological basis for slavery and conquest of Black and Indigenous people. The construction of a racial hierarchy (white identity as superior and rightful land owner, and Africans as property) was integral to chattel slavery. The conceptualisation of the western man was dependent on the dehumanisation of Africans and native people in the euro-western imaginaries (Wynter, 2003). In her book, *Dear Science And Other Stories*, Mckittrick (2021) explores how biological determinism and scientific racism aided in the entrenchment of white supremacy and Black oppression. In addition, this oppression relied on the dehumanisation of Africans as non-feeling property (Wynter, 2003; Guilmette, 2019). Various slave codes established Black people as property, and whites as property-owner (Harris, 1995).

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These slave codes first appeared between 1680 and 1682, and forbade enslaved Africans to be educated, to carry travel permits, assemble in public, and to own weapons or property. Essentially, these laws solidified the already established social order and racialisation that established 'Black' as slave and 'White' as free. This history and these laws went on to build further complex systems of racial exclusion in the U.S. (Harris, 1995). The U.S.'s history of racial segregation and passing of racist laws codes, which are similar to South Africa's Pass Laws, the 1913 Land Act, and Bantu Education Act, and CRT's critique of how these laws institutionalised racism, is why this theory is important when examining coloniality in the university and how it affects Black subjectivities.

Liberal scholarship would have people believe that the abolishment of slave codes, or legalised racialised segregation like Apartheid, makes the world a post-racial equal society. However, CRT

[7] Elaborated in section on Intersectionality in this chapter.

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does not view race as an independent variable; rather, it regards race as a site of contestation. Presently, Black people are taught that slave histories do not affect their lived experience; however, CRT insists that race still matters (Orbe & Allen, 2008: 209). Regardless of the popular assertions of an equal 'post-racial' U.S., CRT argues that white supremacy is a constitutive feature of society (Olson, 2004; Ono, 2010). As argued before, there are many parallels in how race manifests itself in the U.S and South Africa. In our context, people like Desmond Tutu (1994) and other liberal scholars argue that South Africa is a rainbow nation and structural racism died at the end of Apartheid. This has been the same rhetoric that has sought to shut down Black students' call to decolonise the university. CRT provides a useful lens into the legacies of racism and segregation laws that are still embedded in South Africa today.

CRT asserts that racism is more than just prejudice, but is part of the structure of legal, social and political institutions (Angela P. Harris, 2001: xx). Achille Mbembe (2003, 2016, 2019) argues that the colony and slave plantations have given birth to an in-between life/death space for Black people known as necropolitics. These necropolitical spaces exist as spaces of dehumanisation and violence fostered by white supremacy. According to the tenets of both CRT and Critical Law Studies (CLS), the legal system is a political and ideological institution that, in part, rationalises and justifies the existence of the state. CRT adds a framework to CLS by conceptualising white supremacy as an immutable fact of a neocolonial state (Flag, 1994; Chui, 1994). This CRT lens is very important because my research seeks to uncover the remnants and hauntings (i.e. the violence and logics of colonisation) of coloniality that continue to shape the university. Also, CRT takes decolonial theory (to be discussed in a section below) very seriously.

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In contemporary South Africa, CRT legal scholars argue that the law overlooks racialisation and racial hierarchies that exist in law, labour, social power, knowledge and ideology. Modiri (2012: 433) argues,

> I would add that the disconnect I have discovered between CRT and South African constitutional jurisprudence relates not so much to presence (what the court said) but to absence (what the court didn't say, what it neglected to mention). So although the Court perfunctorily gestures towards a paradigm of substantive equality and a contextual approach, many of its outcomes do not reflect the same radical vision of anti-subordination and social justice that would be at the heart of a post-apartheid version of CRT.

Although the legal system believes itself to be objective, CRT highlights the ways that the social construction of race is present in legal systems. Moreover, it outlines how power and knowledge production, in law and otherwise, are racially structured (Modiri, 2012; Crenshaw, 1995). Thus,

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CRT scholars 'express scepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy' (Matsuda *et al*., 1993: 6). CRT presupposes that the production, dissemination, and evaluation of knowledge is political, and colonial ideas of objectivity, neutrality, and scholarly authority can be utilised to distance and separate researchers from material life (De la Garza & Otto, 2016). I elaborate on the salience of colonial, racist and patriarchal logics within scholarship in Chapter Five. This theoretical lens is critical in my research as I acknowledge the entanglement of my subjective experiences as a Black researcher and that of my research participants in a way that takes our material and discursive conditions seriously.

The influencer of CRT, Du Bois, argued that white supremacy affected both how the Black person experiences their material conditions and their psyche (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Race and racial hierarchies are of critical importance in knowledge production, and CRT has therefore been instrumental in the discussion of curriculum transformation in higher education. It is argued that curriculum transformation has the possibility of levelling the playing field so that knowledge production can reflect South Africa's cultural and socio-political landscape (Sibanda, 2017). This includes a diverse academic staff and student cohort, knowledge production, research and teaching that is critical of Euro-Western colonial logics (like objectivity) and embraces scholarship from the African continent and the Global South (Dastile, 2013, 2016). Theorists have argued that curriculum transformation can be driven by Afrocentric philosophical ideals like ubuntu (Sibanda, 2017), while government officials have encouraged ubuntu's indigenous ideals of communality, interdependence, sharing, empathy and a shared destiny (Murithi, 2009; Mbiti, 1969; MEC for Education: KwaZulu Natal, 2006).

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However, it is argued that ubuntu (although important) is not enough to transform and undo racism in South African higher education, as it is unable to account for and address the social and material differences and inequalities which reproduce exclusionary practices in the academy (Sibanda, 2017). Due to histories of coloniality, race remains a marker of privilege and social polarisation, and therefore is central to our understanding of social struggles impacting universities. Race was integral in the setting up of colonial systems and norms that Black students struggle against today, and any change must therefore be mindful of race (Maart, 2013: 56).

At the crux of my research lies the urgent need to uncover how big political concepts like structural racism and coloniality affect ordinary students' everyday life. CRT is useful in that it emphasises the daily real-world effects of race and racism on Black people, their bodies,

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identities, and experiences, and the interplay of structural disparity and interpersonal prejudice. Thus, 'CRT aims to interrogate the nature (and interplay) of structural disparity and interpersonal prejudice' (Conradie, 2016: 8; De la Garza & Otto: 2016). In South Africa, CRT scholars in education assist us in making the connections between legacies of Apartheid and the violent tensions at an interpersonal level, as evidenced by racist attacks on campuses in the late 2000's (Soudien 2010: 892; Conradie 2015: 292). Therefore, it was important to use CRT as a lens in my study, as it would enable me to provide a radical holistic analysis that would take a student's everyday experience in university very seriously. CRT enables me to provide an analysis of both the big structural challenges, and how racism manifests violently in the mundane day-to-day, what Philomena Essed (1991) termed 'everyday racism' in her study of covert condescensions, barriers and other personal and institutional antagonism among Black women in the United States and the Netherlands.

CRT is a commitment to social justice, for Black people to own our experiences and to name Black realities (De la Garza & Otto, 2016; Modiri, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). CRT complements and enriches Black consciousness theory, which is rooted in social (and student) activism of the 1960's, challenging structural racism and the cultivation of the Black critical mind. Both theories are critical to my research, which is an extension of my social activist work in higher education, and is intended to uplift the voices and experiences of Black students who navigated colonial violence in the university. Moreover, most conversations about Black students not finishing their degrees paint them as lazy, and ignore structural racism; therefore, my research seeks to provide a more holistic and complex account that includes the voices of Black students themselves, and does not misrepresent them through racist tropes. Moreover, conversations about Black students' 'drop-out rates,' and supposed intellectual inferiority, ignores the lack of epistemic access, subtle practices of epistemic exclusion and racism in higher education (Morrow, 2002; Young, 2010). Lastly, while race may be the common factor amidst my research participants, their unique experiences based on their gender/sexuality/age/spirituality required my analysis to take intersectionality very seriously.

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2.3 Intersectionality

Even though CRT scholars recognise race as central, they acknowledge that multiple forms of power and oppression are capable of operating simultaneously and in different registers (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Hence, they support intersectional critique. Class, gender, sexuality, colonisation, ability, and other forms of identity and marginalisation are all relationships of

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power that mutually manifest, and that intersect with race and operate synergistically. This can be described as the theory of intersectionality, which was popularised by one of the prolific legal scholars in CRT, Kimberlé Crenshaw, mentioned earlier.

Even though intersectionality was popularised by Crenshaw, Black and Indigenous women all over the world had been living, resisting and articulating intersectional values long before 1989. Oyewumi (1997) further argues that in some African communities, like the Yoruba people, power was not disseminated according to a superior/inferior gender dichotomy. Amaduime (1987) complicated cisnormativity when she wrote about male daughters and female husbands before the popularisation of intersectionality in the West.

Intersectionality can be defined as a concept 'broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1296). Therefore, individuals are affected by oppression on multiple levels, based on their multiple intersecting identities (Lykke, 2003; 2009; 2014). Crenshaw (1991: 1296) continues,

> This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them. It is, then, a project that presumes that categories have meaning and consequences. And this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values and material inequalities implicated in such hierarchies.

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For example, Black nationalist movements may ignore sexism that affects Black women, and homophobia that affects Black queers, because the dominant voices are Black cisgender heterosexual men. Similarly, feminist spaces might ignore white supremacy and coloniality that affect Black feminists because the gatekeepers are white women.

The work of intersectionality is to account for the multiple ways people experience oppression and encourage intervention that does not further marginalise those who are vulnerable (Crenshaw, 1991). The fight for intersectionality has been prevalent throughout South African liberation movements and activism. Dating back to the era of Black consciousness, the notion of the Black body as a site of multiple forms of oppression (as opposed to just Blackness) was a source of contention between Black men and Black women. While Black men in the BCM advocated against racism, Black women, like Mamphele Rhamphela, advocated for the recognition that Black women experience oppression based on race and gender (Gqola 2001; Rampele,1991). Moreover, activists like Simon Nkoli, a queer anti-Aparthied, LGBTI and HIV

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activist, also brought forth the intersection of racial oppression and queer antagonism in post-Apartheid South Africa and HIV/AIDS health rights (southafricanonline.com). Alongside the liberation struggle, South Africa also had robust feminist and women's rights movements during the 1970s and 1980s. Most notable is the articulation of the triple oppression that Black working class women faced due to race, class and gender within Apartheid South Africa (Hassim, 2006; Salo, 2006). Although useful in bringing together gender and racialised capitalism critique in SA, organising around triple oppression was criticised for taking a formulaic additive approach (Hendricks & Lewis, 1994). However, the move toward a more nuanced intersectional politic is evidence that South African women and women's movements have a long-standing history with intersectionality. Historical accounts of women in struggle movements often articulate that women's issues had to be sacrificed for the national agenda; however, women activists, both within South Africa and in exile, have a rich history in women's organising, through political spaces such as the United Women's Congress, Natal Organisation for Women, and Federation for Transvaal Women, alongside and within the national liberation movements (Hassim, 2006). South African feminists in academia also have a long-standing history of challenging white feminists and academics about the colonial research methodologies and the representation of Black people in research (Hendricks & Lewis, 1994). More notably, South African women's and feminist movements were influential, alongside active gender rights advocates, during the consolidation of 'democratic' South African government, post-1994 (Hassim, 2006). While there has been much critique of gender mainstreaming and tokenisation in South Africa, it is important to acknowledge the legacies and contribution of South African women in intersectional feminist politics and intersectional organising.

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In South Africa, colonial legacies, Apartheid legacies and the democratic government shape the multi-layeredness of Black South African's oppression or lack of access (Meer & Muller 2017; Groenmeyer 2011; Moolman 2013; Segalo 2015). In higher education, too, Black students' experiences are multi-layered, based on their intersecting identities (Ndelu *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, intersectionality, as a Black feminist framework of analysis, enables us to reorganise and orientate ourselves in relation to other Black bodies, and the possibility of reproducing White supremacist violence (Xaba, 2017). More recently, the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall decolonial student movements utilised the concept of intersectionality to understand Black students' challenges in higher education (Matandela, 2017; Shefer, 2022; Kessi & Boonzaier 2015; Gouws 2016, 2017; Omarjee 2018).

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This means, as an intersectional researcher, I must be honest and mindful that personhood and my work could reproduce violence if I am not mindful of power. Even in my subversion and protest, without an introspection of my placement in hierarchies, my intervention might further marginalise and violate.

2.4 Decolonial Turn

The 'decolonial turn' refers to the shift in Western academia after the decolonisation of former colonial territories in Africa and Asia, the civil rights movements in the United States, and indigenisation movements in countries like New Zealand (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). The decolonial turn refers to the turning away/rejection of colonialism and modernity (Moldanado-Torres, 2016).

The research collective on decoloniality, organised by Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, brings together scholars of Latin American / European origin, working in universities in the United States and Latin America, and interested in ideas of dependency theory, colonialism, gender, and critical theory. It builds on the earlier work of scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano and seeks, in particular, to examine the relationship between the Frankfurt School version of critical theory and the emerging paradigm of coloniality / modernity. Some of the prominent authors are Maldanado-Torres, Maria Lugones, Sylvia Wynter, and Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, among others.

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In Africa, the relationship between decoloniality and post-coloniality is complicated. For example, prominent scholars like Fanon, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Achille Mbembe, Mudimbe, wa Thiong'o, and Mamdani, amongst many others, have also written on pervasive coloniality and the need for decolonisation in Africa over many different time periods and contexts. However, some of these scholars would consider themselves postcolonial scholars, rather than decolonial scholars. On one hand, post-coloniality can be seen as a geopolitical and geohistorical situatedness, particularly for those from former British, French, and other European (Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.) colonies. On the other hand, post-coloniality has been critiqued for its inability to translate its politics beyond British and French colonisation. In contrast, it is argued that decoloniality can be translated into the unconventional colonial-imperial histories of Eastern Europe and Russia (Tlostanova, 2022). While the theoretical differences and ambiguities exist, my research aims to use these schools of theoretical work in community, rather

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than nit-pick their differences. This is because, while post-colonial scholars might not locate themselves as decolonial, they often do the work of decolonising (Tlostanova, 2022).

Whether in South America, Africa or Eastern Europe, the decolonial turn can be understood as 'a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power' (Smith 1999: 33). Decoloniality is not only a long-standing political and epistemological movement aimed at liberation of ex-colonised peoples from political and material colonial imperialism, but also a way of thinking, knowing, and doing. It is a legacy of marginalised but persistent movements that emerged from struggles against the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, Apartheid, neo-colonialism, and underdevelopment as constitutive negative elements of Euro-North American-centric modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Maldanado-Torres, 2016).

Decolonisation is the physical process of removing a colonial administration from the colony; however, decoloniality also refers to the removal of the colonial logics that exist long after the administration has left (Fanon, 1961; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Therefore, coloniality and decoloniality refer to the science of reasoning, metaphysics, ontology, and hierarchies of power created by processes of (physical) colonisation and decolonisation (Quijano 1991, 2000; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992; Mignolo, 2000; Maldanado-Torres, 2016). If coloniality refers to a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a hierarchy of power that remains after formal independence of colonies, decoloniality aims 'at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanise communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world' (Maldanado-Torres, 2016: 10). Decoloniality also enriches my research analysis as it takes global systems of oppression and locates how colonial patriarchy underpins practices in the university space. Moreover, decoloniality engages with the colonial patriarchal construction of gender, and how bodies of the colonised exist as sites of violence. It also deepens CRT's engagement with the everyday violence of white supremacy. Both theories strengthen my analysis, and allow me to provide depth and insight into Black students' experiences in higher education. Therefore, it is imperative to examine how the naturalisation of war and violence forms part of colonial systems, and how violence (including within the university space) becomes naturalised.

Naturalisation of war and violence

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Similar to colonialism, coloniality involves the expropriation of land and resources. During formal colonialism, expropriation primarily takes place through direct forms of conquest of one group over another; however, under modernity and global neoliberal capitalism, coloniality expropriation also happens through the logic of the market and of modern nation-states. This leads to a situation in colonies where their native and colonised subjects continue experiencing vast forms of dispossession, even after independence. In this process, land and resources are taken away, but so are the very possibilities for the colonised and dehumanised self to emerge as embodied subjects that can properly give, receive, think, create, and act. The colonised are meant to be bodies without land, people without resources, and subjects without the capacity for autonomy and self-determination, whose constant desire is to be other than themselves. The bodies of the colonised and dehumanised are exploited for labour in ways that reinstate their lower, subjugated and marginal positions. For the colonised, time is less the time of production, and more the time of surveillance and of waiting for denigration, violation, and murder to take place (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Gqola (2015) argues that there is a connection between rape culture, the manufacture of female fear, and violent masculinities within colonial contexts. Moreover, hypermasculinity is accompanied by violent masculinities, misogyny and war talk. This is particularly devastating for colonised women and gender non-conforming people because, in the modern/colonial world, masculinity is defined as power over women, meaning that anyone who wishes to claim masculinity is expected to perform violence over female bodies. Colonised women are particularly vulnerable as they are not protected by the codes of (white) femininity in the first place, codes that allow for violence but that also extend some protections. Therefore, violence towards the bodies of colonised women can be seen as an affirmation of masculinity that does not carry major consequences for the perpetrators (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

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In the world of perpetual war, colonised males are, in many contexts, particularly susceptible to being conceived of as enemy combatants, who are a threat to the lives and power of white males and to the "honour" of white women. Therefore, the best approach is to kill them, imprison them, and profile them, all tactics of war. Women and gender non-conforming people of colour will also be killed, imprisoned and profiled, as they also threaten the integrity of the colonial world and cannot but appear as violent as well. Therefore, the colonial world demands a complex, systematic, and enduring exercise from the colonised to perform non-threatening practices. They must appear as impeccably professional, rational, and nationalistic, among other features that reduce the anxiety and fear that their constitution as colonised creates in this context (Maldonado-

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Torres, 2016). Taking into consideration the pervasiveness of coloniality in the university space, this tenant of coloniality (the naturalisation of war) becomes a very important lens when we make sense of Black students' experiences on university campuses. If coloniality is the naturalisation of war on displaced bodies, then university campuses are an extension of that violence on Black students. Moreover, the normalisation of the gender binary, gender-based violence and rape culture form part of coloniality. This naturalisation of war also explains how institutions of learning can easily became militarised, through the hiring of paramilitaries and private security by university decision-makers, for unarmed students during the Fees Must Fall protests that began in 2015 (Nyamnjoh, 2017).

Coloniality of power, knowledge, being

Worldviews cannot be sustained by virtue of power alone. Various forms of agreement and consent need to be part of it. For instance, ideas about the meaning of concepts and the quality of lived experience, about what constitutes valid knowledge or points of view, and about what represents political and economic order, are basic areas that help define how things are conceived and accepted in any given worldview.

The colonial worldview is informed by metaphysical catastrophe, normalisation of violence, binaries of difference and a hierarchy of humanity, in particular, the centrality of the Human. This refers to the dominion of white, male, Western, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual, cisgender humans over other humans, nature and animals, which are seen as material to be exploited by the above-mentioned Human. This metaphysical – the disconnection from other human beings, animals, nature and spirit beings – is what decolonisation means by metaphysical catastrophe.

The metaphysical catastrophe refers to the desegregated and disembodied self of the colonised. Coloniality is a peculiar construction of knowledge, power and being that divides the world into zones of being and not-being (the desegregated dispossessed self ie Black in many contexts) human, and that makes war endless and perpetual. The coloniality of power, knowledge, and being is also what creates the line between the human and non-human. Modernity/coloniality is, in fact, the catastrophic transformation of whatever we can consider as human space, time, structure, culture, subjectivity, objectivity, and methodology, into dehumanising coordinates or foundations that serve to perpetuate the inferiority of some and the superiority of others (Quijano, 1991; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992; Quijano, 2000).

Moreover, Maldonado (2016: 21) states,

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Likewise, the damnés[8] are represented in ways that make them reject themselves and, while kept below the usual dynamics of accumulation and exploitation, can only aspire to climb in the power structure by forms of assimilation that are never entirely successful. Ending perpetual war thus necessitates the formation of embodied subjectivities that resign from the process of searching for recognition and validation in the modern/colonial world. Decolonization is not so much about obtaining recognition from the normative subjects and structures, but about challenging the terms in which humanity is defined and recognition takes place.

This means the colonial logic that exists in South African universities facilitates a process where Black students are estranged from themselves. Moreover, coloniality continuously tells Black students that who they are is shameful, as compared to the imagined student within the Western worldview that universities still uphold. It took me three years to be able to write "I" during this research, because I was taught it devalued my scholarship. In the UCT politics department, I had a tutor refuse to mark my work because it was "too emotive" because I spoke about my experiences in relation to racist historical figures like Rhodes. These patriarchal narratives form part of the complex pyramid of colonial disembodiment that occurs when we enter university space. Beyond that, decoloniality and its articulation of the metaphysical catastrophe enables me to articulate the spiritual violence of coloniality and how the university plays a role in disconnecting Black people from their spiritual selves. The integration of African spirituality and my engagement with ancestral wisdom requires a serious critique of the metaphysical catastrophe in order to uncover how coloniality in the university poses spiritual violence to Black students in university.

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Decoloniality is rooted in a decolonial turn, or turns, away from modernity / coloniality. The most basic expression of the decolonial turn is at the level of attitude, leading to the formation of a decolonial attitude. This is also similar to what Biko (1969) terms the 'Black consciousness' attitude. Decoloniality seeks to shift away from the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being that keep the dispossessed split from itself. It is the desire 'to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other,' against the devastating effects of metaphysical catastrophe, that makes the impossibility of the formation of this attitude (within the logic of modernity / coloniality) possible (Fanon 1952: 206).

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[8] French word meaning 'wretched' or racialised being in colonial contexts. Popularised by Fanon in his book *Wretched of the earth*.

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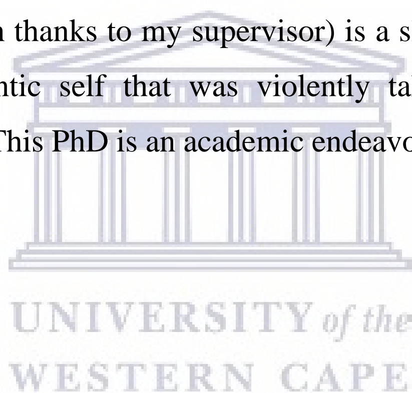
This means the desire to destroy the binary of difference, understand those who appear different, form community and learn, as well as expand beyond the cognitive to embodiment, affect and the spirit world. This new sense of self exists in opposition to metaphysical catastrophe, the paradigm of war, and ontological separation (Maldonado-Torres 2015). This struggle is pursued with love, as the positive attitude of the damné, and rage, as a form of negation that is inspired and oriented by the positive attitude of love (Sandoval 2000). As Anzaldúa (2005: 313) opines, ‘we are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that alienated us from others. When the wound forms a cicatriz, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart.’ Fanon identifies this as the primary expressions of what I am referring to as decolonial agency and the decolonial attitude (Fanon 1952: 206). Like Biko (1969), cited earlier, also states, the dispossessed transition from isolated self-hating subjects to decolonising agents and bridges who serve as connectors between themselves and many others. It is in this process that true love and understanding—philosophy in the most abstract but also the most concrete of senses—can flourish (Maldonado-Torres 2016). For me, this is powerful because it means that my assertion of my experiences (with much thanks to my supervisor) is a slow process of reintegration with my authentic self, an authentic self that was violently taken away from me during my undergraduate years at UCT. This PhD is an academic endeavour and a deep spiritual process of my healing journey.

The decolonial epistemic turn



When a racialised being writes critically about a colonial society, it reconstructs and builds up one's self as a whole integrated being. It requires the dispossessed to dare to question coloniality of being and modernity. This unsettles systems of power and hierarchies when the dispossessed questions the coloniser and articulates desires of a decolonial future (Maldonado-Torres 2016).

Questioning is a key part of self-understanding, and of understanding and knowledge in general. Speaking, writing, and the generation of questions are part of the drama of a subject that starts to regain its humanity in reaching out, without masks, to others. Anzaldúa, (2009:114) also argues that, ‘though we have not broken out of the white frame, we at least see it for what it is. Questioning the values of the dominant culture which imposes fundamental differences on those of the “wrong” side of the good/bad dichotomy is the first step’. This means that, even though my PhD might be located within the ‘white frame’, it can be decolonial in how it challenges and

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critiques coloniality. It is in the questioning that new knowledges and ways of understanding and change can come about. In doing this, we destroy the binary of difference (white people as rightful knowledge producers and Black people as perpetual objects of research) in modern colonial societies. This, in turn, disrupts the control and power of knowledge production and the rising of the decolonial archives.

The decolonial being cannot rely only on questioning, thinking and writing, but must integrate social action within a community. The decolonial seeks 'to induce man to be actional, by maintaining in his circularity the respect of the fundamental values that make the world human, that is the task of utmost urgency for he who, after careful reflection, prepares to act' Fanon (1952:173). Therefore, the self-integration and the emergence of creative critical and spiritual beings must extend to revolution in the physical world. This change happens with the deep understanding that community is fundamental to the decolonial turn. As Cesaire (1990) puts it, when one person of colour is lynched, tortured, or murdered, that dehumanisation affects Cesaire as well. Moreover, decoloniality 'is an activity that requires embodied subjects coming together to create, think, and act in the effort to decolonize being, knowledge, and power. If coloniality emerges as part of the "down-turn" of demographic and metaphysical catastrophe, decoloniality is rooted in practical and metaphysical revolt' (Maldonado-Torres 2016:30). Therefore, decoloniality is not the project of individual salvation but a collaboration with other struggles with the aim of constituting a better world free of the violence of coloniality.

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This decolonial articulation is resonant of the articulation of ubuntu discussed earlier in this chapter. I believe this interconnectedness goes way beyond linear constructions of time and the physical realm of the living. Therefore, I believe this research is a collaboration between a community of the living (myself and the respondents) and ancestors, in response to violence against the living and those in the ancestral realm (who have experienced colonial violence specifically in knowledge production). This is also work that produces a decolonial archive.

2.5 Decolonial feminism

Decolonial feminist theory is a further theoretical lens that I draw on to explore the intersectional challenges that hinder the successful graduation of Black South African students. Often, universities are considered neutral sites of knowledge production; however, in the South African context, education, and by extension universities, have colonial Apartheid patriarchal histories.

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For example, the University of Cape Town (UCT) was founded in 1829 as the South African College, a high school for white boys. The College developed into a university during the period from 1880 to 1900, with increased funding that came from private sources and the colonial British government (University of Cape Town, 2017). During the height of the "native question" during British rule, UCT also contributed to the debate and saw itself as part of the solution to exercise power over Africans (Ntsebeza, 2012). In 1921, UCT established the school of African life and languages. The colonial state was very involved in the planning and funding of a school for African studies as a colonial strategy of ruling over the indigenous people (Lalu, 2011). Even though the university retells the history as a neutral institution with no political involvement, there is evidence that UCT was deeply political.

In his chapter, *Education as Freedom*, Rick Turner (1980) also argues that schools in Africa were founded on colonial principles that favoured European notions of civilisation. This means that schools, colleges, churches and universities in Africa are sites for the reproduction of privilege and the power of settler coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2010). Due to the colonial nature of how education and schools were organised in colonial South Africa, and taking into consideration that my research is based in universities, it becomes imperative to use a feminist theoretical framework that deconstructs coloniality. Decolonial feminist theory's understanding of coloniality, through the coloniality of gender, enables a deeper understanding of how patriarchy, gender binaries, and heteronormativity function, along with racialisation in the university. This will enable me to present a multidimensional analysis of Black students' challenges in higher education, instead of privileging racism.

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Feminist decolonial theory was popularised (but not limited to) by Maria Lugones in 2010, in her paper, *Towards a Decolonial Feminism*. For Lugones (2010), racialisation, colonisation, capitalist exploitation and heteronormativity constitute what she terms the 'coloniality of gender'. She (2010: 747) elaborates,

> My intent is to focus on the subjective- intersubjective to reveal that disaggregating oppressions disaggregates the subjective-intersubjective springs of colonised women's agency. I call the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression "the coloniality of gender." I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender "decolonial feminism".

The coloniality of gender refers to the intersecting oppressions, such as race, colonialism, exploitation under capitalism and heteronormativity, that construct the colonial subject (Lugones, 2010; Oyewumi, 1997; Nkenkana, 2015; Barnes, 2007; Wekker, 2006). Heteronormativity (the

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construction of a gender/sex binary and hierarchy) refers to the belief that people fall into two gendered binaries, that of men and women. In addition, it assumes that the only legitimate sexual orientation is between men and women (Gray, 2011).

Lugones argues that, during the colonising missions of the Americas and the Caribbean, gender was the organising tool of master / slave unequal relations. She explains (2010: 743),

> I understand the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity. Beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonised in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilised are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species - as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. The European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason.

In the European context, the man was the epitome of what it meant to be human, and the woman was a weaker (less-human) extension of the man. Therefore, the construction of racial hierarchies, of European bourgeois heterosexual Christian man (human) and enslaved person of colour (subhuman, hypersexual, barbaric), mirrored this gender dichotomy. This also rationalised (rationality being a character trait of a 'good' colonial man) the subjugation of indigenous people (Lugones, 2010). Describing the African context, Frantz Fanon (1952) also explained Blackness as a construct that seeks to portray Black people as subhuman or inferior in relation to the human / superior White / European. Moreover, for Lugones (2010), the coloniality of gender extended to the division and organising of labour within the slave economy, or what she terms 'capitalist exploitation'. In addition to that, the policing of sexuality, the enforcing of heteronormativity and gender oppression, were key components of the colonial mission.

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Maria Lugones introduces decolonial feminism as a theory that imagines the possibility of overcoming and dismantling the coloniality of gender. For her, indigenous people are not doomed within the coloniality of gender, nor are they passive, but are always actively resisting the coloniality of gender. She (2010) calls this resistance 'the colonial difference,' or what Emma Perez (1999) terms the 'decolonial imaginary.' Lugones asserts that people in the colonial difference are those who possess the possibility of overcoming coloniality. Decolonial feminism

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encourages the acknowledgement of and engagement with indigenous knowledges that exist in the colonial difference.

Decolonial feminism is crucial for this study because universities in South Africa exist as a legacy of colonisation, and operate under a colonial framework that is deeply heteronormative, cisnormative and patriarchal. As mentioned above, it is important that this study uses a lens that takes coloniality seriously. For example, despite post-1994 attempts in South Africa, and post-colonial attempts in the broader African context, 'transformation has remained the weakest in the drive for African futures' (Nkenkana, 2015: 34). Not only has transformation been weak, but oftentimes has embodied masculinity or maleness in African universities (Barnes, 2007). Keeping in line with the vast African feminist scholarship on the coloniality of gender (for example, Barnes 2007; Mama *et al*., 2007; Bennet 2011), this study will examine ways in which the coloniality of gender, as played out in the university space, affects how Black students navigate the university.

Decolonial feminism will enable this study to engage with the challenges of Black South African students from a broader lens. For example, decolonial feminism allows the study to locate the university as a system that maintains and reproduces exploitative patriarchal and heteronormative capitalist systems (Madden, 2014), and intricate repositories of neoliberal practice and ideology (Lewis, 2016; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). This disrupts notions of the university as a neutral space, identifying it as a space underpinned by neoliberal capitalist ideologies. Taking into consideration South Africa's past and the disenfranchisement of Black people, a decolonial lens allows an exploration of the relationship between neo-liberal capitalism in university and Black students' access to university.

This study also allows me to enter a rich discussion between African feminists (Bennet, 2011; Barnes, 2007; Clowes, 2017; Carolissen, 2018; Shefer *et al*., 2017; Ngabaza, 2018; Nkenkana, 2015 etc.) and decolonial African feminists about the impact of colonialism in South Africa. Decolonial feminism allows me to examine the gendered ways coloniality manifests in the university space, and assess whether this is a challenge that Black South African students face in the university. Decolonial feminism takes an intersectional approach to how coloniality cuts across economics, racialisation, gender and sex binary, gender oppression and physical colonisation, and mirrors intersectionality and makes it a useful theoretical framework that will deepen the analysis of the proposed study.

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2.6 Vulnerability and Shame

> Some of the frustrations I have while doing my Phd... On the 17 September I had planned a three hour study online session with another Masters student. Right when I had sat down to study, they started taking down two shacks by the house next door. For the next hour and a half, it felt like someone was hammering in my head. By the time this was done, I had a migraine and I was very angry. "How do you think you can write a PhD in the township?" my negative internal self-talk hissed at me. "Who do you think you are?" I was so angry because precisely what I am researching about is the same thing I am going through. I spiralled into hopelessness and depression for the rest of the day. Self-doubt and loathing creeped in. These are the conditions we as Black students have to study through (online journal, 20/09/2020).

Throughout my career as a Black student, I have grappled with shame. The shame sits in various parts of my body and is triggered by various experiences within and outside the university space. The shame hits me at multiple levels, from my right to exist in academia, my competency due to mental health disabilities, down to the legitimacy of my scholarship. It is important that I name the shame, and discuss the emotional psychological impact of existing in a space, like the university, that triggers shame. Moreover, theorising shame is a key part of the theoretical framing of the study. This is because colonial and racist subtext about Black (in)competency and belonging are so omnipresent that they get internalised as inner voices. As affect theory argues, emotions are not neutral but exist within a socio-political context that gives meaning to various emotions (Ahmed, 2004).

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Brene Brown (2006) writes that shame is a psycho-social-cultural construct, meaning shame relates to one's emphasis on emotions, thoughts and behaviours of self, based in proximity to what is considered the norm/desirable/worthy within their environment. Brown (2006:45) defines shame as,

> an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging. Participants described shame using terms including devastating, noxious, consuming, excruciating, filleted, small, separate from others, rejected, diminished, and the worst feeling ever. In defining shame, participants contrasted shame with guilt, which they defined or described as a feeling that results from behaving in a flawed or bad way rather than a flawed or bad self.

Based on Black people's location within the colonial matrix of power (as subhuman), to be Black is to be in constant shame. I have struggled with shame as a Black student from the township, and the economic challenges I still face. The extract from my online journal illustrates how shame

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and feelings of unworthiness crept in because I was struggling to study in the township. How could I internalise the legacy of Apartheid housing, lack of adequate dignified housing, and the general violence of the township as an indication that I am not worthy to write a PhD thesis? Yet, the voices keep asking, ‘who do you think you are to write an entire PhD, coming from an environment like that?’ I have also experienced this shame over the years when I have seen white counterparts breeze through university with (perceived) ease. Their (perceived) ease within the system added confirmation that I am not worthy and do not belong. Education has been packaged to be a smooth four years of consuming knowledge. Yet, as a ‘breadwinner’ on a scholarship from the township, and as an individual with mental disabilities, my journey in the university has been rocky. It has been filled with awkward pauses, bed-ridden and pinned down with shame for months on end, and guilty gulps of water and antipsychotics.

I argue that to study shame in the Black university student’s experience is to unlock a particular understanding of how coloniality affects the Black student. It is also to understand how these feelings of inadequacy (which can be seen as real or our fault) can play a role in how Black students do not finish their degrees. It is to understand how shame operates in the black body when they enter the university space and, therefore, to understand the vulnerability of Black students in the education system.

When we as Black students enter the university, it is a delicate dance between faith, vulnerability and resilience. Since the early 1970s, scholars have written about vulnerability (Bracken-Roche, 2017) and compounded harm, and suffering and susceptibility to harm (Dominelli, 2012; Roberts & Ashley, 2008; Wisner & Kelman, 2015; Bankoff, Frerks, & Hilhorst, 2004; Pelling, Maskrey, Ruiz, & Hall, 2004; Varley, 1995). I think that this scholarship is valuable; however, I would like to pursue a lens that views that vulnerability as risk, but also a beautiful song of faith.

Over the past decades, there has been a growing body of work amongst feminist scholars that critiques the veiled racism of writing Black, Brown and indigenous women as only vulnerable victims (Boonzaier, 2017; Boonzaier & Kessi, 2018; Gqola, 2015; Helman, 2018; Shefer, 2016). Moreover, the discourse of vulnerability can advance paternalistic, racist, misogynist, homophobic, and anti-feminist political agendas (Koivunen, 2018). As Shefer (2022: 5) explains in her research on South Africa,

> Another key concern is the ways in which mainstream research on gender and sexuality in South Africa has reinstated stereotypic gender and sexual binaries. The reproduction of such normative discourses is also ensnared in transnational and local ‘othering’. It is increasingly evident that intersectional gender

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binarisms are reflected in research, policies, and practices, so that femininity, in particular poor, black, African young femininity, is constructed as always vulnerable and violable.

Brene Brown contends there is a different way we may understand vulnerability. She asserts that vulnerability is opening yourself up to what is unknown and asserts that, 'I define vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. An opening of one's self to the unknown with great risk' (Brown, 2012: 35). As Black students, we pack our suitcases and travel to unfamiliar campuses with high hopes and in pursuit of a better life for our communities. I believe that this is vulnerability. Moreover, Brown (2012: 35) argues that, 'the perception that vulnerability is weakness is the most widely accepted myth about vulnerability and the most dangerous...rather than respecting and appreciating the courage and daring behind vulnerability, we let our fear and discomfort become judgement and criticism.'

Sara Ahmed (2022) writes brilliantly about academia's panic and dismissal of discomfort and hurt. She also suggests that, instead of fearing vulnerability, we can lean into it. In many ways, the classroom (or the university) deals with histories that have caused hurt and continue to hurt. For example, my neighbours taking down a shack (and me consequently not being able to study) invokes painful histories of forced removals, displacement, overcrowding and a lack of adequate housing. The subversive act of publicly acknowledging the incident and naming the shame means that, 'these words become lifelines too, allowing me to live on by going on. Hurt: still. We are moved because it hurts still' (Ahmed, 2022: 64). My openness to vulnerability means that I am open to sitting with the hurt and use it as a lifeline that propels my work.

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While seemingly indulgent, this inner work allows me to push past the Western understanding of shame as an individualistic dark emotion, and transform it into a bridge that allows human connection with others (Probyn *et al*., 2017). This has been important in my research, as many of the research participants struggled with internalised shame, and the honesty and vulnerability about our shame became a place of connection. Through this connection, we were able to start unpacking the dominant racist discourses and systematic challenges we had internalised as personal failure. For example, one research participant was expressing much shame and regret about choosing the wrong courses in first year, and consequently how this contributed to them leaving university. In a soft voice, I simply asked, 'But how could you have known?' Taking into consideration that none of her parents finished high school and they had no institutional support, how could they have had the resources to know better? She hesitated and thought. In that moment, I witnessed a huge shift in her understanding of herself and her journey in education. When

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difficult emotions are not policed, they provide an avenue for human connection and community (Probyn *et al*., 2017).

I have come to understand that registering for the PhD has made me vulnerable in many ways: vulnerable to the colonial system, and also vulnerable in the way that I dared to see myself as a knowledge co-producer (along with my research participants). I have to believe that, even though my parents were traumatised by Bantu Education and excluded from higher education, I am able to stand on their shoulders, shake off shame and believe I am worthy of co-creating knowledge. Furthermore, I feel exposed and vulnerable to criticism (or shaming) as I integrate my personal experiences and spirituality into the process of knowledge production. It is a great risk to also integrate my African spiritual beliefs, the ancestral entities that reside within me and my bloodline, into my academic research. I have a double consciousness because I have been trained (at UCT) that my personal voice discredits the legitimacy of my research. I discuss this in more detail in the methodology chapter. Therefore, in many ways, this whole PhD project is an exercise in vulnerability and an attempt to build connection with those who will read my work, and struggle with shame.

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, the limited scholarship that discusses this topic often implicitly blames students, or paints them as weak, for not completing their degrees. Brown's theory of vulnerability allows us to ask pertinent questions, like: in the midst of much-needed critique of structural violence and coloniality in the university, can we also acknowledge Black students (who were unable to complete their undergraduate degrees) for their courage and resilience (to navigate alien and hostile campuses)? I worry that a critique of coloniality in education that does not acknowledge our agency, nor celebrate our wins (outside of the academy), is another colonial fetish, where Black bodies exist as perpetual victims of the system. I believe this lens helps us to de-centre the university as the only measure of 'success,' and only vehicle to a good life for Black people.

Moreover, situating Black students' lived experience within this new paradigm grounds this research in honesty (about the violences of coloniality), and also humanises them, renders them visible and human beings outside of clinical statistics. This shift allows us to understand that, when Black students protest, despite their attempts to navigate hostile colonial environments, they simply cannot breathe. When Black students protest coloniality, it becomes difficult to problematize them as ungrateful troublemakers (Ahmed (2021) on Complaint). It humanises Black students.

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2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter complicates my relationship with academia as an African spiritual being creating knowledge in the university space. In doing so, I described the theoretical frameworks that ground my academic and spiritual self as I conduct my research. The theories discussed were Black consciousness, critical race theory, decolonisation, decolonial feminism, intersectionality, and vulnerability.

Black consciousness allowed me to outline the genealogy of student activism and Black liberation theory in South Africa, while also providing an historical overview of the racial segregation and legislation which prompted BCM activism. Like BCM, CRT provides an analysis of how everyday racism functions in micro and macro space, and how this affects Black lives. CRT deepened my understanding and widened my lens about how racism is reproduced and maintained in the education system. Decolonial and feminist decolonial theory's rejection of modernity, colonial conceptions of white / Euro-American straight men as human, and the coloniality of gender, enabled me to provide a fuller analysis of how coloniality affects Black students. This was particularly important in understanding how coloniality affected Black students' spiritual lives. Lastly, vulnerability theory, as a lens, helped me avoid portraying Black students as powerless victims and enabled me to honour their strength and courage. These lenses are deeply grounded in honesty about the extent of violence in coloniality, yet also offer room for hope. This hope has been much needed as I waded through the following chapter, which discusses the brutality of racialisation, the inhumane education policies during Apartheid and the current government's failure to decolonise higher education during so-called 'democracy'.

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Chapter Three: Contextualising Higher Education in S.A

Introduction

Any conversation that pertains to Black students' experiences in university needs to examine the history and function of university and knowledge production during settler colonialism and Apartheid. Before that discussion, however, it is imperative to understand the function of race, and specifically how race and class were entangled with gender and racialised capitalism during settler colonialism and Apartheid. Lastly, it is important to look at how these categorisations impacted the education system and racial discriminatory policies under Apartheid. In this chapter, I give historical context to Black students' experiences of coloniality and systematic exclusion in university by presenting the histories of education and various discriminatory policies implemented during Apartheid. I do this to demonstrate that universities are not neutral spaces, to contextualise Black students' experiences within histories of racial inequality, and to demonstrate how these histories have resulted in continued systematic exclusion.

3.1 Race and racial categorisation in SA

Frantz Fanon (1952) describes Blackness as a White construct that seeks to portray Black people as subhuman. In South Africa, this belief existed before the institutionalisation of Apartheid. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010) describes racialisation as a system that organised people according to a hierarchy that depended on binaries, such as primitive versus civilised, or developed versus underdeveloped. At the top of the hierarchy were White people. Their way of life was seen as civilised and developed.

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Historical archives and published writings of colonialists reiterate the arguments of Fanon and Ndlovu-Gatsheni. People like Cecil Rhodes wrote extensively about the role of Black people in the colony, and theorised regularly about 'the subhuman nature' of Black people in South Africa. He famously wrote, 'I prefer land to niggers ... the natives are like children. They are emerging from barbarism and one should kill as many niggers as possible' (Rhodes in Adebajo, 2010: 218). Rhodes articulates the very same idea that Frantz Fanon alludes to, that Blackness is barbaric and subhuman.

The construction of Blackness as inferior continued under Afrikaner nationalism and with the implementation of Apartheid, which was institutionalised when the National Party won the South African national elections in 1948. Werner Eiselen, an Afrikaner anthropologist, was one of the

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first scholars who stressed the need for separate development in the 1920's, before the National Party (NP) came into power (Giliomee, 2003). Afrikaner intelligentsia argued that Africans had refused to assimilate; therefore, separate development was the only solution (du Plessis, 1940). The first book proposing and outlining principles of Apartheid was written by three Stellenbosch university academics: P.J. Coertze, F. J. Language, and B.I.C van Eeden in 1943 (Coertze *et al*., 1943).

Apartheid was a legal form of governance introduced in 1948 by the NP, and was influenced by Afrikaner nationalism, which promoted Afrikaner supremacy and cultural pride through the Afrikaans language and their religion (Dutch Reformed Church) (Mhlauli *et al*., 2015). Institutionalisation of separate development meant that, from 1948 to 1988, the NP put multiple laws in place to achieve and maintain Apartheid. The basic components were racial segregation, separate development and the preservation of Afrikaner nationalism (Robert, 1994).

Apartheid architects argued that the separate social, political and economic development of all racial groups served each group's specific cultural needs (Eiselen, 1943, as cited in Giliomee, 2003; Wizarat, 1980). They viewed race as a biological construct with social, cultural and economic dimensions, which were all premised on the notion of irreconcilable differences, hence the need for separate development (Dubow, 1992; Giliomee, 2003; Posel, 2001).

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Under Apartheid, the South African population was divided into four racial categories: African (Black), Coloured, Indian and White and, in 1950, the Population Registration Act stated that every citizen had to be registered into one of these four official racial categories. Apartheid constructed and micromanaged how people internalised and navigated race. Based on an ideology of a social hierarchy, the state legislated which public amenities different groups used (as per the Separate Amenities Act), and where they lived (as per the Group Areas Act). The government also set up different departments that would deal with people according to their race (Roberts, 1994).

The racial categories were not just a way to organise South African society. They carried meaning, and were founded on a racial hierarchy. In the context of South Africa, racialisation created a hierarchy where Whites were at the top of civilisation, followed by Indians, then Coloured people, and African/Black people were at the bottom (Albert, 2018). Moreover, the institutionalisation of race was used to differentiate African people into sub-groups (e.g. Coloured identity as different to Black) in order to further entrench divisions and tensions. The

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Black identity was more complicated. Prior to 1951, Black people were referred to as 'Natives', then 'Bantu' in 1962, and Black in 1978 (Erasmus, 2012; Horrell, 1964).

Steve Biko (1969) also recognised that Blackness, as constructed by the White Apartheid regime, was something inherently lacking in humanity and reason. The concept of the African as Black was a deliberate socialisation and preparation of the Black race for subservient roles in the fabric of White society. Prominent political figures under Apartheid theorised in detail about the inferiority of Black people.

Racial categorisation was also used as the fundamental principle for allocating resources and opportunities, determining geographical allocation, planning and development, and the boundaries of social interaction. Race became the variable that organised South African society and was a huge determining factor in accessing resources.

The exercise of mass racial classification and differentiation became the foundation for future segregationist and discriminatory laws, such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Immorality Act of 1949, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and the Bantu Education Act of 1953, amongst many others. These laws legalised separate living areas, the separate use of public amenities according to race, and the complete banning of social interaction across racial lines (Posel, 2001). Racial categorisation in South Africa also saw the introduction of a legislated racialised and unequal education.

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3.2 Basic education under Apartheid

In pre-Apartheid South Africa, the schooling system played a huge part in the subjugation and socialisation of slaves. The first school was founded in 1658 in the Cape Colony under Dutch rule (Molteno, 1984; Seroto 1999). Early schooling initiatives by the Dutch East India Company were modelled in a way that psychologically prepared the enslaved people to serve their masters more efficiently. Slaves were required to unlearn everything about their previous communities, and adopt a Dutch worldview and the Christian religion. In effect, the education system served as a re-socialising tool for slaves into their new identities as subjugated subjects (Soudien, 2015). Even though schools were initially integrated, children of colonialists were later separated from those of the enslaved. In these schools, the children of colonialists were groomed for control over others, and were taught how to reproduce and reinforce European 'civilisation' and culture in Africa. This laid the foundations for Apartheid policies and the structure of education in the 20th century (Soudien, 2012).

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During Apartheid, the NP instituted a policy of separate development within the education system by creating separate departments for the racial groups. The outcome was 19 racially and ethnically defined departments of lower and higher education. White education was controlled by the White House of Assembly, Indian education by the Indian House of Delegates, and Coloured education by the Coloured House of Representatives. Urban African education was controlled by the Department of Education and Training, and rural African ethnically separate departments were controlled by 'homeland' educational systems. Each racially divided department functioned as a separate educational bureaucracy, with its own regulations, laws, modes of operation, staff, contracts and history (Carrim, 1998).

From the 1950s, the education system in South Africa took the same shape as other Apartheid policies. In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was passed into law, which stated that different races were not allowed to study at the same school. It also prohibited the instruction of Mathematics and Science in the Black education system (Poutiainen, 2009). In his justification of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, Hendrik Verwoerd (1954: np) said, 'There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?'

This clearly articulates two sentiments: that the Black people are inferior and not deserving of an education of high standards; and that educating Black people is a waste because they are destined for a world of slave menial labour.

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The state transformed the Bantu Education curriculum to teach African people to accept allocated roles of obedience, identification with rural culture, and piety (Soudien, 2012). Moreover, the White education system had the highest state expenditure, resources and infrastructure, while the Black education system was not properly resourced, often had no textbooks, and limited teachers with no or minimal qualifications (OECD, 2008). For many South Africans, basic elements of education were left out of the curriculum, and only English and Afrikaans were officially recognised. During Apartheid, the quality of an educator's training was determined by their race. Teacher training opportunities were unequal, and Black teachers received inferior training. Black teachers were only required to have grade 10 and two years of further study, as opposed to a White teacher who had to have a minimum of three years' education at a college or university. Therefore, most Black teachers were unqualified or underqualified, and the few that were qualified were thinly spread across the homelands (Poutiainen, 2009: 29).

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3.3 Higher education during Apartheid

In the same year that the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was enacted, the Apartheid government also enacted laws to segregate institutions of higher learning, according to the four stipulated races, in compliance with the Extension of Universities Act of 1959. The government established the Commission on Coloured Education, and also passed the Coloured Persons Act (No. 47 of 1963) and the Indian Education Act (No. 61 of 1965), which formalised the segregation of the education system (Soudien, 2012). In 1967, the NP implemented the National Education Policy Act, whereby separate tertiary institutions were established for Blacks, Coloured and Indians. The introduction of the 1984 constitution further entrenched divisions in education in South Africa. By the beginning of 1985, 19 universities were exclusive to Whites, two were exclusive to Indians, two were exclusive to Coloureds and six were exclusively for Africans (Bunting, 2006). The African universities were divided into Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho universities, in order for Africans to be further divided into their supposed respective tribes within the Bantustans (Tabata, n.d.). The term 'Bantustans' refers to the areas to which Black people were relegated during the policy of separate development. Moreover, Black universities (African, Indian and Coloured) were not set up for academic reasons, but rather to produce a Black middle class who would work with the system to further entrench Apartheid (Badat, 2010).

3.4 The legacy of Apartheid

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With the advent of the new South African democracy in 1994, the government embarked on a plan to desegregate South African high schools. Since 1996, every South African has had the right to a basic education, as laid out in the 1996 Bill of Rights, which is contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). The State is constitutionally obligated to make education available and accessible to all South Africans, and policies that advance desegregation have been put in place to ensure equality and quality of education for all South Africans (Crouch, 2004). However, the Apartheid legacy of unequal spending and unequal infrastructure has led to structural inequalities continuing after democracy. During Apartheid, the state 'was paying more than 20 times per capita for White education as for Blacks' (McKeever, 2016:119). High schools in townships struggle with poor infrastructure, whereas schools in the suburbs are far better resourced (Roberts, 1994).

With the political regime change in 1994, one of the State's mandates was to desegregate schools and ensure they were multicultural. With the exception of some resistance from a few White schools, the process went smoothly enough, without much trauma being experienced (Jansen,

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2004). However, the transition has not come without its challenges. Many South African students who attend previously White schools still struggle with feeling alienated or unable to relate to the school cultures. As Jansen (2004:2) writes,

> There is a formidable research literature showing that in South African schools, the grouping of children, the dominant assessment practices, the learner preferences of the teacher, the display of cultural symbols, the organisation of religious symbols, the scope of awards and rewards, and the decisions of 'who teaches what' are all organised in ways that show preference based on race.

However, beyond school culture, the impact of Apartheid on a learner's parents can play a significant role in their education. McKeever (2016: 128) argues,

> [T]he respondent's level of educational achievement is related to the occupation of their parents, but also the quality of that education. This holds even after controlling for age, gender, and growing up in an urban area. Other research has shown that the level of education of caregivers and economic resources of the home are major predictors of educational success in South Africa ... Black student success in school is not only dependent on their competency and hard work. They might not succeed at school because of the level of education of their parents.

Thus, if a Black student's parents grew up under Apartheid and were taught Bantu education, this also influences how they acquire an education in South Africa today. The legacy of inequality and discrimination inherited from racist Apartheid policies has an adverse effect for Black South Africans who are navigating the education system today.

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Despite the fact that measures have been taken towards redress, the legacy of Apartheid is still evident, particularly because inequality exists along the lines of race, even within higher education institutions. As discussed previously, higher education was instrumental in the realisation of Apartheid and racial inequality (Bunting, 2006), and segregation in higher education has resulted in low levels of enrolment into university by Black students, and unequal allocation of resources in previously White universities and Black universities. In 1948, Black university students made up only 4.6% of university enrolments. In the 1960s, the numbers increased, but this was mainly to facilitate the creation of a Black middle class that would administrate Apartheid policies of separate development (Malherbe, 1979).

The objective of sculpting a Black middle-class to support the Apartheid system had direct consequences for the resources allocated to Black universities. Black universities were poorly funded, and academics at Black universities often taught with old materials passed down from

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White institutions. This was in stark contrast to the White universities, which were well-funded. This disparity in resource allocation has shaped the institutional cultures of previously White and Black universities today (Bunting, 2006), and continues to shape inequalities to date. Historically Black universities are still under-resourced and still have students from materially disadvantaged backgrounds, while Black middle-class students can access the more ‘elite’ universities. These ‘elite’ universities tend to get valued more locally and internationally. Thus, despite efforts at transformation, the racial demographics remain relatively unchanged in South African universities (Cooper, 2015).

Another legacy of Apartheid has been the low levels of access to higher education, which is still a prevalent problem in Black communities as a result of decades of exclusion. Diversity and difference in higher education are powerful wellsprings of institutional vitality and development, yet the legacy of apartheid is the exact opposite. It created a pattern of unjust social inclusion and exclusion and the subordination of particular social groups. In 1993, only 9% of people in higher education were Black, as opposed to 70% who were White. Admissions policies in institutions of higher learning, particularly previously White universities, have had to be changed drastically, as they have had to open their doors to Black students who were not legally allowed to attend these institutions during Apartheid (Badat, 2010).

Due to the legacy of Bantu education, there was a huge gap between the accomplishments of high school learners’ from previously disadvantaged schools, and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes. Ongoing schooling deficiencies associated with historically disadvantaged social groups means that, even today, considerable numbers of students are underprepared in terms of the academic skills required for optimal participation and performance in higher education. Many Black students struggle because several institutions instruct in English or Afrikaans, but most Black students use English and/or Afrikaans as second or third languages. These disparities have necessitated the development of academic programmes and the restructuring of higher education (Badat, 2015).

Since the ushering in of a new democracy, many policies have been put in place in order to rectify the wrongs of the past. Efforts have been made to include the Black population into national planning in the education system, and for redress to be implemented according to historical advantages and disadvantages. With the establishment of the new ministry, several laws were implemented to transform tertiary education. Two of the most influential pieces of legislation are the Education and Training White Paper (Moja & Cloete, 1996), and the National Plan for Higher

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Education (2001). The Education and Training White Paper outlined the macro principles of education, and detailed the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (Carrim, 1998), while the National Plan for Higher Education developed the frameworks and strategic interventions necessary to transform higher education. These will be outlined in more detail below.

3.5 Policy and legislation

After the fall of the Apartheid regime, the new democratic government had the task of setting up a centralised ministry for education, to reform the existing segregated and unequal system of education (Reddy, 2004). Therefore, more inclusive institutional cultures, that embrace language and cultural diversity among staff and students, have to be built so that 'all our people feel at home in higher education' (Asmal & James, 2003:12). Access to higher education has become a national policy mandate directed at previously disadvantaged groups (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

Several laws were put in place in order to transform tertiary education. As noted above, two of the most influential pieces of legislation are the Education and Training White Paper and the National plan for Higher Education.

Education and Training White Paper

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In 1994 and 1995, the Education and Training White Paper was published, and it outlined the macro principles of education, and established the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (Carrim, 1998). The term 'White paper' indicates that this policy was one of the first steps in the process of transforming education under the national Reconstruction and Development Programme. The Education and Training White Paper stated that higher education should be transformed in order to negate the exclusionary practices and segregated education system that was institutionalised under Apartheid. The new education system needed to reflect the new democratic South Africa (DoE, 1995).

Taking this into consideration, the White Paper refers to the South African constitution and human rights as the basis for transformation. It asserts that, as per the constitution, education is a basic human right. This means that all citizens have the right to access high quality education and training. The policy commits to desegregating education and integrating those previously excluded from the education system, such as poor children, illiterate women, those with disabilities, rural and squatter communities, and communities that have been affected by violence

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(DoE, 1995). The policy commits to centring the learners in their educational endeavours and responding to the educational needs of learners (DoE, 1995):

> The overarching goal of policy must be to enable all individuals to value, have access to, and succeed in lifelong education and training of good quality. Educational and management processes must therefore put the learners first, recognising and building on their knowledge and experience, and responding to their needs.

This means that the department commits to responding to the educational needs of individuals, from early childhood development right through to higher education. This included restructuring the budget of the education system in order to meet the new financial requirements. The paper also stipulated that the curricula of various educational institutions would be reviewed and a standardised national qualification, known as the National Qualification Framework, would be implemented by the South African Qualification Association (DoE, 1995). Educational institution's governing bodies needed to be representative and adhere to democratic processes and principles.

In terms of higher education, the policy required institutions of higher learning to be representative of the broader South African population and to deal with the result of poor secondary education among the increasing number of students they admit. Therefore, transformation required that the previously racialised philosophies of higher education institutions needed to be replaced with a new democratic culture to actively undo race-based separation (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

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The department commits to respecting universities' autonomy; however, they have the responsibility to assess institutions of higher learning regarding transformation, and assist them to improve (DoE, 1995).

National Plan for Higher Education

Since 1994, many tertiary institutions, especially those which were previously White, have gotten on board with transformation. Policies have been put in place in order to create universities which are more inclusive of the broader South African population (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007). In 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) created a framework that identifies the strategic interventions necessary to transform higher education. The NPHE set out an agenda to improve access to institutions of higher education for Black students, and assist them to complete their

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academic careers. The policy set out different ways to achieve this, which included Academic Development programmes and Financial Aid schemes (DoE, 2001).

The NPHE set out to transform higher education in five different ways. First, to produce graduates that would aid the social and economic development of South Africa. Second, to achieve equity in the South African higher education system through increased participation rates in academia and improved staff equity. Third, to achieve diversity in the South African higher education system, especially by diversifying fields of studies and programmes. Fourth, to sustain and promote postgraduate research, as well as increasing Masters and Doctoral graduate outputs. Lastly, to restructure the institutional landscape of the higher education system (DoE, 2001).

However, even though the policies seek to foster equal access and non-discriminatory practices, there is still much work to be done. As Badat (2010) asserts, the idea of democracy and equal access is not enough to eradicate social and economic patterns of exclusion. Even though new policies have been formulated, deep-rooted structural inequalities still remain. Asmal and James (2003:12) also point out that the gap between the constitutional mandate and social reality 'is still wide'. Moreover, the policies have been introduced into a field marked by discourses and practices still embedded in Apartheid ways of being (Walker, 2006).

Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion

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In 2008, the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion was created by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, to improve the higher education sector (Soudien., 2008). The committee was formed after various racist events on university campuses. For example, a group of Afrikaner male students filmed themselves peeing on their food and forcing Black workers to eat the food (Gifford, 2008). This forced government and universities to face prevailing racist, sexist and exclusionary practices on campuses. The committee made various recommendations, outlined below:

- More funding for the higher education sector and infrastructures at a national level, in particular for staff development, and that the funding for such posts be competitive.
- Earmark funding for curriculum development initiatives at an institutional and systems-wide level, as well as more funding for disadvantaged students, and more residences built to accommodate the rise of student enrolment.
- Universities' understanding of transformation, discrimination and social cohesion must be consistent with the values of the White paper. However, the report expressed concern about

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policy implementation and the transformation of the curricula, as well as institutional cultures (Soudien, 2008).

Moreover, the committee found that socio-economic conditions affect students academically, while structural and institutional factors also affect their success. For example, Black students from disadvantaged communities struggled to catch up with academic programmes. It is important to note that Black students do not struggle academically because they are poor, but because of poor educational infrastructure in basic education, as a result of Apartheid. The lack of understanding of Apartheid legacies in education results in the problematic view that Black students who attend development programmes to bridge the gap (created by such legacies) are inferior (Soudien, 2008). Quite fittingly, these racist assumptions betray how these programmes and policies themselves are rooted in racist discourse. Most of these programmes are based on a deficit model, or the amplification of deficits of Black students (Harper, 2014; Daniel, 2018). This then results in the perception that Black students who attend these programmes are inferior.

The council made various recommendations about the issue of language in South African universities, including that the Minister conduct a broad review of the obstacles facing the effective implementation of language policies and practices. Institutions would be required to report on their plans for equitable language policies and multilingualism, and make these part of their institutional planning (Soudien, 2008).

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Lastly, the council reported that it is necessary to transform the curriculum in universities, revising its appropriateness and relevance to the social, ethical, political and technical skills and competencies relevant in post-Apartheid South Africa, the African continent and abroad. Moreover, the committee recommended that the curriculum include content that educates and sensitises students about social issues affecting South Africa, the broader continent and the world (Soudien., 2008).

At its core, this paper admits two things: the general lack of meaningful radical change in higher education, and how this lack of change is linked to the government's failure to provide a quality life for all South Africans. The problems in the South African education system (coloniality, poverty, patriarchy etc.) are a microcosm of the broader dehumanisation of Black people in 'post-Apartheid' South Africa. In the previous chapter, I discussed an incident where I was trying to study and was unable to because two neighbours were taking down two shacks for hours. This impacted my ability to study and also propagated feelings of shame and an imposter voice. It is

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true that this experience is a result of forced removals and the Group Areas Act (1950), which forced people to live in inhumane overcrowded communities. It also must be acknowledged that the ANC government's failure to provide people with dignified housing and improve Black people's socio-economic circumstances is the reason why those socio-economic factors negatively impact Black students' experiences in higher education. The socio-economic circumstances that plague higher education are not coincidental, as was neutrally presented by DHET in the paper.

Council of Higher Education Responds to the Ministerial Report

Upon the publication of the previously discussed report, the Council of Higher Education (CHE)[9] reviewed the recommendations and penned a response, acknowledging that the findings of the report are consistent with the council's experiences working in the sector. However, the CHE also challenged some of the recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee. For example, the CHE argues that, with regards to transformation of staff and equitable practices for previously excluded academics, institutional cultures (or violence) also play a role in whether previously excluded staff stay at a university.

The CHE reiterated the need for diversity training for staff in universities, but pointed out that the report left out discrimination on the basis of gender and disability. Moreover, the CHE contended that rape is a huge challenge in South Africa, and it is therefore likely that rape and sexism is prevalent on university campuses as well. Understanding coloniality and how it is embedded in patriarchy, sexism and rape culture is also very important in understanding Black students' experiences in university. This intervention by the CHE reiterated Lugones' (2008) articulation of the coloniality of gender. As racialised beings, Black students experience not only racism, but also sexism, patriarchy and rape culture on campus.

The CHE concurred that the report's findings are consistent with their own long-term findings in the sector, and also highlighted existing structures (e.g. the Higher Education Quality Committee) already addressing some of the challenges noted in the report. Furthermore, the CHE requested to be included in future mechanisms/task teams set up by the Department. To the credit of the Department of Higher Education, their efforts to transform higher education continued as promised, and the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training was published in 2014.

[9] The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established by the Higher Education Act of 1997 as an independent statutory body.

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White Paper for Post-school Education and Training 2014

The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training was published in 2014 with the aim of communicating the Department's vision of how higher education should be configured by 2030. The policy's objectives were to create a (DoE, 2014):

post-school system that can assist in fair, equitable and non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. A single post-schooling education and training education system. Expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision. A stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace. A post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens, employers in both the public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and development objectives.

The policy outlines specific goals for each sector of higher education (TVET[10]/community colleges/universities/distance-learning institutions etc); since this research focuses on universities, I will outline the university-specific goals. The goal of the policy is to improve the quality of education in universities and foster diversity. The Department hopes to increase university enrolment from 17.3% to 25% of school leavers. As participation increases, the Department requires universities to improve students' access to university, academic improvement and success in universities, with emphasis on students who have previously been excluded due to race, gender and disability. Lastly, the policy states that the government is committed to providing free education for poor students in universities as soon as resources are available (DoE, 2014).

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It is important to note that one of the weaknesses of this paper was the way it compared different institutions without acknowledgement of the hierarchical structure of higher education, and the historical inequalities that continue into the present. Global neoliberal capitalist and Euro-American universities rankings mean that non-universities (such as TVETs, community colleges, and distance-learning institutions) are devalued, as they are not the ideological hubs of neoliberalism and coloniality that 'traditional' universities are. The paper also did not deal with comparative (compared to more 'developed' contexts) and competitive rankings that pressure local universities to churn out research outputs. How authentic and transformed can an African university be if it aims to emulate the Euro-American university model? Meanwhile, the local

[10] Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges

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university is still struggling to integrate African languages and multilingualism in South African universities.

Language Policy for Higher Education 2017

African languages have historically been marginalised, and considered inferior and unsuitable for some of the scientific components of Western education (Mhlauli *et al*., 2015). The Language Policy for Higher Education was drafted in 2017, to be implemented in 2019. The Department has recognised the lack of multilingualism and intellectualisation of African languages in universities and, despite intervention through the Language-in-Education Policy of 1997, the Language Policy for Higher Education 2002, and the Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Development of African languages in Higher Education of 2015 (DHET, 2015), South African universities have still fallen short. Most African languages have not been given socio-symbolic significance (Beukes, 2010). Thus, the most recent language policy seeks to address the challenge of the underutilisation and underdevelopment of indigenous South African languages in higher education. The department also recognises that multilingualism and utilisation of African languages in the university space will help with student integration, and offer students who speak African languages the chance to learn in a way that will help them succeed academically (DHET, 2017).

Language equity, equality and multilingualism are principles enshrined in the South African constitution, as part of the mandate to redress injustices of the past, and the university is not exempt. The policy requires universities to develop strategies, policies and implementation plans that foster multilingualism, and encourages them to diversify their language of instruction. Universities are to translate all internal communications so that they are accessible to the diverse student populace, as well as integrate African languages into scholarship and the classroom. Vice-Chancellors are required to report annually to the Department regarding the progress of the above-mentioned policy transformation. This legislation is very important for this research because the majority of Black university students speak an indigenous African language as a first language, meaning that most Black students learn in a second language. Therefore, the transformation of language policies has become central to this research and will be explored further in Chapter Seven (DHET, 2017).

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3.6 Limitations of policy and legislation

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Apartheid created a complex web of racially discriminatory and authoritarian legislature, policies and practices. Thus, one must not underestimate the magnitude of the task faced by the state, to centralise higher education without disruption while maintaining good quality education. However, even though policy development was fast, the implementation has been challenging and remains incomplete. Not only that, but government legislation has often had unintended consequences. The homogenisation of policy for diverse institutions with diverse institutional histories has posed administrative difficulties and hindrances, which is the opposite intention of legislation (Cooper, 2015), while the bureaucratisation of the higher education sector poses various administrative and financial challenges to tertiary institutions. DHET regulations can be deemed to interfere too much in universities, but combining focused regulation with more engaged advocacy and negotiation with the higher education sector would be more effective (CHE 2016).

Unfortunately, the CHE did not critique legislation like the White Papers on their failure to address the issue of racial ambiguity when dealing with racial inequalities. For example, the use of broad vague language such as 'previously disadvantaged' or 'poor' when referring to Black people (and other people of colour) who were systemically discriminated against under Apartheid. The challenges and inequalities that exist in higher education come as a result of explicit racial segregation and discrimination. However, the constitution and government legislation utilise code words like "vulnerable" and "previously disadvantaged," and do not address how embodied Blackness is a unique challenge that requires intervention. The origins of education are colonial in nature, but the government insists on liberal reformist legislation when the process of undoing coloniality in education should be decolonisation. Cooper (2015) argues that the concessions that were made in higher education were part of the negotiated settlement between the ANC and the ruling white economic-political-military elite during the transfer of power in 1994. Some of the liberal policy implementations were expected to result in long-term radical transformation (Naidoo, 2010), while the US and the EU's shift towards a third capitalist industrial revolution would not have supported radical change in higher education in South Africa (Cooper, 2011, 2015).

3.7 Neoliberal hegemonies in university

In 1994, South Africa moved from Apartheid to the consolidation of a neoliberal democracy, and this shift affected institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, 'neoliberalism is capitalist in

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nature, and the state power is not in the interest of the people, but that of capital' (Sebake, 2017: 6). Thus, these neoliberal policies further amplified existing racial capitalist heteropatriarchal divides. Previously non-commodified spaces like the university have been transformed to fit the global market (Baatjes, 2005), and the resultant corporatisation and neoliberal privatisation is another factor that creates challenges for students attending university.

Moreover, capitalism and neoliberalism are underpinned by a particular set of individualist, competitive, consumerist extractivist logics, and their ideologies have influenced how we navigate the university space. The dominant ideology tends to be market-driven and individualistic in nature (Braidotti, 2019; Clowes *et al*., 2017; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2018), and higher education and training exist within the nexus of a social democracy and human capital. Therefore, a 'job consciousness' exists at the very foundation of the university. This means students are trained for, and ultimately fed into, the labour market. This job consciousness exists in an interconnected culture and social consciousness about work, labour and jobs, which ultimately exist within a broader political economy of global corporate capitalism (Vally & Motala, 2017).

Over the years, the university has evolved into an institution that locates students as customers receiving an essential service that opens the job market. Within a neoliberal South Africa, the university moves from being state-funded to state-aided. For example, at Stellenbosch University, state funding only comprises one third of the university budget (le Grange, 2016). How does neoliberalism in the university space affect Black students? Neoliberalism presents itself as non-racial economic policies; however, if universities treat students as customers, then this means poor Black students are excluded from university. As discussed thorough this study, Apartheid legacies of exclusion still disenfranchise Black students today (Clowes et al. 2009; Collins 2014; Gordon & Collins, 2013; Hames 2007, 2009) and, coupled with the above-mentioned gap in NSFAS funding (CHE, 2013), neoliberal policies negatively affect Black students today. Again, this makes it imperative that this study thoroughly examine how neoliberalism affects Black students' experience in the university.

It seems to me that it is counter-intuitive to instate neoliberal policies that rely on cutting back state funding in a context that needs redress from colonial and Apartheid legacies. Under neoliberalism, these legacies become depoliticised, privatised and criminalised, in a society that blames systematic and deeply historically rooted social problems. Neoliberal policies transform higher education into 'malls for the upper-class where the merchandise is out of reach for poor,

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black and historically disadvantaged youth' (Baatjie, 2005: 5). The lack of state funding also means that those Black students who have access need to get university loans to be able to afford education. This leads to a lifetime of debt (Hamer & Lang, 2015). Moreover, cuts in medical services and student housing further disadvantages Black students, who already face diminishing prospects for higher education (Hamer & Lang, 2015).

Neoliberalism also changes the relationship of academic and student to service provider and client, while the institution transforms into a brand. Social justice research is viewed as useless, as it has no market value under neoliberalism (Baatjie, 2005). This has dire implications for Black students, who navigate the university with intersectional systemic difficulties that hinder their progress. This means that they need major support for equal participation. Neoliberal higher education policies that treat students as customers hinder any chance of equal participation. Moreover, they deepen epistemic, ontological and spatial violence and injustice (Van Marle, 2018).

In Chapters Two and Four, I discuss principles of African beliefs such as ubuntu, as well as neoliberalism and its emphasis on individualism, corporatism and exploitative policies, which are worrying in terms of the impact it may have on the spiritual lives of Black students. African belief systems like ubuntu and African spirituality emphasise community, humanity and harmony with nature. Coloniality and neoliberalism are energetic systems of oppression (Xaba, 2021), and therefore affect the spiritual lives of Black students. In Chapter Seven, I will discuss how some of my research participants have been spiritually impacted by these dehumanising systems.

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3.8 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements

Black students continue to experience their rights within universities as conditional, contingent, marginal and circumscribed by the terms of the Other. At times, they feel overshadowed by foreign products of knowledge, and statues celebrating colonial conquests of their ancestors (Carolissen & Kiguwa, 2018). This environment, and the previously discussed challenges, prompted the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movements and student protests in 2015.

#RhodesMustFall began at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and its ideological foundations were pan-Africanism, Black consciousness, decolonial theory, and intersectionality through Black feminism (Gouws & Coetzee, 2019; Murris, 2016; Nyamnjoh, 2017; Omarjee, 2018; Pather, 2015; UCT: Rhodes Must Fall, 2015). On the 20th of March, 2015, students occupied the

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administrative building of the university, and asserted that they would not leave until their demands for decolonisation were acknowledged and met by the university (Ahmed, 2017). In particular, the students challenged the systematic exclusion manifested in the form of a Eurocentric curriculum, minimal staff transformation, and the lack of Black academics at UCT. Students spoke of the alienating Eurocentrism, and how it physically and existentially excluded Black students. Through advocacy for the removal of Cecil John Rhodes' statue, students challenged the colonial symbolism (colonial art, statues and buildings) proudly displayed on campus (Ramaru, 2017).

#RMF inspired other international student movements, like #RMF: Oxford, and is also considered to be a catalyst for #FeesMustFall. The #FMF movement was formed by political student organisations in October 2015, and advocated for the provision of free, decolonised, quality education, and an end to the outsourcing of workers in the university space (Disemelo, 2015). The widespread activism and resonance of the student movements on every university campus highlighted the lack of adequate racial and decolonial transformation in post-apartheid South Africa (Le Grange, 2016). Although the subject of citizenship and belonging has been an area of great research by South African academics, the 'ongoing student protests in higher education remind us that South African universities are crucibles in which the conflictual legacies of our unequal histories, continue to collide' (Kiguwa & Carolissen 2018:3).

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The student movements were met with resistance by various gatekeepers in higher education and right-wing South Africa, who were worried about rewriting South African history and the erasure of key prominent figures in South Africa. Students were often viewed as irrational, violent and disruptive, as is evident in the pointed language deployed in this narrative from local scholars who did not support the decolonial movement,

Human excrement was thrown at the statue of Rhodes, and some participants engaged in disruptive behaviour, including chanting the struggle slogan 'One settler, one bullet' (Davis, 2015). After the statue was removed one month later, the movement, sometimes in collaboration with certain political figures, started targeting other colonial heritage monuments which they perceived as glorifying racial inequality (Espinoza, 2015). #RMF violence increased in 2016, with the burning of vehicles, petrol-bombing of buildings, intimidation of non-participating staff and students, and destruction of artworks (Konik & Konik, 2018: 5750)

However, the above research and academic writing ignores the context of the violence unleashed by university administrations and the State toward the student movement. Language such as

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"intimidation" is damning, and the use of phrases like 'targeting colonial heritage monuments they perceived as glorifying inequality' (Espinoza, 2015: np) is gaslighting, and presents students' experiences as irrational. Student activists are portrayed as arsonists (Mbembe, 2016) and destroyers of cultural heritage; however, such critics do not acknowledge the violence from UCT and the state which led to those actions. A fair account of the actions would also acknowledge the intimidation by the university, how students were homeless, that there was a serial rapist on campus, and that the state brutalised students. One evening, they brutalised students (even those not protesting) from about seven in the evening till way after midnight (Isdahl, 2016; Albert, 2016). Sadly, at the height of the violent response from the university and the state, even some progressive decolonial scholars like Achille Mbembe began to withdraw support and compared the students to terrorist groups on social media (Mbembe, 2016).

Although the students were portrayed as irrational iconoclasts (Kros, 2015), the movement has greatly shifted how we engage with colonial legacy and decolonisation in South Africa. Contrary to the portrayal of the movement as lazy and disruptive, the students were ideologically grounded in political theory and articulated the philosophy of "Fallism," which emerged 'as a philosophy that facilitates the restoration of dignity for black people' under the various political frameworks of the movement (Ahmed, 2019: 247). Moreover, various academics who have been working hard in dismantling coloniality in higher education in South Africa (see Shefer, Kiguwa, Kessi, Carolissen, Steyn, Gabaza, among others) have also written about the importance of the movement as a turning point in dismantling systemic racism and coloniality.

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Even though the student movements were progressive, it must be noted that they experienced internal conflicts. There were various incidences of rape, queer antagonism, ableism and the appropriation of black women's labour (Ahmed, 2019; Ndelu *et al*., 2017; Ramaru, 2018). Particularly in #RMF, the movement was seen as centralising cisgender heterosexual men, such as Chumani Maxwele and Ntokozo Qwabe (Ahmed, 2019). More broadly however, these issues also plagued #FMF on almost every university campus. Unfortunately, these conflicts weakened the movement and the broader unified fight for a decolonial university. I argue that the inability of progressive decolonial student activists and the student movement to fight against patriarchy and homophobia is evidence that these systems of oppression are deeply entrenched in university cultures. Therefore, it is imperative that this study takes intersectionality very seriously when examining Black students' experiences in the university.

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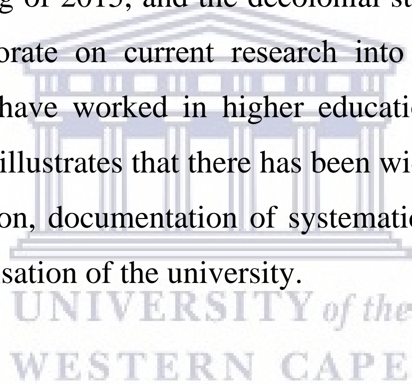
Conclusion

When discussing the current challenges in higher education, it is important to extensively discuss the history of education in order to contextualise said challenges. It is also important to outline the various efforts to transform education, and where they fall short, in order to move forward. The racist history of the South African education system under colonialism and Apartheid have contributed massively to the challenges faced by Black students today. This will, I hope, provide more complex understanding and empathy for the challenges faced by Black students, and lessen the victim-blaming for their own systematic exclusion and racism. It would be disingenuous to only blame colonialism and Apartheid, as the national government's failure to decolonise has also impacted South African universities. Overall, racism, coloniality, sexism and patriarchy (as reiterated by the CHE) still exist and impact Black students' university experiences. In the next chapter, I flesh out Black students' experiences of coloniality, patriarchy and neoliberalism on university campuses, before tracing how these various gaps in policy and forms of violence resulted in the student uprising of 2015, and the decolonial student movements that have been introduced here. I also elaborate on current research into Black students' experiences of coloniality by scholars who have worked in higher education before and since the student movements. The next chapter illustrates that there has been widespread longstanding critique of policy gaps in higher education, documentation of systematic violence experienced by Black students and calls for decolonisation of the university.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[11] **Nqo, nqo, nqo, nqo, nqo, sivulele** (Knock knock! Knock knock! Open the doors)

Ningas'valeli ngaphandle (Don't leave us outside)

Nathi s'fun' ukphil' i-soft life, soft life (We also want a good life)

Nqo, nqo, nqo, nqo, nqo, sivulele (Knock knock! Knock knock! Open the doors)

Ningas'valeli ngaphandle (Don't leave us outside)

Nathi s'fun' ukphil' i-soft life, soft life (We also want a good life)

- Nomfundo Moh - Soft Life (Visualizer)

[11] Image is called Death of a Dream by Imraan Christian. This was a collaborative piece between the photographer, myself, Kealeboga Ramaru, Justice Machaba and Dudu Ndlovu to protest police brutality during the Fees Must Fall protests. https://afropunk.com/2016/03/feature-cape-town-photographer-and-filmmaker-imraan-christian-uses-art-as-a-form-of-protest-in-death-of-a-dream-series/

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Chapter Four: Current Research of Black students' experiences and the decolonial challenge

Introduction

As important as the last chapter's section on South Africa's policies on higher education, is an in-depth discussion of the material and everyday embodied experiences of students that also speaks to the inadequacies and gaps in SA education policies. This discussion provides a holistic view about the progress and limitations of previously discussed policies. This in turn gives clarity about the current conditions of Black students upon which this research is predicated. Moreover, this chapter discusses the intersectional factors that shape Black university students' experiences in higher education, and will include themes such as coloniality, neoliberalism in universities, gender and sexuality, disability and the student movements.

4.1 Enrolment

Over the last two decades, student enrolment has almost doubled in South African institutions of higher learning, alongside a significant shift in the profile and demographics of these students. Almost two-thirds of enrolled students are students of colour. Although this indicates growth, in the period from 1994 to 2012, student participation was still skewed along racial lines (CHE, 2016). Moreover, relying only on enrolment statistics results in only accounting for Black students' enrolment, without investigating whether they stay in university (Shay, 2017). Most institutions present high enrolment percentages, but do not mention the high dropout rates among Black students. Estimates reveal that only about 45% of contact students, and 55% of all students in higher education, will graduate (CHE, 2016). Even more alarming, although 60% of Black students finish their first year, only 15% finish their degrees (de Beer & Peterson, 2016; Le Grange, 2016). These numbers reveal an urgent need for systemic reform in how the university teaches and functions.

4.2 Teaching and learning

Universities are not neutral spaces, and the teaching and learning environment is highly ideological. Curriculum design, learning materials, pedagogy, style of teaching and various methods of assessment form part of a highly ideological landscape. For example, the Bantu Education curriculum under Apartheid described what was named 'Bantu Culture,' and African

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civilisation was presented as largely 'undeveloped', static and inferior (Hartshorne, 1992; Worden, 1994), beliefs which largely remain to the current day. In post-Apartheid South Africa, the mandate for teaching and learning is to foster a social justice orientation, and higher education must play a role in the restructuring of an unequal society (DoE, 1995).

Curriculum refers to the content taught, the processes through which teaching takes place, and the ethical and moral practices of teachers (Pinar, 2012) in an educational setting. It is also, 'a symbolic process whereby reality is reproduced, repaired and transformed in historical and social context and through which we (both students and educators) may articulate our experience in the world by studying bodies of knowledge' (Carolissen *et al*., 2015:9). Executed in the right way, a curriculum has the potential to facilitate spaces where teachers and students start to interrogate coloniality and find commonality. Unfortunately, radical change in the curriculum has been slow in South Africa.

For example, disciplines like psychology have seen some shifts in undergraduate enrolment of Black students, but at senior levels and in the profession, white people are overrepresented. White people (a minority) comprise more than half of psychologists, interns, and postgrad students, while Black people (the largest population group in SA) constitute a small minority (HPCSA, 2013; Stats SA, 2013). Moreover, Western and Northern scholarship remains dominant in psychology (Carolissen *et al*., 2015:9). Similarly, disciples like law still are epistemically embedded in Roman-Dutch and English colonial logic (Geduld, 2020). Due to this, in 2015, law students at UCT formed the Decolonize UCT Law movement, aimed at integrating critical race theory, decoloniality and queer theory into an alternative inclusive curriculum (Decolonize UCT Law, 2015; Matebeni, 2022).

There is an increasing need for the curriculum to shift and reflect diverse student populations, while also fostering social justice and restructuring societal inequalities (CHE, 2016). This shift requires an academic body that is highly trained, which has serious financial implications for institutions of higher learning. It also requires more faculty to be employed in order to deal with the growing student enrolment numbers and the curriculum shift. This means that institutions will require more funding and resources. A pertinent question remains: is it possible to finance the overhaul of the education system when almost half of students do not obtain their degrees? The CHE (2016: 148) contends that,

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If the status quo in terms of teaching and learning structures and cultures is assumed, and student numbers are simply increased, there will be wastage of many millions of Rands of subsidy funding paid for students who fail or who are excluded from the system. There is a case to be made for focusing on changing the teaching and learning system for the existing intake of students, half of whom leave without a qualification.

Thus, within the current context, CHE (2016) argues that it is unwise to push for enrollment growth as an indication of transformation, without adequate government plans and financial resources to foster the pedagogical change in teaching and learning.

Finances have not stopped many scholars (such as Carolissen, Bozalek, Kiguwa, Boonzaier, Shefer, Ratele, De la Ray, Van Kierkerk, Mpofu, and others) from calling for radical curriculum transformation in South Africa. However, unequal power relations remain between individual academics calling for change, and those in power in university management (often white and male) who may halt the change (Thavers, 2003). The current debates about teaching and learning practices provide a great foundation for the next section: a comprehensive discussion about racialisation and colonial violence in the university space.

4.3 Racialisation on campus

As previously discussed, coloniality and the university cannot be easily separated in South Africa. The university has colonial historical roots, and Black students therefore have to navigate colonial legacies, one of which is the construction of race (Erasmus, 2012; Worden, 1994). As racialised beings navigating the university space, Black students have to confront the colonial constructions of race at some point in their university career. As Soudien (2008) asserts, Black people on campuses remain racialised and subjects of racism.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three, the infantilisation of Black people (Verwoed, 1954), comparisons of Black people to animals (Conrad,1988), assertions of barbarism, and fantasies about killing "niggers" (Rhodes in Adebajo, 2010: 218) have been documented and widely critiqued (Biko, 1969; Fanon, 1952). Sadly, these regressive views still remain part of the larger affective and discursive landscape of South Africa, and remain prevalent on university campuses.

This is the reason why racial prejudices and race discrimination are recognised as central concerns in the transformation process in higher education. The effort to transform has often been met with resistance in previously white universities, mainly based on racist views reminiscent of colonialism, and operationalised in particular embodied and spatial ways during Apartheid. At

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UCT, discourses of low standards and reverse racism have inundated the media, and present Black students as the 'problem,' rather than as rightful co-beneficiaries of transformation (Kessi, 2013).

Discourses of transformation thus produce rhetoric about Black students as undeserving of an education, either because they lack capabilities (i.e. accepted because of affirmative action, not on merit) or refuse to work hard (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Transformation is therefore often either superficial inclusion of people of colour to up demographic profiles of the university (Erasmus, 2010; Pattman & Carolissen, 2018), or assimilationist (Ratele, 2018). Transformation requires a deeper commitment to 'diversity', interrogation of power within knowledge production and research (Pattman & Carolissen, 2018), just language practices (Cooper, 2018), and decolonisation of heteropatriarchy on university campuses (Ngabaza *et al.*,, 2018; Hemson *et al*., 2018; Munyuki *et al*., 2018; Reygan, 2018; Shefer, 2018). Currently, dominant discourses in institutions of higher learning are universalist, as an attempt to deny coloniality and gaslight experiences of violence (Pattman & Carolissen, 2018), or function on a deficit model.

Black students are often viewed as unintelligent, inferior, barbaric or on financial aid. Fundamentally, there is nothing negative about needing financial aid; however, the discourse of financial aid is shaped as an othering discourse that shames Black students for structural legacies of inequality. One student asserts that, 'There is a belief that all the Black people got in because of their race. Or Black people probably got in with lower grades. That the majority of them are poor and on financial aid' (Albert, 2018: 120). Black students have been reported to struggle with racial stereotypes on campuses around the world (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Hamilton & Shang, nd; Omarjee, 2018;), which affects how they experience and perform their identity. Exposure to a climate of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom and on campus is the main factor in differences in withdrawal (from social activities) behaviour by minorities on predominantly white campuses in the United States (Cabrera *et al*., 1999).

In a photovoice study done at UCT, Black students reported experiencing a heightened awareness of their Blackness on campus. Some students even reported 'feeling Black for the first time'. Kessi and Cornell (2015:11) further elaborate,

> participants' experiences are feelings of inadequacy, not belonging, self-doubt and confusion. In response to these dynamics, students adopted strategies to cope with the dominant culture of the university. Many students silence themselves and are thus not able to participate fully in university life ... many students

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assimilate into the dominant culture by taking on certain cultural practices, such as modifying their language and changing their accents, making friends with and engaging in the activities of white students.

Institutions like UCT are deeply embedded in institutionalised racism, which scholars like More (2012) define as the historical, social, political and religious processes and practices that have forced Black people to internalise their identity as sub-human. The above student narratives illustrate the pervasiveness of colonial racial construction long after colonialism, and the psychological trauma of assimilation into an anti-Black environment (Biko, 1969). As discussed in the theoretical framework, coloniality is also a gendered project (Lugones, 2010), and Black students' experiences of non-belonging are therefore due to race, as well as other intersecting identities (such as gender and sexuality). The content of the curriculum, and the educators themselves, can be heteronormative, patriarchal, and unsafe, and campuses can be physical spaces rife with queer antagonism (Licardo, 2018; Matebeni, 2022; Matebeni & Msibi, 2015; Reygan, 2018; Robertson & Pattman, 2018). Even in social justice spaces fighting for decolonisation, women and queer students feel further alienation (Khan, 2017; Ramaru, 2017). This will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Since the end of the official racially discriminatory practices of Apartheid, there has been much debate about student 'citizenship' and belonging in higher education. With the centralisation of the education system post-1994, the government mandates policies that 'encourage the cultivation of citizenship to effect social change and transformation in the higher education sector' (Carolissen & Kiguwa, 2018:3). However, higher education can be a terrain where Black students feel invisible or like they do not belong (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

The invisibility and unbelonging that Black students face in the university space is a remnant of colonial constructions of Blackness. Equally concerning are the experiences of alienation and racism on university campuses. The history of spatial segregation during Apartheid has meant that racial integration in these spaces has been met with resistance (Robertson & Pattman, 2018). Black students have also recounted incidences of discrimination and alienation in these supposed 'safe spaces' away from home (Albert, 2018; Kamanga, 2019). In 2022, a white student broke into a Black peer's room and urinated over his belongings (Naidoo, 2022). While this caused outrage on the part of the Minister of Higher Education and the public, such incidents and contempt for Black students are not isolated acts of racism, but deeply rooted in colonial violence.

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4.4 Coloniality in the academy

If universities are colonial constructions, then, by extension, the curriculum, culture and values of the university will also uphold coloniality. As discussed in Chapter Two, coloniality is a system that upholds racism, Eurocentrism, hierarchies and binaries. This means that the academy does not respect indigenous knowledges and, 'in the colonial imagination, people of colour have never produced knowledge' (Xaba, 2018: 72). This is what is commonly known as epistemicide (Santos, 2014), in which the university has played a key role .

At its inception, the university was a product of coloniality. It was founded on colonial and Eurocentric assumptions, and often called upon to play an active role in the subjugation of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (Mignolo, 2011; Odora-Hoppers & Richards, 2011; Quijano, 1991, 2000; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Indeed, from early in the century voices in South Africa had called for the state to fund a more scientific kind of enquiry into the 'native problem'. The academics who staffed these institutions made it clear that their research was motivated by a profound unease about the future of 'white civilisation' in South Africa (Wright, 1983).

For example, even though UCT describes itself as a historically neutral institution with no political involvement, there is evidence that UCT was not neutral. During the height of research into the 'native question, UCT contributed to the debate and saw itself as part of the solution to exercise power over Africans. Ntsebeza (2012: 3) writes,

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According to Gordon, the university publicly announced the establishment of the School of African Life and Languages at the height of the Parliamentary debate on the Native Affairs Bill which created a permanent advisory Native Affairs Commission. UCT saw a role for itself in providing resources in the formulation and implementation of the 'Native policy'.

Moreover, Lalu (2011: np) reiterates Ntsebeza's statements that the University was not apolitical, but indirectly participated in the subjugation of African people:

The native question aligned knowledge projects with the demands of administering native populations. The Milner Commission of Inquiry (1903 to 1905) was perhaps the first to call for scientific studies of natives of South Africa. The call for the study of the natives had several consequences, not least that the study of human subjects would be indispensable to the modes of government in these far reaches of the empire.

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These are some of many academic accounts of the colonial origins of UCT. However, as previously mentioned, UCT is not unique, as coloniality exists in tertiary institutions irrespective of institutional histories. The coloniality of power, knowledge and being (the stratification according to binaries and hierarchies of inferior/superior known as metaphysical catastrophe) underpins what constitutes knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Quijano, 1991). Universities have been instrumental in setting up systems which, according to Carolissen (2022, n.p.) facilitate 'shrinking the world we ought to know' instead of expanding it.

Various disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, and the sciences, have played a crucial role in establishing this metaphysical catastrophe (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). For example, scientific racism measured skulls to argue that indigenous people are intellectually inferior (Smith, 1999). In South Africa, Apartheid racism influenced the discipline of psychology, and many of the people influential in establishing the discipline in the country were politicians (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Community psychologist, Hendric Frensch Verwoerd is also known as the architect of Apartheid. Indeed, institutions like Stellenbosch were central in the realisation Afrikaner nationalism, and the implementation of Apartheid (Dubow, 1992; Gillomee, 2003; Mhlauli *et al*., 2015). Unfortunately, the coloniality of power and knowledge still exists in most disciplines today (Carrolissen *et al*., 2015; Durrheim, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Malherbe, 2021; Painter, 2005; Stevens, 2003).

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This has huge implications, not only in how students navigate the physical campus, but also how they engage with the curriculum. Speaking to many students about their experiences with the curriculum over the years has prompted me to ask the question: How does this curriculum affect the spiritual selves of Black students? In Chapter Seven, I will elaborate on the spiritual harm a colonial education visits on the Black body.

CHE (2009) offers a critique on the challenges of teaching and learning in higher education; however, they do not adequately critique the colonial logic prevalent within teaching and learning. On the other hand, #RMF has been a student movement that was intentional about naming coloniality as one of the key challenges Black students face on campus (Ahmed, 2019). Some Black students reported that the university curriculums are anti-poor, anti-Black and Eurocentric (Albert, 2018). In addition, the history of racialised capital and current neoliberal practices form part of the systemic issues that alienate university students.

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4.5 Intersectional experiences of Black students in higher education

This section, and those that follow, discuss the intersectional struggles of Black students. As previously discussed, a range of discriminatory Apartheid policies and belief systems continue to affect how Black students navigate the university (Clowes et al., 2009; Collins 2014; Gordon & Collins 2013; Hames 2007, 2009). However, it is important to acknowledge that, while the discussion of race, class, gender and sexuality and disability might be separated into sections in the study, these identities and struggles are intertwined.

Class

The introduction of colonial economies during colonial conquest resulted in racialised capitalism, which is an economic system that was dependent on slave labour and other exploitative practises, constituted by war, militarism, imperialism and expropriation (Alexander, 1979; Burden-Stelly, 2020; Phiri, 2022). The history of racialised capitalism means that racial inequalities and class inequalities are interchangeable (Du Bois, 1970, 1971; Fanon, 1963; Sullivan, 2003). This section and the sections to follow discuss the intersectional struggles of Black students. It is important to acknowledge that while the discussion of race, class, gender and sexuality and disability might be separated into sections in the study, these identities and struggles are intertwined.

The introduction of colonial economies during colonial conquest resulted in racialised capitalism. Racialised capitalism is an economic system that was dependent on slave labour and other exploitative practices. Moreso, it was a system constituted by war, militarism, imperialism and expropriation (Alexander, 1979; Burden-Stelly, 2020; Phiri, 2022). Some economists will readily argue that racial inequalities have shifted, but class inequalities remain (Bond, 2000). However, a racialised political economy persists (Reddy, 2005). Post-1994, South Africa developed a racialised neo-liberal economic policy (Phiri, 2022). For example, the World Bank insisted that African governments cut back on spending in higher education, and this had dire consequences for most institutions (Dong-Jatta, 2002, as cited in Samoff & Carroll, 2003). As a result, students are treated as customers, and Black students are affected the worst.

Various Higher Education Department policies and reports, such as the Report on the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation, and White Paper 3, among others (DoE, 1997, 2008, 2010), acknowledge the continuing existing intertwined struggles of race, class, gender and other marginal identities. Recent student movements advocating for university fees to fall, and for solidarity between workers and students, have drawn attention to the economic exclusion

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and exploitation in universities (Shay, 2017), while foregrounding the harmful impact of poverty and socio-economic inequalities alerts us to the growing class divide (Carolissen, 2015). This underscores South Africa's status as one of the most unequal countries in the world (Phiri, 2020).

Some international studies also argue that more privileged families exploit opportunities provided by school systems in order to secure favourable outcomes for their children (Triventi *et al.*, 2020). In fact, some privileged families do not even need to do that, as universities have policies that favour students from wealthy backgrounds. For example, Stellenbosch University is a predominantly white university with students who are second- or third-generation attendees. The residences continue to house students with strong academic and sporting reputations (Robertson & Patmann, 2018). Due to the inequalities in basic education, this means that white students (and a minority of black middle-class students) will always have first preference. These are some of the subtle ways that class inequalities continue to disadvantage poor Black students.

An insightful study by Clowes *et al*. (2017) foregrounds how class affects equal participation in the university space. The high price of campus food means that disadvantaged students are forced to navigate campus with no food. Technological equipment, coupled with the use of the English language, can isolate students who went to under-resourced schools and who use English as a second/third language. As another example, the Group Areas Act instituted geographical Apartheid along racial lines. This saw the forced removal of Black and Coloured people to the outskirts of Cape Town. This then affects how students travel to university. Difficulty in accessing transport, and being forced to use unsafe transport options where they may be exposed to crime and violence, affects how students attend lectures, how long they can stay on campus due to safety, and their energy levels when participating in class. These seemingly insignificant factors also contribute to whether a student can participate successfully in the classroom and flourish in the university (Clowes *et al*., 2017).

Gender and Sexuality[12]

Gender and sexuality also play a significant role in social justice and equal participation in the university. Debates that have invoked university student citizenship or alienating institutional cultures continuously argue that university cultures are embedded in patriarchy, whiteness and middle-class heteronormativity (Tabensky & Matthews, 2015). The current South African

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[12] Trigger warning: discussions about sexual violence, rape and transphobia

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colonial post-Apartheid university (Ratele, 2018), as a heteropatriarchal colonial invention, consequently marginalises students on the basis of their racial, gendered, sexual or disability identity (Everitt-Penhole & Boonzaier, 2018; Kessi, 2018; McKinney et al, 2018; Munyuki, 2018; Richards et al, 2018; Robertson & Pattman, 2018). As such, equal participation in higher education remains a myth.

It could be argued that enrolments of women into undergraduate programmes have increased by 57% as of 2010, and therefore this indicates that the gender disparity in universities is decreasing. However, enrollment statistics are not sufficient to ascertain the challenges Black women students face in relation to their gender and sexuality. The university is often a highly gendered (masculine) and heteronormative space (Bennet & Beja, 2005; Bennett *et al*., 2007; Hames 2007; Jagessar & Msibi 2015), and marginalised genders (women and non-binary students) often feel unsafe. For example, in a study conducted at UWC a few years ago (Ngabaza *et al*., 2018: 144), some women reported feeling unsafe on campus:

> guys will catcall women, pressure women to go home with them, get women drunk in order to go home with them, there is a possibility of my drink getting spiked, also having the personal space and body violated by inappropriate touching from the males, the possibility of drunken violence being inflicted on me.

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This narrative raises important issues around sexuality (assumed heterosexuality), male entitlement, and rape culture within the university space. As mentioned before, transportation to and from university also forms part of South African students' experience of the university (Clowes *et al*., 2017), and this experience is also gendered. Students who are women often fear physical and sexual violence while traveling using public transportation. Similarly, research shows that women fear rape on many university campuses throughout the country (Ngabaza *et al*., 2018). From November 2015 to February 2016, a serial rapist abducted multiple women near UCT campus (Fischer, 2016). Despite UCT's highly resourced security systems, this violence went on for months without the university taking action. This is one of the reasons why student activists erected a shack in the middle of campus (known as the Shackville) in protest. Hundreds of Black women students, who did not have money and relied on promised student housing, were homeless on campus while a serial rapist was violating women. Although ambiguous language is used, court proceedings also note that he specifically targeted Black women. In an earlier study in 2007, women students at UCT reported feeling unsafe and fearful of rape and sexual violence (Dosekun, 2007). Similarly, in studies at UKZN, women students also articulated feelings of fear,

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experiences of rape and sexual violence on campus (Collins & Gordons, 2013; Ngubelanga, 2021). Again, this illustrates what Maldonado-Torres (2016) calls the war on certain bodies that is endemic to coloniality. These structures are also stratified according to race (like the serial rapist at UCT), class (like transportation issues), age etc. These experiences highlight everyday sexual coercion and violence (Clowes *et al*., 2017), mirrored in a colonial environment characterised by cultures of domination (hooks, 2001).

This flags the imperative to challenge normative gender, binaristic sexuality and rape culture as a key part of the agenda of transforming the university, as heteropatriarchy and cisnormativity also form part of the colonial violence Black students face in the university. For example, heteronormative and cisnormative understandings of Black students' struggles might leave trans women, trans men and queer cisgender men out of conversations about safety at the university. In my research, I have painful memories of how cisgender women violated, and advocated for the removal of, a trans woman from a women's residency. Hearing about this experience stretched my (highly cisnormative) understanding of fear and violation for women in university. Moreover, we also get an understanding that, while the dominant literature about women and safety on campus portrays cis women as victims/survivors, cis women can also dehumanise other women.

Discrimination based on gender and sexuality has been criminalised in South Africa. However, while the country might have progressive human rights laws, heteropatriarchy and hate crimes still persist. It is still widely believed that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' (Matebeni, 2017). These societal attitudes, and the gender/sexuality colonial binary located in modernity, are still prevalent in university spaces. This leads to overt and covert forms of violences (Cornell *et al*., 2016). Over the years, many academics (Kiguwa *et al*., 2015; Msibi, 2012; Munyuki *et al*., 2018; Reygan, 2018; Shefer, 2018) and Black decolonial activists (e.g. Sandile Ndelu, Thatho Pule, Seoketsi Moeketsi, Nigel Patel, Vuyo Mbutho, and many others) have advocated for the decolonisation of gender and sexuality in the university space. Recently, Shefer *et al*. (2020) have discussed how the COVID pandemic has reinforced gender disparities' intersections with race/class/sexuality/disability in higher education.

Matebeni (2017) also calls us to decolonise queer identities beyond Western conceptions of LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex people). She urges us Africans to stretch the queer identity to all people who face discrimination, like refugees, all Black people facing

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coloniality, etc. She argues the importance of extending queerness to refer to all those who resist coloniality, and think of new ways to reconnect us as people.

Figure 1: A bathroom sign from the University of Cape Town's Humanities Building.

As a cisgender person, I did not know that the bathroom space can be a space of gender violence and enforcing of cisnormativity, until I witnessed the decolonial work of the Trans Collective,[13] who have advocated for the degendering of public bathrooms (atsreafoundation.org, 2019). As Patel (2017: 4) writes,

> Evident in the historicising of the bathroom space is that the sex-segregated European-style toilet cistem [system] imposed on and adopted in the Global South is rooted in many intersecting forms of violence. Hence in South Africa specifically it is essential that gender be considered alongside race and class for any future activism that aims to address the violence that transgender people face in bathrooms.

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Patel (they/them) recounts how the gendered public bathroom is a European invention developed when women started joining the workforce. As such, it is constructed according to the modernist conventions of gender/sex binaries. Most importantly, they also locate the struggles of trans students of colour within colonial/Apartheid histories of South Africa, to illustrate the interconnectedness of race/class/gender/sexuality/ability struggles for trans students. Patel (2017) also argues that, while trans exclusionary feminists have rejected degendering bathrooms (see transphobic image above), disability activists and trans activists have formed a positive community around bathroom equity. Activists with disabilities also navigate inaccessible campus spaces designed for able-bodied individuals, and empathise with the trans community's fight for equity.

Disability

[13] The UCT Trans Collective advocates for the rights of trans and non-binary people on campus, degendering UCT, and strengthening the discourse of Black trans people in South Africa: https://globalartsfund.tumblr.com/post/157538700362/uct-the-trans-collective-bio-the-trans

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Much has been written about colonialism and ableism. At its core, colonialism demanded able bodies and minds from its subordinated people. Bodies needed to be able to perform slave labour and push the expansion of the empire, or they would be relegated as 'useless' (Imada, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). South African universities (as spaces where colonial logic exists and where neoliberalism is rampant) are also exclusionary spaces that rank people according to their 'productivity'.

Before I discuss the challenges faced by Black students in university, I would like to note scholarship that problematizes disability studies. Oftentimes, disability is presented as an 'other' to a white, cisgender, heterosexual male. As Mohamed (2022, n.p.) argues,

> Most disability studies are made in relation to an idealised normalcy that only really encompasses a very tiny proportion of people in the Global South and even in the Global North. The fantasy up against which the normal finds expression is white, male, middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied. The normal live in a world of plenty, seen and cared for and afforded protection by the formal instruments of the state, they are able to move and have and live with abandon. It is a myth, and a life afforded to very few. This world of the normal is served by those people about whom a scholarship of the obvious is about, the people who are quietly debilitated, who endure worlds that maim, disable, impair as if that were the natural order of the world.

As a person living with intellectual disabilities and who struggles with my internalised ableism, this section of the thesis is very painful to write. I recognise that the very idea of 'disability' is a colonial construct predicated on 'perceived unproductivity as laborers; embodied racial-sexual differences; "unchaste" proclivities of their women; susceptibility to moral contagion and infectious diseases; or inability to learn' (Imada, 2017:1). However, my lack of internal work may result in problematic language and reinforcing coloniality in my discussion about disability. As a researcher who is also a healer, I have observed the othering of African spirituality within coloniality.

Naturally, the South African constitution protects the rights of people with disability through various policies of affirmative action (Swartz, 2022). In 2018, the government published a national policy to address the challenges that people living with disability experience in post-schooling education and training systems (PSET). The policy aims to 'create an inclusive PSET system for people with disabilities … and provide the DHET with a monitoring and evaluation instrument to ensure that disability compliance is mainstreamed in all PSET institutions' (DHET, 2018: n.p.). Although this policy is progressive for higher education, it does have some

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shortcomings (Mutanga, 2017, 2018). Given the gaps in recent policy, it is imperative that this study illuminates how these translate in the real lives of Black students on university campuses.

The further marginalisation of differently abled bodies on university campuses also forms part of coloniality and the intersectional challenges faced by Black students in higher education. Approximately 7.5% of South African citizens live with disabilities, and 20% of that total is enrolled in higher education institutions (Mutanga, 2018). However, students with disabilities reported feelings of isolation and a lack of social network support on campus, their sense of community confined to small disability units (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012). This can further propagate othering and feelings of isolation.

In a study done amongst South African university students, it was found that students who were visually impaired felt ill-prepared for university, because state schools for students with 'special needs' are poorly resourced. For example, only 17 out of 22 schools for visually impaired students had sufficient textbooks in 2015 (Lourens & Swartz, 2021). While these statistics might be presented without accounting for demographics, these struggles are often intersected with race and class in South Africa. Thus, most of the students who feel the impact of a lack of resources are students of colour. The lack of resources and poor policy implementation are a result of the neoliberalisation of state welfare policies (Mladenov, 2015).

In South Africa, most students with disabilities are awarded 'disability-related' funding, predicated on academic merit in basic education. However, the hostile and unchanging university environments might cause the students' academics to 'decline,' which is seen as intellectual inferiority, and results in their academic or financial exclusion (Sayed *et al*., 2003). This widens the disparities, and reinforces exclusion and ableist discourses about which bodies are 'able' to learn, without accounting for systemic violence. This is institutionalisation and rationalisation of violence on marginalised bodies that liberal disability studies scholarship struggles to disrupt (Puar, 2017).

Disrupting this narrative requires taking coloniality and the naturalisation of violence seriously. As decolonial scholars, the naturalisation of binaries and hierarchies form part of the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010; Maldanado-Torres, 2016). When it comes to mental health, Manning (2020: 2) views neurotypicality as a white supremacist notion:

I see neurotypicality as akin to structural racism—as the infusion of white supremacy in the governing definition of what counts as -human. The assumption that neurotypicality is the neutral ground from which

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difference asserts itself (an assumption everywhere supported by the neuroscientific lit-er-a-ture) suggests that -there is still an urgent conversation to be had about how the human, and knowledge as a defining category of the -human, is or-ga-nized and deployed in the image of neurotypicality.

Mohamed and Shefer (2015) argue that the discourse of binary (normal vs disabled) happens alongside othering discourse about race, class, sexuality, ethnicities and nationalism. This also means the colonial entrenchment of 'normalcy' establishes a definition of 'neurotypical' which others people with intellectual disabilities (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015). Included in this is the othering of affect, embodiment, indigenous knowledges, art, performance and spirituality.

When South African universities fail to decolonise the university space or create environments where students can successfully graduate, new injustices are created (Wilson-Strydom, 2018). Taking the colonial roots of disability, I join the decolonial voices calling for this conversation to happen outside the discourse of 'inclusion'. Rather, universities must decolonise ableist conceptions of the body, and expand it to include diverse bodies and the diverse ways minds learn. This is the intersectional decolonial advocacy that #RMF/#FMF activists like Khanyisa Ntombini have been advocating on university campuses (Crowes, 2017; Xaba, 2017).

Conclusion

The numerous challenges outlined in the Soudien report, alongside the prevalence of coloniality and various other challenges in South African higher education discussed in this chapter, illustrate the importance of prioritising the narratives of Black students in research. The interconnectedness of race, class, gender, sexuality and disability discussed in this chapter illustrates the importance of an intersectional lens when discussing Black students' experiences. Most importantly, the two student movements described have greatly influenced the narrative of social justice on campuses, exposed colonial legacies in higher education, and put more radical transformation on the agenda. The articulation by young people of their own harrowing experiences of violence in the university space (Kiguwa & Carolissen 2018:3) speaks to the importance of this research.

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1. These are the technologies that

Were present and were honed

In the colonies

And concentration camps

In the prisons

On the reserves

In the laboratories

In the institutions of knowledge

These are the tools we teach

And promote

That will inform

And discipline

That will help

And save

That will develop

And advance

The humans that these tools have dehumanised

The stories that these tools have silenced

The relationships that these tools have subverted

The environment that these tools have contaminated

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Research Ethics and Indigenous Peoples 101 | Linda Tuhiwai Smith

2. We are sorry that our ancestors were intelligent, advanced and daring enough to explore the wild oceans, discovering new countries and developing them.

We are sorry that those who came before us, took you out of the bush and taught you that there was more to life than beating drums and chasing animals with sticks and stones.

We are sorry that they planned, funded and developed roads, towns, mines, factories and airports which you now claim to be your long deprived inheritance

So much so that you feel you have the right to change and rename at your discretion.

We are sorry that our parents taught us the value of small strong families,

So our children would not end up as underfed illiterate shack dwellers living in poverty and waiting for government handouts

We are sorry that when the evil Apartheid government provided you with schools, you decided they looked better with no windows or in a pile of ashes.

We happily gave up those bad days of being spanked in our schools for doing something wrong,

And much prefer these days of freedom, drug abuse and violence where problems can be resolved with guns and knives...

We are sorry that our once carefully monitored borders are now being flung opened and left you competing for jobs against illegal immigrants

We are sorry that their countries have not grown into economic powerhouses after kicking out the white settlers…

When the settlers got here

There was no infrastructure, no roads, no buildings, no technology and the use of the wheel was not evident.

-White South Africans: We are sorry

WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS: "We Are Sorry

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Chapter Five: Methodology

Introduction

The theoretical framework utilised in this research prioritises decoloniality and, as such, it was important that my methodology did not reinscribe colonial research methods. It was imperative that my methodology and how I think about the process of making theory be deeply embedded in my decolonial ethical, ontological and epistemological approach, rather than an external mechanistic process. After engaging with decolonial methodology theories, I decided to rewrite my methodology chapter and decolonise my way of understanding research. This process of writing and rewriting has become increasingly important to me as a decolonial researcher. It means that I am willing to be guided when I make mistakes and unlearn colonial assumptions in my work. I think it is fundamental in this research to talk about my own struggles and vulnerabilities. Readers often only see a final draft after it has gone through editing and multiple inputs. I hope this vulnerability about my imperfect journey encourages those discouraged by fear and feelings of inadequacy in their knowledge production journey.

5.1 Research Design

In the past, the research methodology chapter caused me great anxiety. I have viewed this section as the 'scientific' chapter that required me to hide myself in order to sound 'objective', 'credible' and 'worthy'. I could afford no slip-ups that would betray me as a 'kid from the township who cheated the system' and would 'be found out'. I hid behind terms such as 'key components of research', 'population and sampling' and 'data collection methods, data analysis and ethical considerations'. This chapter discusses these important proponents of research. However, a decolonial feminist research methodology lens also means that I can celebrate the decolonial subversive and spiritual methods of creating knowledge. On one hand, coloniality (and colonial methods of creating knowledge) require me to feel shame and mutilate my indigenous ways of making sense of the world and creating knowledge. On the other hand, decolonial feminist research methodologies whisper gently, 'come inside as you are, with all the gifts your grandmother and her grandmothers placed in your hands at birth'. With this in mind, this chapter discusses how my research utilised decolonial feminist research methodology to understand the structural and spiritual colonial violences experienced by Black students in higher education, and how this resulted in them being unable to finish their undergraduate degrees. Moreover, using the notion of 'plugging in theory,' and Process

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Methodology theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), I outline the complex, embedded and non-conventional way my personhood shaped the research and, equally, how the research shaped me.

5.2 A turn from positivism and old empiricism

Feminist research is not a unitary field. Broadly, feminist research methodologies aim to empower women and other marginalised identities, transform imbalanced power relations and advocate for social justice (Cook & Fonow, 1986; Ackerly & True, 2008). Critical feminist research approaches are well-known for their criticism of scientific research methodologies' insistence on objectivity (Ackerly & True, 2008), which asserts that the researcher must be a neutral outsider devoid of positionality (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). This insistence on objectivity creates knowledge production that is inherently patriarchal and male biased (Fine, 1994; Unger, 1983; Wilkinson, 1988). Therefore, in scientific research, even the 'choice of research topic, conceptual framework and methodology, analysis framework, and language used in scientific articles tends to reflect male biases and patriarchal values' (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019:5), which resulted in the erasure of women. For example, positivism erased women and gender non-binary people from conventional research and did not acknowledge their standpoint and lived realities as valid data (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Phillips, 2015). It is imperative to remember that women constitute half of the population; therefore, disregarding women's narratives and realities in scientific research results in inaccurate conclusions and drawing up policies which do not serve half of the population (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). As a result, feminist research methodologies place particular emphasis on hearing the silent and are directed at opening up spaces for women and other marginal groups to find their voices (Oakley, 1998; Shefer *et al*., 2004).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the social sciences' shift into postmodernism, postcoloniality and decolonial critique provided the academy with tools to move from structural rigidity to nuanced understanding of how structures of oppression impacted people (Moldanado-Torres, 2016; Moldanado-Torres, 2011). Interestingly, even in the progressive post-colonial states, androcentrism prevailed in academia. In the African context, Mama (2003: 201) asserts that,

> African governments have not formally excluded women from participation in this project, as the colonialists did. They have tended to treat the attainment of nation-statehood as a collective restoration of conventional masculinity, however, which has precluded full and equal participation of women in

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the national project. Access to education, commonly regarded as a major route to upward mobility and status, has remained deeply inequitable.

It is important to note that, even after the decolonial turn, the reproduction of coloniality in research still exists in universities in postcolonial contexts (Shefer, 2020). Moreover, Mama (2003) observes that postcolonial states have fallen short in achieving equal meaningful civil participation for women. Education in South Africa has been conceptualised as the pathway to a better life (Xaba, 2017); therefore, if women and other marginalised identities are left out of this national mandate, then they are excluded from that pathway. Academia and research play a huge role in this erasure because, before women (and other marginalised communities) are erased from these futures, they are erased in research that informs the various policies that ensure a better life. This erasure was also evident in research that lumped women and gender issues in with generic terms such as people, community or oppressed (Hall, 1993). This phenomenon of erasure and silence is what is known as androcentrism, or the act of conducting research through an androcentric filter (Maguire, 1987).

Participatory research is built on a critique of positivism, which often ignores and repeats many of the androcentric aspects of hegemonic social science research. Freire (1996) maintained that colonial domination was the major theme of our epoch, but his conscientisation tools ignored men's domination over women. Ironically, participatory research was critical of positivist or colonial knowledge production, but still enforced androcentrism as the norm. For example, even decolonial scholars like Freire lacked gendered sensitivity in his work. Consequently, decolonial feminists found themselves needing to bridge the gap and put women's issues at the forefront (Klein, 1983).

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The feminist shift in research methodologies, and the patriarchal erasure of women in traditional decolonial/postcolonial research, resulted in the development of decolonial feminist research methodologies for those who work with intersecting marginal identities. While some western feminism research might ignore the epistemic violence within coloniality, and some traditional decolonial theory might lack gender sensitivity, decolonial feminist research hopes to address the blind spots and erasures of both in order to be more inclusive. For example, while some decolonial theorists might ignore how coloniality impacts gender identities, Maria Lugones (2010) merges the intersecting struggles of racialisation, capitalism and gender oppression, theorising the coloniality of gender to address the existing theoretical gaps.

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Similarly, many indigenous scholars have played a crucial role in understanding this intersection within knowledge production and research (Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2018). Smith (1999) links current positivist research practices to colonial epistemic violence. For the colonised, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism, because many European scholars committed violences on indigenous peoples for research that would help them prove European superiority. In New Zealand, indigenous people's skulls would be drilled open and 'researchers' would fill their skulls with millet seed in order to measure their faculties . The amount of millet seeds the skull could hold was thought to determine the capacity for reason and mental thought (Smith, 1999). In the US and Guatemala, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment is another horrific example of racist medical experimentation (Howell, 2017). These practices resulted in racist scholarship that supposedly proved indigenous people's inferiority and justified their subjugation (Smith, 1999). It is imperative to not only view these accounts of the barbarity of colonisation as historical events, but to also understand these occurrences from a spiritual angle. These are accounts of violence which were perpetrated against the ancestors of indigenous people all over the world. Moreover, as an individual whose ancestors were violated, the violence forms part of the ancestral trauma which manifests in my life today. These occurrences also explain why the academic space causes mental and spiritual dissonance. Our histories of dehumanisation, and our mental and spiritual health are deeply interlinked. My research seeks to discuss how this unacknowledged and unhealed trauma shows up within us, as Black students in higher education, as well as how it impacts Black students' experiences and ability to graduate, and undermines their capacity to flourish in the university.

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Furthermore, the collective memory of imperialism is reliant on colonial distorted assumptions about indigenous people, constructed in the West and imported back to indigenous people through the colonial gaze (Smith, 1999). Edward Said (1978) refers to this process as a discourse about the Other, which is supported by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. This process has worked because of the constant interchange between academia and the informal imaginative construction of ideas about the Other. The academic exchange, he argues, is supported by a corporate institution which 'makes statements about it [the Orient], authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching about it, settling it, ruling over it' (1978:11). This makes research a 'significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other' (Smith, 1999:2). Both Smith and Said help us understand the marginalised voices

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of Black students in my study, and the racist representation of said students in South African public discourse, as a systematic production of these harmful narratives. Therefore, as a Black student with lived experience and a decolonial activist organising background, this research is important as it disrupts the colonial gaze and prioritises Black students' ways of knowing and being.

As Fanon (1963) asserts, decolonisation is a process of complete disorder, in attempts to reorder the colonial world. This means that any methodology or system of knowledge production that uses decoloniality must be unpalatable to those who are invested in the maintenance of colonial structures (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Black students' experiences and pain has been structurally marginalised and replaced with victim-blaming colonial tropes, and my research therefore seeks to disrupt this power imbalance. In addition, I intertwine African spirituality and its practices in my research. This disrupts the separation of academia and spirituality asserted by positivist research methods. Moreover, I want to be clear that African spirituality is not something to merely integrate into academia in the 'Africanisation' discourse. African spirituality is its own knowledge system, deeply rooted in indigenous knowledges, connected to ancestral communities (both in the physical realm and spiritual realm) and uQamata.[14] While I might inherit ancestral trauma, I also inherit ancestral wisdom. I don't 'think therefore I am'. I exist as the physical manifestation of an amalgamation of quadruple ancestral lineages (Xaba, 2021) and a vessel entrusted with carrying that knowledge forward.

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5.3 Ethnographic qualitative methods

This study uses qualitative methods to examine Black South African students' challenges to successfully graduating in higher education. Qualitative research differs from more traditional quantitative research processes, which are often characterised by in-depth research into motivation, attitudes and behaviours of respondents or situational context. On the other hand, qualitative ethnographic methods are characterised by respondents' own lived experiences, and descriptive data such as written, spoken or observable behaviour. Due to the nature of the study, qualitative methodologies provide a deeper sense of contextual depth (Kiguwa & Carolissen, 2018) and an understanding of how and why these relationships occur, by delving into the

[14] A spiritual entity known as God or other names

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stories and experiences of the research participants, thus enriching the integrity of the findings (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017).

As my research explores the lived experiences of Black students in higher education, it is imperative that I utilise qualitative research methodologies to provide contextual depth. In-depth individual qualitative interviews and observations were conducted with a group of Black students previously enrolled at various South African universities. These were semi-structured, audio-recorded and transcribed, with open-ended questions organised under significant research questions of the study. The objective was to elicit the personal background information, feelings, knowledge, and interpretations of the students, with regards to their experiences within the university space.

Feminist methodologies complement my research framework, as they are not prescriptive about which method to use. Instead, they encourage the researcher to discern for themselves what methods work best, based on the nature of the study. Feminist research methodologies allow the purpose and context of the research to direct the methodological choices, as opposed to only trying one approach (Greaves *et al*., 1995).

This becomes very important to note for my research, due to the nature of my topic. My study takes racial identity, and historical injustices based on race, very seriously. However, as discussed in Chapter One, most of the literature that deals with students who 'drop out' of university do not provide a demographic breakdown that adequately reflects which racial, gendered, sexual, or other, populations are most affected by the phenomenon. This creates broad generalisations which do not paint a clear picture of how racial inequalities and historical injustices play a role in why Black students do not graduate. These statistics provide numbers, but these numbers do not delve into the lived realities and challenges which might provide a clearer picture of the problem, and therefore allow better-informed interventions.

5.4 Thinking with theory

My engagement with data was an emotional, spiritual and immersive experience. Due to the immersive nature of my research, 'thinking with theory' allowed me to transcend the anxiety of not being 'objective,' and therefore not 'scientific'. This way of understanding qualitative enquiry aims to do more than theorise about knowledge production, by challenging the conditions where knowledge and meaning are created. For example, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) seek to deconstruct what counts as knowledge and truth. This theoretical and

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methodological turn is appropriate for this research, as it complements the decolonial feminist research methodologies discussed above, and assists me in decolonising the way I conceptualise qualitative enquiry. Thinking with theory asserts that the ideological shifts, emotional triggers and spiritual growth I encountered during my engagement with my research participants' stories is itself data. Moreover, the process of engaging with data is also a research outcome, as opposed to the sanitised end product. Therefore, using the above-mentioned theory, this section outlines how I analysed my material.

5.5 Plugging in theory and process methodology

Plugging in theory was popularised by Jackson and Mazzei (2012a) in their interdisciplinary book, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research*. Their work uses six interdisciplinary theories to illustrate how one might think with theory while conducting qualitative enquiry: Derrida's Deconstruction, Spivak's Marginality, Foucault's Power/Knowledge, Butler's Performativity, Deleuze's Desire, and Barad's Intra-action. Jackson and Mazzei (2012a) observe that dominant notions about qualitative research and data analysis are humanist. They therefore introduce their scholarly intervention as a new analytic, as opposed to a humanist, conventional and interpretive form of inquiry and analysis that is rigid, methodological and planned. Oftentimes, scholarship in qualitative research teaches data analysis as something mechanistic, reducing data to coding, themes and transferable narratives. They argue that this is located in positivism. Moreover, it is data organisation, and not data analysis, which is dense and multilayered (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a).

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Delueze (1983) viewed thinking and thought as something that emerges amidst our day-to-day living. Therefore, thinking and theory is not something that you plan to do. He (1983:210) added, 'thought does not need a method...method in general is a means by which we avoid going to a particular place or by which we maintain or escape from it.' Moreover, the data one works with in the process of research is not separate from you, but rather embedded in you. Therefore, it becomes important to decolonise the ways in which we practise thinking past the methodological and clinical plans and paths for research (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a).

Research is something that happens in the moment, emergent, unpredictable and always re-doable (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a). Jackson and Mazzei (2012a) have termed this type of research, Process Methodology, which is interested in the process of the research, rather than its outcome. This was an appropriate methodology for me as it captured the unconventional

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way I conducted my research, and its complexities, in more nuanced ways. My process of data collection, analysis and knowledge creation did not follow the mechanistic coding order, and was deeply embedded in my spiritual and ancestral journey. The involvement of my ancestors meant that I could not follow positivist scientific methods that required me to be objective in a deeply personal process of knowledge making. Part of this work is to heal ancestral trauma caused by coloniality in my bloodline, and that is deeply personal and spiritual work. Like Jackson and Mazzei (2012a), I believe that theory is a form of data and data is produced by theory. Jackson and Mazzei (2012b) argue that, when people tell a story, they have a theoretical perspective behind that story. Every story is layered with interpretation and world views that are grounded in a theory, and during the interview, the researcher is told an interpretation of an interpretation. This means that ancestral knowledge, my personal experience and the narratives of my research participants is grounded within theory. This makes myself, my ancestors and the research participants a community of theorists and knowledge producers that have produced this work. This is a subversive way of understanding knowledge production, disrupting the researcher/researched hierarchy, and also acknowledging that we (especially as Africans) are always influenced/guided by our ancestors. In my analysis, I relied on my ancestors for guidance, wisdom and healing when I experienced secondary trauma.

5.6 Plugging theory, relationality and experience into the data

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As previously mentioned, my research methods were greatly influenced by Jackson and Mazzei's plugging theory. However, I extend the theory by adding relationality, experience and spirituality. Their wonderful work offers other scholars the opportunity to plug theory into conversation with the data. I, on the other hand, extend the theory by 'plugging in' to the previously silenced part of my work that is connected to my ancestors and my spirituality, and into the participants' journeys and their ancestors.

Jackson & Mazzei (2012b) argue that theory is imperative in research as it ensures that our sense of knowing is in a state of in-between-ness, and is always becoming. It is a humble state of understanding when what we know (about the research) is always transforming into something new. This threshold incites change and movement in qualitative research. I add that decolonial qualitative research methodologies that rely on ancestral wisdom and knowledge also exist within a threshold where movement and change occur. Moreover, this movement also happens within both the academic and non-academic spheres. Most importantly, because this research took ancestral wisdom seriously, the movement and shift also occurs within the

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physical, spiritual and ancestral realm. For example, when I first conducted the research, I thought it was going to be about systemic challenges faced by Black students. However, as I started my journey of initiation as a healer, I started to interrogate how white supremacy and coloniality affected my life. My ancestors also led me to people and some research participants who were healers. These individuals (such as my dear friend Leslie) encouraged me to not ignore the spiritual impact of coloniality. My 'plugging' into the data means that this research has transformed from its inception, and that it will continue to move and transform long after my dissertation is examined.

The data was not numerical, as it took the form of verbal self-narrated stories, follow-up interviews and WhatsApp voice notes about the various challenges Black students encountered in basic education and university. I was not interested in following conventional instrumentalist and formulaic ways of analysing data, such as transcribing, coding and then dividing the narratives into themes. From the outset, the interviews with the research participants had been conversational and deeply personal, as opposed to a question and answer session. Therefore, I decided to listen to the conversations three times, then pull out quotes, instead of transcribing the interviews.

Self-narrated stories and WhatsApp voice notes are rich narratives articulated from a deep sense of pain (from colonial violence) and the research participants' personal power. This means that there were many non-verbal cues and communication that I might have missed if I had used transcription. As Jackson & Mazzei (2017; 2013: np) argue, 'voice does this other thing, it animates bodies, animates words, animates histories, materialities, affects and so on. Voice is doing a lot, it is not just telling a story.' For example, I met one participant in the parking lot of a shopping mall in her township in Pretoria. The ex-student lived at home and I did not have finances to book a space near her home, yet she was so committed to helping with my research that she was willing to sit with me on the quiet bench outside to tell me her story. The immersive nature of my research meant that I wanted to be transported back to Pretoria, to that parking lot, and be in conversation with her once more. To hear her pauses, the silences and tonality. To be able to hear when her voice breaks in pain (as sometimes that was also an indication that I must represent this issue with extra caution or use double pseudonyms to ensure safety). Sometimes, it was how the participants spoke about a particular issue that enabled me to read power and resilience into their story. For example, one participant was talking about the lack of safety on her campus, and how she intervened when an LGBTIQ

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student who had a physical disability was attacked by a homophobic student. There was an intangible way in which her tone and animation enabled me to interpret that story as about more than just queer antagonism. Her non-verbal communication of her personal power and intervention enabled me to write about the incident as a powerful example of LGBTIQ allyship and community. Over the months of data analysis, I would often message the research participants to thank them again for the conversations, enquire about their well-being and joke that listening to our conversation felt like I had spent another afternoon with them. Indeed, I was purposeful about immersing myself in our conversations, and not hiding behind methods and coding to avoid going to a particular place of emotional discomfort.

I was intentional about not seeming objective and I therefore also shared my personal experiences of navigating higher education. In relistening to the narratives, I understood that some of the conversations were more than just research 'interviews.' During some conversations, we worked through deep pain and feelings of non-belonging. This also resulted in a shared space of finding meaning and affirming our respective journeys. As discussed in the theoretical framework, most students internalised their exclusion as personal failure or evidence of intellectual inferiority. In those moments, words of encouragement and affirmation were appropriate, rather than trying to be a distant objective 'qualitative researcher'. I was a fellow student, a Black sister and a human who also empathised. I spoke to a research participant who kept on saying, 'I guess I played myself,' and blaming herself for choosing a degree she was not passionate about. I gently asked her how she could sabotage herself if she did not know and no one in her family had been to university? She paused and suddenly her whole face lit up as she realised how she had carried shame and blame for structural issues in higher education. This was a couple of seconds in a two and a half hour conversation; however, the gentleness and power of those moments enabled me to add a whole section in my theoretical framework where I discuss shame and vulnerability. These are the little nuanced ways that illustrate that data analysis is not only about organising narratives and, if I was simply coding transcripts, I would have missed the importance of those few seconds.

After listening to all the interviews, I then wrote down the emerging themes as headings in a word document. I proceeded to listen to the interviews for the second time and placed a time stamp and the name of the research participants under the relevant headings. On a separate document, I jotted down some notes that I would refer to when I was writing up my analysis. While listening to participants who were discussing the same topic, I would often contact my

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research participants and ask for a follow-up interview. I found that sometimes other participants would have insight about a theme that other participants did not discuss and that required a follow-up. For example, towards the end of my data collection, the theme of spiritual colonial violence came up after conversing with two healers. I then felt that I had to have a follow-up conversation with a research participant who was a Sangoma and explore this theme with her, as we had spoken three years prior.

After drawing up the headings and placing the time stamps, I was able to divide the headings into three chapters. I view my thesis as telling a story. It is telling my story and the research participants' powerful stories, to dispute the dominant damaging story that Black students 'drop out' of university because they did not work hard enough or were inferior. The first analytical chapter outlines the research participants' experiences in basic education to argue that coloniality in higher education is an extension of what is going on in basic education. The second analytical chapter outlines the research participants' experiences in higher education, and illuminates the structural racism and coloniality inherent in the system. In the third chapter, I present powerful narratives of resistance, as it was important that this research did not locate participants in deterministic victimhood and celebrated their moments of resistance.

The third time I listened to the audio conversations, I pulled out quotes from the timestamps from the recordings and placed them under the relevant themes. I would listen to one interview, then pull out the quotes that spoke to a particular theme. I repeated this until all my chapters and sections were populated with narratives. Then I read each section and asked myself a series of questions: If participants were in one room having a spirited conversation, how would they agree or disagree? How do their voices inform or dispute my decolonial theoretical framework? What are some of the new themes emerging? How do these narratives dispute the dominant colonial discourse (of 'drop-outs' as opposed to structurally excluded)? Lastly, how did my previous ways of organising (often highly militant, cisnormative and ableist) within student movements further marginalise my research participants and how does this thesis interrupt that pattern? Thereafter, I started interpreting the narratives and locating them within the broader decoloniality arguments in higher education.

The issue of translation is important, as it complicates data analysis and the issue of voice. I was adamant that I wanted participants to express themselves in a way that felt comfortable and authentic to them. This means that the data is in English, isiXhosa, isiZulu and a tiny portion of seSotho. Oftentimes, the conversations were a mixture of English and one African

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language. This presented a dilemma when I was pulling quotes from the data. I decided to translate the majority of the quotes, but had anxiety about how the translation from the African languages into English changed the participants' voices. It was not that my translation was incompetent, but that English was unable to capture the richness of the stories. I consulted with my supervisor at the end of my analysis and she assured me that I would have been encouraged to present the narratives in the African languages and translate them in the footnotes or elsewhere. However, due to time constraints, I was unable to revert them back into African languages. I did leave the section on African spirituality in isiXhosa, as it deals with ancestral and indigenous knowledge.

I tried hard to ensure that the conversation was not formal, and the data is colloquial with plenty of swear words. At first, I edited out the swear words but, in consultation with my supervisor, I have decided to keep the swear words as they represent the authenticity of one's speech. This is how individuals speak and editing how people speak feels like policing and playing into respectability politics.

African Spirituality, healing and storytelling

African spirituality and storytelling facilitated healing during hard times in my research journey. For example, at the beginning of my data collection, I was exposed to secondary trauma from the research interviews and this led to a mental health breakdown. However, as my journey with African spirituality grew, I understood that I experienced secondary trauma, as well as visitations from the research participants' ancestors, through the intimate conversations we had. As a healer, I am learning that I have the ability to feel other people's spiritual, emotional and physical pain. Therefore, during my encounter with the research participants, I would absorb their pain. I have had to learn to set spiritual boundaries between myself, the painful narratives and the research participants' ancestors, who tried to convey messages or channel their own trauma. If I do not set these boundaries, I am unable to get out of bed for weeks. During the beginning of the research, I had to start therapy because I was unable to cope, but as my spiritual journey grew, I leaned into African spirituality to help me. During telephonic interviews, I would light two candles and burn impepho. This practice helped me minimise the depressive episodes and nightmares I would experience after.

I also relied a lot on prayer. I prayed for myself, my participants and both our ancestors. I prayed before our interviews, and after with my candles. Firstly, I was aware of the extractive

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nature of research and how researchers use people's trauma to build their careers. Although I am a student and I do not have much financially, constantly praying for my research participants is my form of spiritual intervention and intercession for the difficult journeys of the people who contributed to this research. I do not use prayer as a dismissive and unaccountable way out. I genuinely believe that I am alive because of the prayers of so many who interceded on my behalf. I believe in the power of prayer. Even though I pray, I also have intervened or assisted some research participants in practical ways when I have had the means.

I have also had to pray and set boundaries when participants' ancestors visited me. During the interviews, some conversations were about people's ancestors, colleagues or friends who had passed in traumatic ways. During these times, they would visit me in my flat and I spent weeks weeping and experiencing excruciating grief. I am still learning how to handle these situations, but I have been able to ask the people who have passed to visit and communicate with their loved ones. This ensured that I am able to continue with my research and function.

During the times when I have felt overwhelmed or unable to cope psychologically or spiritually, I relied on storytelling and fiction to help me write my research. Some topics were too painful for me to present academically, and I would lean into fiction to help me tell the story. When I was in psychological/spiritual breakdown as a result of the research, oftentimes I would be too scared to engage with the research, and fiction would motivate me to keep working. Other times, I would be experiencing rage because of the injustices I was witnessing and fiction helped me escape from the anguish, or imagine a better future with different outcomes.

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5.7 Autoethnography

My position as an insider-outsider, and taking into consideration how deeply my personal story is intertwined with my research, it was imperative to use an autoethnographic lens within this research. In line with decolonial feminist methodologies, autoethnography is a methodological and writing practice in social sciences that deals with more than relaying personal stories within one's research, but also contends with issues of power relations within a cultural space that limit the writers' understanding of their own life and text (Banks & Banks, 2000; Harrison & Watermeyer, 2019; Reed-Danahay, 1997). The inception of autoethnography came as a critique of ethnographic research methodologies, which were deeply embedded in colonial disciplines like anthropology, which created colonial racist cannons predicated on studying the "other"

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(indigenous communities), with the aim of aiding imperialism and colonisation (Conquergood, 1991; Geleta, 2014; Neumann, 1996).

However, post-World War 2, the end of physical colonisation of territories, and the rise of postmodernist thinking and decolonial/postcolonial movements/critical studies brought about the critique of ethnographic research. This included its claim of rationality, objectivity, reproduction of universal truths and grand/master narrative (Butz & Besio, 2009; Clifford, 1986; Foucault 1979; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography challenges the dichotomy of the objective and the subjective, and challenges the supposed split between the individual and their society (and all the visible and invisible power structures within that society). Moreover, knowledge production and claims are not neutral, but are socially and politically constituted (Butz & Besio, 2009). Autoethnography is important for this research for multiple reasons. Firstly, being a researcher who has experienced many of the challenges in higher education faced by my research participants allowed me to situate myself and my voice in the process of knowledge production. This complicated the conventional power relationship and separation of 'researcher' and 'subject'. Secondly, within my situatedness, I was able to recognise how the 'self' influenced the research in helpful and unhelpful ways, due to a projection of my pain in the narratives (discussed in detail below). Lastly, autoethnographic (and decolonial research methodologies') critique of power in knowledge claims helps illuminate the dominant colonial construction of Black students who do not complete their degrees (e.g. due their lack of work ethic or intellectual inferiority), and forms part of the social and political constitution of power within South African society that seeks to blame Black students for colonial and spiritual violence in universities.

Autoethnography allowed me to disrupt notions of the researcher as an objective and impartial extractor of (often painful) narratives within the knowledge production system (Tuck, 2009). It also enabled me to ask deeper questions about the function and purpose of my research. In her autoethnographic-poetic eco-critical meditation on diatoms, Lykke (2019: 1) asks a question that deeply resonates with my work: how 'speculative poeticizing, posthuman mourning, and spiritual-materialist, feminist, and immanence philosophical approaches to human–diatom relations can contribute to an opening of new horizons and a rethinking of human–algae relations, necessary for such a shift?' Deep interdisciplinary, inter-artform, and knowledge-spiritual interrogation of the purpose of knowledge production in shifting systemic oppression, has also led me to ask: How can my research contribute to epistemic shifts, and

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also serve as spiritual intervention? These questions helped me navigate the extractive and exploitative nature of university knowledge production (i.e. PhD research).

The first few years into my research, I was very scared to use "I", and my writing sounded very impersonal and clinical. All the while, I would articulate how my research utilises feminist research methodologies that critique the same issues I was practising. The consistent feedback about my work from my supervisor encouraged me to use "I" and bring in my own voice. This work has not been easy, as it required me to deal with feelings of unbelonging in academia (based on race, class, gender, sexuality and disability), and fear of victimisation and punishment for inserting my experiences into my research, which would disqualify my work as not meeting the "academic standard". I believe in the ability of radical scholarship to shape how we create knowledge, and also how radical scholarship can be deeply transformational for healing. My supervisor's (non-shaming) way of highlighting the inconsistencies in my work has allowed me to trust my voice and (begin to) decolonise subconscious modernist understandings of what is knowledge creation.

Autoethnography also gave me the ability to confront and reflect upon how my personal experiences and pain were projected upon my research participants. I remember a conversation I had with Katlego about the victimisation she had experienced in university, and how it had affected her mental health and her future. She felt very despondent and depressed about whether she would be able to return to university or earn a living. At that moment, I panicked as I perceived her to have lost hope. I started to interject while she spoke about how I also struggle with mental health but I continue to write my PhD. In that moment, I also panicked, because I had a subconscious need to represent the research participants as not just victims, but survivors of a violent system who transgressed in their own ways. While seeking to subvert colonial representations of the research participants, I was not allowing Katlego to feel and experience her pain and despondency. I had the privilege of completing three degrees and being socially rewarded for my accomplishments. On the other hand, her despondency and pain were normal reactions, given her situation, and did not need to be explained away. I invalidated her experience and asserted a narrative based on my inner anxiety, which was informed by my need to endorse universal (feel-good) notions about 'survivors,' while dismissing the inconvenient truths. Autoethnography and critical research methodologies assist us to reflect how the self can limit the process of knowledge production too (Jackson, 2012a).

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Reflexivity, as feminist methodology practice, enabled me to sit with the discomfort of difference and how I utilised my personal power as a researcher when difference showed up during conversations. As discussed in the section exploring positionality, my locatedness within the matrix of power (particularly my class struggles) makes it difficult for me to recognise my power as a researcher. However, reflexivity requires me to look deeper into my social location (Sikes, 2010) and interrogate institutional, emotional, personal, interpersonal and theoretical positions (Mauthner & Doucet, 2002). One may be able to understand their own positionality; however, reflexivity requires an interrogation of how they use their power when contradicted or faced with difference. How do I constitute both oppression and liberation? For instance, my need to debunk colonial tropes resulted in dismissal of Katlego's pain in order to represent her as a hero in my research. Continuously throughout my research, the tension between debunking colonial tropes and projecting a 'survivor narrative' has ensued. This anxiety made it difficult to openly discuss shame, pain and feelings of hopelessness, due to my personal anxiety of reinscribing colonial tropes about the research participants.

5.8 Embodied/situated knowledges, epistemology, positionality, reflexivity

> "I did an interview last week and it always makes me feel so out of breath. So distraught. So depressed."
>
> My journal entry, 20/09/2020

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Researcher's Positionality

As previously mentioned, the researcher's positionality refers to their location within the axis of power. Therefore, as a Black queer woman researcher from the township, with two intellectual disabilities, my relationship to power is complicated. When feminist methodologies discuss positionality, they traditionally discuss a privileged other that comes into the community, extracting information from participants and 'creating knowledge'. The dominant question becomes, 'How can we study power and identify ways to mitigate its abuse in the real world when we, as researchers, also participate in the projection of power through knowledge claims?' (Ackerly & True, 2008: 695). However, what happens when the researcher is from the community and the research question is also part of their lived experience? For example, what happens when a person is researching and creating knowledge about their own lived experience?

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It would be disingenuous to assert that, as a Black student with three degrees and pursuing a PhD, I face the same difficulties as a Black student who did not complete their degree. The reality is that I navigate the world, university, labour market and even the township with educational privilege (Albert, 2020). This means that my degrees open certain doors and opportunities that remain closed for the majority of Black people in my community who do not have tertiary education. Moreover, my prior involvement in student movements for decolonisation in the university (and hyper-visibility within these spaces) has granted me certain kinds of power and a privileged voice. It is very important to acknowledge this power and to be sensitive to how I could use my power to silence marginal voices or invalidate differences of opinion. I have often questioned how I would respond to a Black student who may not believe that coloniality exists in the university space. I continue to be reflective about how my power could influence the research interviews or exercise power over my respondents.

As previously discussed, my positionality has provided me with deeper insight and relatability to research respondents. Some of my respondents knew about my involvement in student movements and therefore felt free and safe to talk about painful experiences of racism in the university. During the interviews, I would also open up about my own painful experiences and this also created an open safe space for vulnerability and deeper sharing. Moreover, students did not feel like I was a privileged outsider collecting their stories to create problematic colonial knowledge; however, they knew that this research is part of my political activism and lifelong commitment to decolonising the university space.

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However, my positionality also presented me with great challenges while conducting this research. In 2014 and 2020, I was diagnosed with two mental health disabilities and with anxiety. This means that I navigate the university with great difficulty and my disabilities impact my interpersonal relationships (inside and outside the university). Even the most progressive spaces in the university (or outside) are not able to deal with the complexities of a student whose mental world dramatically shifts and alters their perception of reality. In the previous chapter, I discussed ableism as a colonial neoliberal valuing of bodies in relation to their productivity within the system (Mohamed, 2022). Manning (2020) argues that neurotypicality (the binary of "normal minds" versus those who are "sick") also functions as a white supremacist concept of (de)valuing bodies. I have had to pause my research for short or long periods in order to be well. In a capitalist society, where someone's worth is closely linked to their productivity levels, taking long breaks to recover oftentimes affected my confidence in

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my ability to finish my PhD. Most times, it was difficult for me to differentiate between needing to heal my mental health, or worrying about just not having the intellectual capacity to complete a PhD.

As a Black person, the PhD experience is a very complicated, painful and also rewarding one. I navigate the world with a double consciousness and I still constantly have to work through the imposed racist labels placed upon me by the white world. Therefore, a PhD triggers feelings of inferiority and an overwhelming imposter syndrome. The university was not designed for Black people to navigate and flourish; therefore, the university experience is a lonely and isolating one for me. There have been times when I am in a room full of academics and I would experience so much anxiety that I would not be able to understand English. Even though I speak English as a first language, there have been moments when I would be unable to understand the language because I would be so anxious and so riddled with imposter syndrome. In those moments (especially when I am the only Black person in the room), I would just sit and not be able to understand the language, nor be able to follow the conversation. This would further trigger and validate my imposter syndrome.

Class privileges and class differences are often not taken seriously by the university; however, when you are from the township, these are not differences you can ignore. My class consciousness is not something that I can leave at the door; it is an integral part of my positionality that often determines how I experience and navigate spaces. For example, here is a journal entry that reflects the challenges:

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On the 17 September I had planned a three hour study session with another Masters student. Right when I had sat down to study, the house next door started taking down two shacks. For the next hour and a half, it felt like someone was hammering in my head. By the time this was done, I had a migraine and I was very angry. “How do you think you can write a PhD in the township?” my negative internal self-talk hissed at me. “Who do you think you are?”

As a Black student, and like many of my research participants, my disruptive home environment is a result of Apartheid legacies of densely populated, economically devastated, poor townships, an environment where people have to live in metal structures due to a lack of adequate housing. Repeatedly, I am asked an insensitive question: why don't you use your funding to rent in the suburbs?

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As a Black student in my thirties, I navigate the university experience with expectations of being a provider, and I have Black tax, which pertains to the expectations by Black families that students who went to university must economically liberate their immediate and extended family (Carpenter & Phaswana, 2021; Magubane, 2017; Mangoma, 2019). This puts a lot of financial and psychological stress on Black youth and, as a result, some young Black people get into debt or battle with depression.

The ANC failure to structurally decolonise white supremacy has left a huge burden on us Black students who come from poor families. We are oftentimes the people who are expected to liberate not only our own families, but also provide for multiple households in our family network. For example, my scholarship income has to be divided to support myself, my family and extended family. One has to make difficult decisions: do I live closer to campus or do I use that rent money to buy food for people dependent on me? These are some of the difficulties and choices we have to make, while also trying to juggle an imposter syndrome, mental health and coloniality in the university space.

Embodied Knowledges

As a feminist researcher, my research is concerned with the (internal and external) lives of my participants in relation to myself and the world. Life is entangled with racialised, gendered and sexualised regimes (Smelik & Lykke, 2008). As we create knowledge and meaning, feminist research methodologies place great importance on embodied knowledges and pay close attention to epistemology, positionality and power (Ackerly & True, 2008). Feminist research methodologies problematise the notion of academia as the only source of knowledge production, and caution against how this reproduces discourses of an inferior "other" (Lai, 2018). This requires a conscious reconfiguration of the power inherent within the positionality (subject/object) of the researcher (which has to do with how researchers are located within the axis of power).

Feminist research approaches destabilise the hierarchical idea that the researcher is an all-knowing expert, and argue that the 'researched' are also knowledge co-creators (Boswell, 2003; Hendricks & Lewis, 1994; Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010). Participants are not passive, walking data waiting to be plucked for scholarship, but rather possess embodied situated knowledges which redefine them as empowered co-curators in the knowledge production system (Hill-Collins, 1990). Feminist research methodologies are crucial for my study because

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of the marginalisation and violence my research participants have already experienced in the university space. As I emphasised in the acknowledgement section, this thesis would not exist in its vulnerable and powerful way without the embodied knowledges of my participants. In their diversity, the research participants hold massive libraries inside their bodies, and are therefore co-creators of this knowledge.

Ackerly and True (2008:694) contend that, 'destabilising epistemology should not prevent us from doing research; it should enable us to do it better. We have an ethical commitment to noticing the power of epistemology, particularly the power of privileged epistemologies (including our own).' Therefore, it is unethical for feminist researchers to extract data without acknowledging their power and privilege. Scholarship is a not far-off objective site of knowledge production. On the contrary, scholarship is political, purposeful and ideological. It can either reinforce harmful hegemonic discourses (traditional anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, etc.), or be utilised as a disruption of these discourses. Feminist research aims to be a political praxis that destabilises totalising masculinist "scientific" knowledge canons (Mohanty, 1984).

While feminist researchers strive for ethical and transformative research, there still exists a large gap between the ideal goals and reality. Feminist research methodologies aim to establish equality in the research process, enact social change and validate women's unique experiences. However, many barriers inhibit feminists from reaching these ideals (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). This will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

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The intersection of gender/race/class/histories in feminist research methods

Over time, feminist research methodologies have birthed research that problematised understandings of gender, which then allowed for further interrogation of other erasures, and a robust analysis of other systematic oppressions like patriarchy, colonialism, and racism (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). For example, in South Africa, this particular silencing exists at the intersection of race, class, and gender. Black women are often silenced on account of being Black and women (Shefer *et al*., 2004). Black feminist scholars have often written about the erasure of Black women within androcentric Black consciousness discourse (Gqola, 2013; Maart, 2013; Ramphele, 1991) and the marginalisation of Black women's issues in western feminism (Abrahams, 2002; Boswell, 2003; Shefer *et al*., 2004).

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As previously mentioned, feminist research exists with its own shortcomings and criticism. There is much criticism of an assumed Western, white, middle-class, one dimensional 'voice,' and assertion of (for example) womanism as resistance against this dominant Eurocentric unilateral discourse (Abrahams, 2002, in Shefer *et al*., 2004). In an attempt to prioritise women, Western feminism (predominantly, but not only limited to, white women from Western Europe and North America) often homogenised "woman" without proper historical and cultural context. As Mohanty (1984: 335) asserts:

> it is in the production of this 'Third World Difference' that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries. It is in this process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named.

This Third World difference flattens the category of 'woman' into one homogenous group devoid of political/religious/cultural/racial/historical subjectivity and context. Consequently, this generality assumes that everyone in the category 'woman' has identical interests and desires for liberation, despite class/ethnic/racial locations or contradictions. On the other hand, the category 'man' is also viewed as one coherent group that dominates cross-culturally and universally (Mohanty, 1984). These identities cannot be neatly divided into binaries of oppressed/oppressor due to the multi-layered nature of race/class/caste/religious/cultural power dynamics (Hill-Collins, 1990). For example, in South Africa, white women occupy racial privilege and, in certain contexts, exercise dominance over men of colour due to histories of white supremacy.

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There exists a silent epistemological violence in Western feminism that others women of colour (Abdel-Malek, 2003; Hill-Collins, 1990; Mahmood, 2005; Mohanty, 1984). Once again, academia and research play a huge role in contemporary imperialism, which exercises power through hegemonic cultural institutions (like the academy) to marginalise women of colour, indigenous women and women in Global South contexts (Abdel-Malek, 2003). As mentioned before, these institutions have an (often under-acknowledged) influence on popular culture and the collective imagination (Smith, 1999; Said, 1978). This means these seemingly abstract ideas have material consequences.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the 'feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as "feudal residues" or label us "traditional" [and] also portray us as politically

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immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western Feminism' be continuously challenged (Amos & Parmar, 1984:7). Boswell (2010:1) argues that the visibility of Black women writers positions them as 'writing subjects in a society that has historically denied them creative and personal agency'.

Similarly, feminist scholars belonging to the transgender and gender-nonconforming communities have also criticised feminist research for marginalising trans women's lived realities (Ndelu, 2017; Omar, 2016). Oftentimes, when the category 'woman' is invoked, it refers to cisgender (assigned female at birth) women. This means that feminist research that has the potential to influence policy fails to account for the struggles and needs of trans women. It is crucial that the conceptualisation of 'womanhood' does not conflate gender identity (woman) and biological sex (people with vaginas). Not all people with vaginas (or assigned female at birth) are women, and not all women have vaginas. Most feminist discourse perpetuates universality based on the biomedical female category and gender binarisms. This is dehumanising to the transgender community, and reinforces heteropatriarchy. At a material level, trans women are left out of service delivery for women, and this negatively impacts their quality of life (Matandela, 2017; Ndelu, 2017; Omar, 2016). When using a feminist research methodology, it becomes important to be vigilant about who is silenced in any discourses and problematise it (Ackerly & True, 2008).

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The aspiration of feminist research methodologies is to examine the connections between the complex heterogeneous perspectives located at the intersection of class, race, gender and cultural contexts in order to uplift the hopes, aspirations and security of all marginal groups across the globe (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Narayan, 1997). The heterogeneity in feminist research is an asset, rather than something to be flattened out by some Western feminist scholars. Feminist research is interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, uses different methods and is continuously being redefined by the concerns of women from diverse contexts. This makes it imperative that feminist research is at the forefront of issues of anti-racism, decoloniality and empowerment (Ollivier & Tremblay, 2000).

5.9 Population and participants

This research seeks to assess whether Blackness, as a historical racial construct, affects Black students' university experience negatively. It is imperative to assess if and how a historically exclusive site of knowledge production, like the university, can be hostile to certain people

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who hold particular identities, such as the Black identity. This study seeks to understand how the challenges they experience due to their identity affected their ability to graduate. The dominant narrative about 'drop out rates' often blames Black students, or perpetuates racialised ideas about Black intellectual inferiority and laziness (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). However, the findings of this study bring new insight into Black students' subjective experiences, and the external challenges that cause them to not finish their degrees. This study sought to understand the intersectional challenges faced by Black students in the university, and to ascertain whether these challenges are associated with Black students' inability to complete their degrees. I explored how coloniality affects Black students overall, as well as their spiritual well being, and whether this results in their inability to finish their qualification.

A purposive sample of 18 students from South African universities who did not complete their undergraduate degree were interviewed in the qualitative phase of the study. The choice to interview 18 university students allowed for deeper, and more thorough and meaningful engagement with the students. This enriched the research and provided insight that would not have been reached if a larger sample was utilised.

Initially, this study was supposed to interview five students each from University of Cape Town (UCT), Stellenbosch University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and University of the Western Cape (UWC), in order for the research to be contextually located. However, most Black students who responded to the call for interviews were not located in the Western Cape and thus were not available for sit-down interviews. It was very difficult to find participants who were from the Western Cape. Most students who attended the above four universities had left the Western Cape and were unemployed at home. Unfortunately, I did not have adequate research funds to travel to the Eastern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal to interview students who had left the Western Cape. Therefore, I had to interview students from universities across South Africa. This explains the broad scope of the universities, as opposed to a comparative analysis of universities in the Western Cape.[15]

The Black students that I interviewed had not successfully completed their degree. The use of "successful completion" is radically different from the narrow neoliberal capitalist definition of success (i.e. whether one is able to provide labour for the market), and here is merely stating

[15] I received research funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, New imaginaries for an intersectional critical humanities project on gender and sexual justice, to interview participants from the Gauteng province.

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that the student did not complete their degree. The completion of a university degree is not a measure of someone's worth, capabilities or success in life. On the contrary, this study has sought to subvert popular notions that students are academically incompetent, through an in-depth exploration of the various challenges that result in unsuccessful completion of one's degrees. In addition, much research has been done on students who are enrolled in tertiary institutions; however, there are a huge amount of narratives that have not been documented, from those who have been materially excluded. The intentional exploration of Black students who have not completed their degrees sought to assist in filling this gap, and documenting the narratives of those students who have 'fallen through the cracks' of untransformed institutions of higher learning. Participants come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and identify with diverse sexual and gender identities. For the purposes of this study, Black students are all South African citizens.

Traditionally, it is common to provide a demographic profile and a description of the research participants. However, due to safety reasons, I will not provide this. Some of the research participants shared sensitive information about well-known public events, academics and people, and I would like to ensure they are safe from further victimisation. I have even used double pseudonyms to further ensure they are not recognisable. I believe sharing a description about them would identify them to the perpetrators and university administration people, who know some of the incidents and events well.

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5.10 Ethical considerations

As a researcher, it is important to take care and to deal with respondents in a respectful manner. Research with human participation is guided by global ethical principles to ensure that no harm comes to the respondents of a research project (De Vos *et al*., 2011; Tuck, 2009; Smith, 2005). Ethical clearance was granted by the ethics committee at the University of the Western Cape. It is important to note that the normative Western traditions of adhering to standard ethical considerations is only one minor part of my ethical approach. As I have outlined in this whole chapter, ethics transcends the few points outlined below, and it has been embedded in everything I have done and written in this study.

Avoidance of Harm: For indigenous people, research has been historically used to study and dehumanise our communities (Smith, 2005). As a decolonial researcher conducting research among Black people who had been traumatised by coloniality and structural racism, it became

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imperative to not to expose them to more harm. Although the study by its nature did not directly expose respondents to emotional harm, the latter was difficult to predict and avoid. This is because the students were asked to share personal experiences that potentially elicit past or even current emotional trauma. Therefore, as the researcher, to minimise the negative impact of such trauma, I took steps to minimise harm should re-trauma occur. For example, I contained the situation by discontinuing the interview at the first sign of discomfort. I also referred the participants for counselling at LifeLine, which offers free counselling and is located at 56 Roeland Street, Cape Town, 8001, Western Cape, South Africa. Lastly, I offered an opportunity to debrief the interview within a week of the interview being conducted.

Informed Consent: Written consent was obtained from each of the participants through an information letter and contract that clearly explained the purpose of the research (see Appendix A). Furthermore, due to COVID-19, and because the majority of the interviews were done telephonically, I asked participants to sign their consent via WhatsApp (see Appendix B).

Privacy, Anonymity, Confidentiality: A portion of the interviews were conducted in a private comfortable space as a way of ensuring the privacy of the respondents. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the advent of lockdown, quarantine and social distancing, some of the interviews had to be conducted in public spaces, and the majority were recorded telephonically. I conducted the telephonic interviews while I was alone in a quiet room to ensure privacy and (with consent) recorded the calls. Anonymity has been assured through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any personal identifying information. Before the interviews were conducted, the respondents were assured that whatever they shared with the researcher would not be shared with anyone else. Lastly, for participants who spoke about well-documented public events or public figures, double pseudonyms were used to ensure their safety from potential victimisation.

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Conclusion

Feminist research methodologies pose new questions, and provide answers and new perspectives to social questions about injustices, and this results in the formulation of new tools for analysis. Taking men’s, women’s, gender non-conforming and other marginal perspectives and lived realities seriously affords society with a clearer picture of the problem. Depending on where one is culturally located, we all play different roles and access power differently. This results in a unique and a different take on a social issue based on various positionalities. The

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centering of all perspectives and experiences in feminist research enhances our comprehension of a problem (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). It also enables holistic intervention at policy level. Lastly, the use of feminist critical paradigms improves the relevance, scope and calibre of research projects (ADEA Working Group on Higher Education, 2006). In my research, the use of feminist research methods and autoethnography was crucial in understanding the multi-dimensional challenges of Black students in the university space. This paradigm has also helped me express (in research terms) and conceptualise the marginalisation of Black students' challenges, and the colonial violences, as systematic erasure. The next chapters explore Black students' challenges in basic and higher education in settler colonial South Africa, such as financial exclusion, racism, colonial histories and spiritual violence in the university, illustrating this systematic erasure.

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Prelude to Chapter Six: Silver faucets [Taken from my diary][16]

We are told to stand in a straight line. Our school blazers touching shoulder to shoulder. A muddy brown blazer, a sky-blue blazer, a navy blue blazer and my busy striped blue-red-white-yellow blazer at the very end. I am not listening to the other blazers as they perform for the American funders so their school fees can be paid. I am busy trying to cram all my achievements in my little tired brain so the white people can like me and also pay for my school fees.

'Wanelisa, do not ramble and do not let your stupid brain drift to the clouds again!' I internally scream to myself.

The corner of my right eye catches a silver faucet. It is square and not like the old brass one at my house in the township. If you stare and concentrate hard, you can see your face in the faucet too. Julia, our sponsor and the founder of this education centre had spoken very slowly when she explained to me how the tap works. 'Wanelisa, listen carefully. You pull this rectangular part up to release the water, ok girl? Then pull it to the right for the hot water to come out. Then you pull it to the left for the cold water. Do you want me to show you again? Do you have running water at your house, love?' She smiled a sympathetic smile. I want to say, 'I am poor and not stupid, Julia' but I need school fees. Instead, I act like I am in awe and lie that I do not have running water at home. I hope this lie will add to my eligibility for school fees.

The crowd is clapping for the navy blue blazer now. Soon it will be my turn to perform for the American funders. Sweat drips down my forehead to the same rhythm of the water drops falling from the silver faucets. Julia has 'saved' me for last because apparently my story is very juicy. 'Tell them everything, ok girl? About the sexual abuse too.' She encouraged me when we were rehearsing our stories before the Americans arrived. The clapping stops. In my mind's eye, I put on my tapping shoes and prepare to dance.

Julia introduces me as a youth activist and her long strawberry blonde hair dances in waves across her shoulders and down her back as she talks. It is my turn now. I wear a yellow synthetic smile and step forward. If I am honest, I feel like I am in a slave movie. You know those scenes when white people are buying all those Black people standing in a straight line at an auction?

The white American's pupils dilate and shine with pity when I am done. I told them everything. Including the sexual abuse. And I don't care how much of the Americans' money goes into Julia's Italian sports car. I don't care about the old white man with eyes the shade of pool water with chlorine, who

[16] Trigger warning: sexual abuse and ableist language

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holds my arm way too long when we chat with the sponsors. I don't care that he is asking about my abuse with a semi-erect penis.

I know that when my school principal proudly announces that I have received a scholarship during assembly, I will smile proudly and force myself to forget the chlorine water eyes. Most importantly, my mother will not have to sell anymore of her furniture for me to pay for my school fees.

And.... One day, no one will over explain to me how square silver faucets work.

June 2019, Pretoria. 11 am

[Excerpt from an interview with my research participants which contextualises why I chose to share my story above]

Wanelisa: I think it is very important what you are saying about being poor and exceptional because people want to see their investment, actually.

Katlego[17] : It is this thought of us being expected to be exceptional. People do not expect that of themselves to be superheroes. To be doing well mentally, getting straight A's and discoursing online. But they expect this from me because they gave me money. You cannot exist and be ordinary and mediocre.

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Wanelisa: This is triggering me so much. The reason why my mental health is so bad is because I have never realised that this is what I do. I have never realised that this is what I do. I have to be exceptional. Who the fuck cares about a kid from kwaLanga other than if they are exceptional in some way?

Katlego: Yes, because what makes you different from all those other poor kids? You have to show that I am the one. You have to be <u>the</u> one.

[17] All names of research of participants are pseudonyms. In some cases, I have to use more than one pseudonym for certain people to protect their identity.

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Chapter Six: Black students' experiences in basic education

Introduction

This chapter is one of three analysis chapters that provide an understanding of the experiences of Black students who did not graduate in higher education. In previous chapters, I demonstrated how quantitative and deracialised studies on 'dropout rates' are limited in providing an understanding of why Black students do not graduate undergrad. These chapters provide qualitative data that illuminate the structural and spiritual violences of coloniality in university. This chapter will introduce the research participants and provide a discussion on Black students' experiences in basic education. It then provides insight on the demographic characteristics of the research participants. I also examine how Black students internalise race, and make sense of the world's external racialisation. This chapter discusses how Black students make sense of their gendered and sexual identification, before turning to Black students' experiences of racism, homophobia and anti-Blackness in higher education, and arguing that the colonial violence manifesting in higher education is an extension of what exists in basic education.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	**Number**	**Percentage**
Age		
20-35	14	87.5
35-50	2	12.5
Gender		
Men	5	31.25
Women	10	62.5

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Gender Queer	1	0.625
Race		
Black/African	15	93.75
Don’t Identify with race	1	6.25
Payment of Tuition		
NSFAS	7	43.75
Bursary	3	18.75
Parents	6	37.5
Degree (Faculty)		
Humanities	9	56.25
Commerce	1	6.25
Engineering	2	12.5
Law	2	12.5
Science	1	6.25
Medicine	1	6.25

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Community Characteristics		
Historically White Suburb	3	18.75
Black Township	9	56.25
Peri-urban area	2	12.5
Rural area	2	12.5
Family Structure		
Both parents	4	2.5
Orphan	3	18.75
Single Mother	5	31.25
Child-headed household	1	6.25
Extended Family (Grandmother)	2	12.5

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As mentioned in my methodology chapter, I chose to present my participants through broad demographic characteristics, as opposed to the individual profile standard in qualitative and feminist research. Some of the participants I spoke to are well-known public figures, or mention well-known public incidents that might identify them and put their safety at risk. I have therefore opted for a generalised summary to protect their identities and/or possible

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identification.[18] The majority of the research participants (87.5%) were people aged 20 to 35 years. More than half of the participants were women, 31.25% were men and less than 1% identified as gender queer. A majority of 93.75% personally identified as Black or African, and 6.25% did not identify with a specific race. The majority of the research participants live in predominantly Black townships, peri-urban areas and rural areas. Most of the research participants grew up in single parent households, child-headed homes, with extended families, or were orphans, while only a few (2.5%) grew up in two-parent homes. It is very noteworthy that a significant percentage are Black students who were orphaned while in basic education or the early years of higher education, because navigating the education system with no parents or support impacts whether a person will finish their degree.

6. 1 Social /environmental context of the students

A black student's family history, family life and their social context determines how much support they receive while navigating the education system and, in turn, this might determine how well they navigate the education system. Students are not decontextualized blank slates; they come from socio-economic contexts and environments which may support or hinder their progress in the education system. All of this is also located within the context of colonial and Apartheid legacies, racialised capitalism and rampant poverty. Therefore, it was important for me to present the context in which these students survived and thrived to reach the first year of university. I do this with the embodied knowledge that many of the peers I grew up with have long passed on due to violence and disease. Oftentimes, we forget the extreme violence that some Black youth have survived in poor Black communities to see the university lecture halls.

Family history

The prevalence of female-headed households has been on the rise in South Africa. In 2005, 52% of children below 18 lived apart from their fathers (Malberne, 2015; Roy, 2008). Additionally, in 2010, only 27% of Black children lived with both parents (Ratele *et al.*, 2012).

[18] Many of the people I spoke with were student activists and experienced victimisation and legal action as a result. I therefore am being extra cautious about protecting students and to ensure my research does not put them at further risk. Some participants mention famous scholars doing inhuman things (and I also use pseudonyms for the scholars) and I worry that the scholars might read this thesis and victimise participants again.

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In my research, there are countless testimonies about how Black women provided for children with very little, while the fathers were mostly not present.

My mom was a factory worker [Tearing up] I hope I don't cry. One day I saw my mother's payslip. My mother earned 75 Rands a week and she had to pay 3000 Rands school fees in the 90's. I don't know how she did it and she paid it in full. She worked as a factory worker in Wynberg. There is even a story that she had to give birth to me and then rush back to work ... But I can tell you Wanelisa, I wanted for nothing. I went to bed with food. (Gugu)

My dad has been unemployed since 2013 and my mother is a domestic worker ... my older sister and my mom provide for the family. There was a period where we were all scared of him. He was an animal. We did not want to get on his bad side. He smoked a lot of drugs too. I learnt the different smells of drugs from him. Then he would beat up my mom and older sister. He was very angry until I stood up to him. I was asking myself, why must people be living in fear? So I beat him up, he beat me up and I beat him up. I told him to open a case at the police station. But after that, things were better. (Xolisa)

My mom was a domestic worker and my dad was a lawyer so I was born from different worlds. My mom was amazing and she has given us a life that other people in my community couldn't afford. Not because she had money but because her hustling was very strong ... My dad was never really part of my life. I just know he is a lawyer, he has a nice house, has properties all around and he drives all the nice cars I see on T.V. He is a dog if I may put it that way ... I was raised by a single parent but they say in the township you are never raised by a single parent because there is an army of women who look out for you. (Lisa)

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She [her mother] had to work and we had to stay here because of school ... This was the end of grade 6. I woke up and prepared for my younger sister first because she had school transport earlier, then I prepared for myself and my other younger sister because we went to the same school. You go to school. Then you come back from school and you wash school socks and make sure that there is enough polony for the school lunches. Then you cook. You know the routine? Then you pray to God that you will be safe at night when you sleep. It is not a nice experience. You are a kid but now you are exposed to a whole new level of life. And when other kids speak about home, you cannot relate to them talking about their mothers washing their uniforms because you are the one who does that in your house. (Andiswa)

I was raised by a single mother and I don't know my dad. My mother passed away in 2010 when I was doing grade nine. I have been fending for myself since I was in grade nine because my older sisters disowned me. They disowned me because of my gender [trans] identity. (Cindy)

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My dad was an activist. He had a legal background ... because of his political ideals and political activism because wayesoloko eleqwa ngama polisa[19] and uMama was always trying to protect him so we could not stay in one place for too long ... My mother is a nurse. She qualified for midwifery when she was quite young and then she did paediatrics. She went on to start a Masters much later in psychiatric nursing but she did not finish because she was raising three children and a husband. But she has a high-ranking status in nursing in hospitals and now she works at the university of Pretoria in student health. (Luthando)

It is very hard to discuss the challenges of many children who grow up without fathers in our Black communities. It can be easy to paint Black fathers as irresponsible, but not link this phenomenon to the Apartheid legacies of migrant labour and various laws that broke up Black families (Malinga & Ratele, 2021; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Ratele *et al*., 2012; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000). This decontextualizes the Black family from the legislation, such as the Pass Laws, which contributed to fatherless children or families who do not know each other due to migrant labour systems (Musariri & Moyer, 2021; Swartz & Bhana, 2010). Yet, on the other hand, it would be disingenuous to pretend that other factors are not at play here. For example, Lisa's father lives 20 minutes away from her home, yet has not played a significant role in her life. Boys and girls are not given the same roles, nor the same levels of responsibilities in our communities, and girls are often parentified, while boys do not carry the same expectations (Buchino, 1993; Chinere & Mahati, 2014; Harrison & Watermeyer, 2019; Swartz & Bhana, 2010). This culture shapes the type of men these boys grow up to be and, coupled with Apartheid legacies, creates generations of black children with a profound sense of rejection from their fathers. Lisa goes as far as to call her father a dog; although harsh, this speaks to her pain of growing up poor while seeing her very affluent father not providing her with a better life. When I asked Lethu about her family dynamic, she told me that she found out three weeks prior to our interview about her father's identity when she learned that he had died. She tells me that she did not go to his funeral because she did not want to spend money to bury someone in a different province, so she chose to work and make an income that day. She chose herself and her wellbeing over family obligations to a person who never made an effort to know her while he was still alive.

One of the findings that surprised me was the number of children who were orphans, most of whom didn't know their fathers, and their mothers had died). South Africa has a high number

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[19] He was always hunted down by police [translated from isiXhosa]

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of orphaned and vulnerable children. Approximately 19% (four million) of South African children have lost one or both parents (Meintjes *et al*, 2010). 51% of these children's parent/s have died from HIV/AIDS or related illnesses (Chinere & Mahati, 2014). One student had headed a household since primary school. This is significant because university is already really challenging for most Black students who do have parent/s; imagine how much more challenging it is if you have no parents. Thus, a student who has lost both parents requires much more support from the university and the community as a whole. For example, I know from experience how triggering it was to fill the 'Father's details' section on my NSFAS loan applications every year, and how, every year, I needed to prove that my father had died. It caused emotional distress. I cannot imagine how Black students who are orphans navigate that application process, with all the documents needed from parents, or the required annual proof that your parents are deceased. As Cindy mentions, she had to navigate both basic education and higher education alone because she was disowned by her older siblings due to her gender identity. As a trans child with no parents and disowned because of transphobia, her needs and vulnerabilities in the university are more urgent than my own as a cisgender woman who had one parent and (somewhat of) a support structure. I often wonder how an individual like Cindy can even mobilise the transport fare to get to university and food to eat while waiting for NSFAS or the bursary to pay out? It takes great resilience for some Black students to even get to the university gate, and this is why it is unacceptable for Black students to then face further racism, coloniality and victimisation inside the university.

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To further illustrate my point, even for the students who lived in two-parent households, the women were providers. Luthando's dad was a political activist; therefore, they had to move around the country because their lives were in constant danger. Her father was not employed and her mother provided for the household. Again, this speaks to the disruption of traditional patriarchal gender financial roles, and how Black women have to be providers in the home. In comparison to Xolisa's family experience, Luthando says the political persecution and her mother's role did not negatively affect the home, as it kept her family as a unit, with her parents' politics and vision aligned as they fought for freedom. However, Xolisa's father's unemployment affected the family negatively, as he started using multiple drugs. He then started physically and emotionally abusing the family. His behaviour must also be contextualised within normative Xhosa masculinity, which places great emphasis on men financially providing for their families and leading the home (Malherbe, 2015). The tension becomes apparent when cultural gender norms (like Xhosa manhood) exist in the same reality

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as unemployment, poverty and systematic racism (Roy, 2004). Often men self-medicate with substances and take out their rage at their disenfranchisement on their wives and children, creating a hostile and violent home. This is how patriarchy hurts men: it robs them of the ability to receive support and community from women (in the home or otherwise) when the system dehumanises them (hooks, 2004; Ratele, 2008). For Xolisa, it also robbed him of a healthy relationship and an example of a man who is able to be vulnerable. Patriarchy not only hurts women and gender queer people, but hurts men too.

Social political contexts and challenges

Like myself, the research participants I interviewed come from very difficult socio-political circumstances. I would like to argue that when we speak about the challenges and the colonial violence Black students in university encounter, we must also contextualise it within the broader structure of colonial violence that manifests in their homes and communities. Oftentimes, we speak of the university experience as though this is the first time students experience coloniality. South Africa is the hub of colonial violence, and students' experiences clearly illustrate the concentrated violence that is articulated in the decolonial section in Chapter Two.

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Lisa: The danger comes from crime. We know crime comes from poverty. If those boys were afforded the same opportunities as white kids ... poverty causes all these killings and desperation ... I would say that it was a miracle for me to get to UCT because if you can go to Lower[20] now and you ask if they know UCT, maybe one or two people will know about it. There are very few people I know who go to university ... Wanelisa, these kids are angry and they are brutal. They do horrendous things during the day time while people are watching. Other little boys say they join the gangs because they said they would be killed. You think I can buy my nephew a bicycle while we live there? Never, I would be getting him killed. This one time he was dropped off by the bus near Vuyiseka High on his way from school. Those boys chased him till he got home. He came back and his eyes were popping out of his skull in fear. Apparently boys from this section cannot enter that section. These kids are twelve year and fourteen year olds. One time they demanded a beer from an older man in a shebeen and the man chastised them because of their age. They shot him in the head and he was gone. One day we can make a documentary and families will come forward. The lady next door called a young boy in the neighbourhood because she wanted the boy to give a parcel to his mother (I think he was thirteen).

[20] Lower is one of the dangerous neighbourhoods in Cape Town.

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Those boys came out of a car and shot him dead. My neighbour was circling the child and trying to shield him but they killed him. There was no conflict and nothing happened. Even you, they would just shoot you for no reason.

Wanelisa: Do you think your family is targeted in the killings? It seems like it

Lisa: It may seem like it but everyone is experiencing this. It is just that you get to hear my story and people killed in my family. My neighbours will tell you similar stories.

…

The area that I left in KZN is still underdeveloped. They recently got electricity in November or December. Imagine after 18 years and they only got electricity last year? ... And water and sanitation is also a problem because we did not have running water. We had to collect from the river where the same cows drink and make it dirty and we also swim sometimes. (Mpilo)

I was from the township and I lived in a two room house. This hotel room is bigger than the house. I shared a toilet with a community of twenty plus people. We had a communal tap and I did not have running water in my house. I did not have a yard. My mother did not have a car to bring and fetch me from school. (Gugu)

Most Black students who navigate the university environment come from communities that lack basic resources, where there is mass unemployment and exclusion from the economy, no proper healthcare, and high levels of violence. When we are younger, we are not told that these are the consequences of colonial violence. The underlying attitude and public discourse says our communities are like this because we are violent, we did not pursue an education and that we are lazy. In the following chapter, I discuss how Black children are not taught their history and about structural racism, which would allow Black children to make sense of the dire circumstances of Black people today. This is connected to how we live decontextualized lives and internalised shame about our communities. I am appreciative of Lisa's compassionate and contextualised understanding of the violence and gangsterism in her community. She does not see the boys in her community as inherently violent black men, but as a manifestation of the disenfranchisement, poverty and colonial violence in South Africa.

The reason why white children have different destinies to the children in her community is due to socio-political and structural racism, and not a matter of good life choices. Social exclusion, structural racism and poverty have shaped the personhood (or masculinities) of youth in the townships (MacMaster, 2007; Salo, 2003). Some of the boys in Lisa's community joined the

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gangs because they would be vulnerable or be killed by other boys if they did not. It was a way to ensure they live and are protected, and her nephew's experiences of victimisation are evidence of the dangers young boys face when they stay in school. The sad irony is that these boys who join gangs for survival often die young anyway. It seems that the destiny for boys in her community is early death (Ratele, 2010; Sadeet *et al*., 2009; Smith, 2015). In the interview, Lisa shares with me that her brother, who was the first to get into university, was also killed. Her older sister's teenage son was brutally murdered in 2016, and she has just returned from the Eastern Cape where she buried another brother who was gunned down in her mother's arms. Her mother had laid on top of him trying to save him; the gangs violently threw her to the curb and blew the brother's brains out. Lisa retells coming home to find her mother with her brother's brains splattered all over her mother's face. This is the background that leads me to ask her whether her family is targeted in the excerpt above; however, she assures me that all families in her community experience high levels of violence. Lisa's experience clearly illustrates what Maldanado-Torres (2017) calls the war zone. She navigates the world through immense violence and huge losses. It is important to understand the traumatic environments many Black students exist in, and to understand that these incidents sometimes happen while someone is pursuing their degrees. University adds trauma and colonial violence to young people who already navigate trauma and colonial violence in their family and community.

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The township is often characterised as the most violent setting; however, Black students coming from rural areas also experience structural violence, in different yet dehumanising ways. Mpilo articulates the structural limitations of growing up in rural Kwazulu-Natal, without running water, sanitation and electricity. His community only received sanitation and water by the end of 2020. This illustrated that, even though the national government claims they have created an equal and liberated South Africa, there are people who do not experience the changes that the national discourse presents (Badat, 2010). I do not equate liberation and equality with development, because this would be a Euro-American developmental lens of understanding progress; however, it is important to note the glaring inequality in South Africa, despite the rainbow nation rhetoric. These inequalities shape how Black students fit into university contexts, and whether they are eventually excluded. Moreover, Mpilo informed me that most children in his community do not make it past grade 5 because their families are poor and they see no point in education when they can work on white farms and earn a living. Most of the Black people lease land from white farmers who abuse and who exploit Black families. Mpilo told me that his grandfather complained to him that the white man he leases land from

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refused to give the Black community equipment so they could plant crops for the season, because the white farmer's saw had been stolen and he wanted to teach them a lesson. A whole community's livelihood would be affected, while living in glaring poverty with no running water and electricity, because someone stole a saw. This is another example of colonial violence and racism that must be accounted for within the contemporary South African context. Even though Black students might come from predominantly Black communities, racism and colonial violence still impact their lives. For example, what happens if there is a student who is accepted at UCT in the same year the white farmer punishes his family and they are unable to plant crops? This affects how/if they are able to pay school fees or navigate the university.

Internalised racialisation and Blackness

The research participants' engagement with race and Blackness revealed a tension between the Fanonian (1969) understanding of Blackness during colonialism, and Steve Biko's (1969) rearticulation of Blackness as a political identity. Race and Blackness is highly contested in South Africa, and it is unsurprising that some research participants struggle with, misunderstand and reject Blackness.

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Xolisa: I identify as African not Black.

Wanelisa: And what is the difference between Black and African?

Xolisa: Black is a colour.

….

Andiswa: I am black, yes. I can't change. I would love to press a button but I can't.

Wanelisa: You would like to press a button?

Andiswa: You know those buttons you can press and get those white privileges? Like, 'hey guys! I'm white can I get those privileges?[inaudible] but there is nothing I can do, I am Black.

….

Peter: I personally identify as mixed ... My father's father was from Mozambique and he married a Zulu woman. So I identify as mixed race because I have that blood in me but if you are talking socially, I guess people would say I am Black. Everybody has something to say about that.

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Wanelisa: Oh, it is interesting what you are saying because people usually talk about mixed race in terms of a white and Black parent but you are talking about being culturally or heritage.

Peter: No. I am talking about mixed race. I cannot say I am mixed culturally because I do not know anything about the Mozambican culture. I have never been to Mozambique. I was never told about the historical background of Mozambique. I am talking about the biology of it.

Wanelisa: So you see people from Mozambique are from a different race?

Peter: Yes, I do. Remember I said when we spoke yesterday that I think the phrasing of Black is not necessary, if not offensive. The reason I say this is because my maternal grandmother had eight children and they are all different shade in skin colour. Now someone might say I must not be insensible because I know what they mean but I ask how insensible is it to take all these different colours and put in one box? When Black is not even a colour of the skin? Brown is the colour of a person's skin. I do see colour or difference based on nationality. Black Americans are a different race. Ethiopians are a different race. People from Asia are Asians ... If South Africans are a different race but of course we have variations because we don't only have Zulu, we have Xhosa and baSotho who are a different tribe.

….

I am black ... what is it that they say?! Black blackity Black Black [laughter] (Luthando)

I identify as African and not Black. Because this whole Black thing? Yeah ... Someone out there decided to classify me as Black. Have you seen the colour black? Have you seen my skin? Dude, come on! I am far from that ... The whole notion of race doesn't make sense to me. Before colonisation, we didn't identify ourselves according to skin colour as Africans. (Samkelo)

Blackness invokes different reactions, from pride (like Luthando) to an outright rejection of Blackness (Peter). For example, Peter insisted that I use the word Brown throughout the interview, otherwise he would not continue . Samkelo articulates the Fanonian understanding of Blackness as an external racialisation process imposed on Black people, and that before colonialism we used to identify according to different nations/clans. He (and Xolisa and Khayalethu) state that Black is a colour which does not resemble the brownness of their skin. This is a literal interpretation that differs from Biko's political articulation of Blackness as rebellion against white supremacy. The rejection of black as a colour made sense to me when

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I spoke to Peter, and he literally took out a dictionary and read me the definitions of black. It seems he objects because the associations in the dictionary are negative, such as ‘despair’.

Peter also seems to conflate race and the nation state. He views Mozambicans as a race and South Africans as a race; this therefore makes him ‘mixed race’. Curiously, throughout our conversation, he uses the other identifications of white, Coloured and Indian with ease. In the next section, he articulates that sometimes he is tempted to tick Coloured when he does not see a box for ‘mixed race’. He is not critical of the complicated history of the term Coloured. This demonstrates that he only rejects Blackness. Based on his understanding of Blackness from the dictionary, Peter rejects it because it is something associated with negative aspects. For Peter, Blackness is something that Black people force on other Black people who might not want it (like him).

Andiswa understands Blackness from a completely different point of view. On the surface, one might read her articulation of Blackness as self-rejection or an aspiration for whiteness. For her, Blackness is the opposite of privilege, and therefore a struggle. The privilege refers to the humanity afforded white people that is not extended to people like her. Therefore, she does not long for white privilege, but to be afforded the same humanity that is given to white people.

Some of the Black students’ articulation of Blackness made me very sad, and Peter's rejection of Blackness was very triggering for me. This is because understanding Steve Biko’s articulation of Blackness saved me from coloniality during my years at UCT. It was a lifeline, a new way to assert pride and rooted me in a tradition of ‘rebellion against oppression’ (Mngxitama *et al*., 2008: 5). Biko (1969: 49) said, ‘Black people – real Black people – are those who manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the White man’. Biko’s Blackness gave me tools to identify my oppression, a language to articulate my suffering and aspiration for freedom. It gave me the confidence I had never had to confront white people when they were racist. Blackness was and still is the opposite of darkness or despair. However, when young people are not taught about the colonial construction of race, or their parents do not have a conversation about racism, the danger is that they internalise their racial identity as shameful or bad.

External racialisation

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South Africa as a nation pushes a post-racial narrative that strives for colour blindness, yet people are externally racialised, whether they identify with race or not, and placed in a hierarchy of humanity (Modiri, 2012). In my Masters research (Albert, 2018), I spoke to Black students about how their parents approached race conversations and Blackness. An overwhelming majority said there had been no conversation about race, yet they held a strong Black identity. The post-racial liberal rhetoric is not helpful, because racialisation still happens whether parents talk about race or Blackness or not. It is just that Black children get socialised outside the home, and many times the messages are damaging. It was important for me to try to convey this in my research as well.

We grew up on the Rainbow nation idea. There was no emphasis on race or anything like that. It was just humanity … We didn't have many adults around. You know those families where you have many adults around where you get to hear them talk and you can catch up on their conversations? So, we never got to hear those conversations. (Andiswa)

I definitely identify with race because that is how the world sees me. It is stupid to say that you don't see colour because you are wiping people out. (Gugu)

I am torn apart in this regard, because just like with sexuality, I have what people define me as and my own internal definitions ... In the world that we live in, we have to tick our races for administrative purposes and I would tick Black African. When I asked, I was told that it was for statistical reasons. Even on campus in the computerised system, I was conflicted because I would find Coloured and mixed race. I thought of ticking Coloured but I know that is for people who are lighter than Black but not white. (Peter)

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Most of the participants did not have direct conversations about race and Blackness with their caregivers. However, it is noteworthy that they experienced other social and government processes as part of their external racialisation into Blackness. Gugu articulates that he identifies with race because the external world identifies him with a specific race without his consent. So even though there are no conversations, the outside world lets him know he is Black. Most importantly, he notes that claiming not to see race only invisibilized the people that the external world places into racial categories, and these categories mean that some people thrive and others do not. Critical race theory is helpful in helping us understand that, even though racial inequality is legally prohibited, race as a site of struggle still exists (Orbe & Allen, 2008).

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Andiswa makes a very important contribution about racialisation: it can be received indirectly through observed adult conversation. This is important because, even though parents might not have explicit conversations about race with their children, children pick up parents’ views about race in many indirect ways. Furthermore, Peter expresses a tension between how he identifies and how people and institutions racialise him. As discussed, he identifies as mixed race but the external world views him as Black. He also makes an important point about how institutions propagate racialisation. In South Africa, scholars have critiqued the South African government for continuing to use Apartheid racial categories (Alexander, 2007; Erasmus, 2012). Like Peter asserts, the argument is that these categories are important for affirmative action and redress. What is curious to me is that, almost 30 years after legislated Apartheid ended, these inequalities still exist and are growing even wider. This means that merely ticking boxes (to show who is present) is not the same as decolonising and ensuring meaningful equality.

Constructions and embodiment of Gender and Sexuality

The colonial worldview is informed by metaphysical catastrophe, normalisation of violence, binaries of difference and a hierarchy of humanity (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Quijano, 1991, 2000; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Some of the research participants’ articulation of their gender identity demonstrates this, and what Lugones (2010) terms the coloniality of gender. None of the cisgender heterosexual men I spoke with said that their gender put them at risk of sexual violence, except a cisgender queer man who had experienced sexual violence. Cisgender women articulated that their gender attracted violence, and trans women shared how they faced constant threat of death.

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I have a Gucci bag that I don't know what to do with. It makes me a victim. I have a vagina. (Lisa)

That is weird. That is strange. I have never had anyone ever ask me that [laughter]. (Andiswa)

It is very difficult being trans because in everything that you do, you have this obsession with passing. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I thing about is, when I am walking I hope nobody can see I am trans. I hope they see me as cis[gender]. Walking, talking and dressing, minor things that people don't think about, those are the things on our mind. Maybe you take a taxi to campus and one taxi driver sees that you are trans, that could trigger a violent act. That could result in your death. There

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is this war against you and you want to assimilate. You want to be accepted as normal...it is difficult being a trans person without being questioned or without threats to your life. (Cindy)

It is very important to juxtapose Andiswa's and Cindy's experiences because it demonstrates how deeply embedded gender binaries are within coloniality. When I asked Andiswa what gender she identified as, she laughed and answered that she is a woman. As a cisgender woman, the idea of an individual asking her to clarify her gender is nonsensical. Of course she is a woman ... obviously! This is because the world and biopower reads her physiology and genetics as 'female' and her womanhood is never in question. She fits cleanly into the gender binary. On the other hand, as a trans woman, Cindy is constantly questioned about her gender and rejected from the category 'woman', which comes with the risk and reality of real violence and possible death. Therefore, safety means assimilation into cis-womanhood. This demonstrates how the coloniality of gender is present in how we understand bodies, gender and sexuality in South Africa (Patel, 2017).

The coloniality of gender refers to intersecting oppressions, such as race, colonialism, exploitation under capitalism and heteronormativity, that construct the colonial subject (Barnes, 2007; Lugones, 2010; Nkenkana, 2015; Oyewumi, 1997; Wekker, 2006). In this construction, there are only two categories: man and woman, and the man has a penis and the woman has a vagina. However, trans people exist outside the narrow coloniality of gender and disrupt the colonial gender order. This disruption of coloniality results in violence, even from other people oppressed within the matrix of coloniality.

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Lisa discusses how her vagina, or what she terms as her 'Gucci purse', attracts violence. Interestingly, Lisa equates her gender identity to her vagina. This further illustrates how, within coloniality, our understanding of gender is linked to reproductive organs. Nevertheless, her gender identity, and her vagina, are linked to a constant danger of sexual violence. Gqola (2015) argues there is a connection between rape culture, the manufacture of female fear and violent masculinities. She describes how hypermasculinity goes hand-in-hand with violent masculinities, misogyny and war talk. This is particularly devastating for colonised women because, in the modern/colonial world, masculinity is defined as power over women, meaning that anyone who wishes to claim masculinity is expected to perform violence over female bodies. Colonised women are particularly vulnerable as they are not protected by the codes of (white) femininity in the first place, codes that allow for violence but also extend some protections. Therefore, violence towards the bodies of colonised women can be seen as an

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affirmation of masculinity that does not carry major consequences (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Therefore, the normalisation of the gender binary, gender-based violence and rape culture form part of the naturalisation of war within coloniality.

Constructions and embodiment of sexuality

Heteronormativity refers to the belief that people fall into the gendered binary of men and women, and that the only legitimate sexual orientation is heterosexuality, or sex between men and women (Gray, 2011). South Africa is deeply embedded in coloniality, and therefore in heteronormativity. However, because as Africans we have our own spiritual beliefs, it allowed some of the research participants to reject this and live their authentic truths.

I am bisexual or queer. I don't know if I am bisexual but I am attracted to people. I understand that we are more spirit rather than physical so I am attracted to spirit and people rather than gender. (Luthando)

I am bisexual or queer ... My mother is homophobic and so is my father. I have never been homophobic and I have always been kind of activist-y for the longest time. But there are certain things I just did not want to defend myself against. It is a very tricky conversation. It is almost like in Apartheid with Black people who passed [for white] and would try and liberate Black people from that space but also passed? Because maybe the real experiences of living in that space would be damaging if they lived as Black. (Sethu)

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Eight of the sixteen (50%) research participants reported that they were part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Interestingly, Luthando understands people as spiritual and therefore is attracted to the content of a person's soul, while their gender identity is less significant. Even though there are some progressive communities where people can have the freedom to identify as they please, heteronormativity still exists. For example, Sethu is queer, but has chosen not to publicly identify as queer. Her parents are homophobic and she fears rejection and violence should she 'come out'. We had a conversation about 'coming out' as not an option for some queer people because it means hypervisibility, which in turn means violence (Judge, 2021; Matebeni, 2014; Reddy *et al*., 2018). Most often, people who are not 'out' are shunned in LGBTIQ+ spaces or pressured to be public without regard for the vulnerability. In the next section (homophobia in basic education), I will have a further discussion about heteronormativity and homophobia. I chose to continue the discussion about these issues in the next section because the participants were raising their experiences violence of basic education.

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I thought it is important to highlight these issues in the discussion about challenges in basic education as opposed to this discussion about the participants' social environment.

Gender and the ancestor

People who are healers often have a beautiful and non-conventional relationship with gender and queerness, as in African spirituality, gender and sexuality can exist outside coloniality and heteronormativity. While this does not apply to all South African healers, Luthando's description of human beings as spirit sets the foundation for us to understand how Gugu articulates gender as a healer.

Gugu: I identify as non-binary fem.[21] My dominant dlozi[22] is a woman so I feel comfortable with the pronouns she/her. When you say he, I'm like who are you talking about? Me? It only comes secondary that I am in a 'he' body ... I know we have so many letters in the LGBTIQ alphabet. There is a further identity that I am carving out for myself because I will say my spirit is trans ... As someone who has amadlozi, you have your one from your mother's side and ones from your father's side. When you go to initiation school or ukuthwasa, you learn about which energies are dominant in you. You move through the world with four surnames. Your mother's mother and father's surnames. Your father's mother and father's surname. When you phalhla, you call on all those surnames.

Wanelisa: So gender for you is a social construct and an expression of your diversity. But it is also something that is spiritual and ancestral. So you bring in different lifetimes and lifelines which complicates the gender binary or even the idea of choosing a gender?

Gugu: Gender for me is no longer physical. It is spiritual. I wake sometimes and I embody masculinity. I feel like somebody's grandfather and I move slow and grumpy. The next day I wake up feeling like a queen and I want you to address me properly. I have had to unlearn societal gender constructs of men and women. Even the gender construction of the LGBTIQ community does not go into the spirit of the person. I felt crazy in the beginning because nobody is talking about this. Your spirit identifies differently on different days. Especially if you are a person that has spirits moving through them.

As a Sangoma, Gugu houses many spiritual entities who once walked the earth and identified (complicatedly or uncomplicatedly) with gender. Therefore, her gender is an expression of the

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[21] Feminine person

[22] The dominant ancestors that inhabits the healer's body

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many spiritual entities she shares her body with. Her everyday experience of gender is dependent on the ancestor that shows up through her body. If a masculine ancestor shows up, she feels masculine. If one of her gogos[23] shows up, then she embodies the gogo's femininity. Importantly, she alluded to how even the Western construction of LGBTIQ+ cannot fit her experience of gender. Nyanzi (2014) and Matebeni (2017) have also critiqued Western notions of 'queer' and argued that they might not fit African identities, and may limit queer to gender/sexual identities.

6. 2 Basic Education in South Africa

The home and the social environment are not the only spaces where Black students come to understand their racial, gendered and sexual identities. Basic education institutions also play a role in shaping how young Black students experience their identity. This section discusses Black students' experiences of coloniality and violence in primary and high school.

Basic education from Apartheid to democracy

The removal of Apartheid-era racist laws, such as those related to Bantu education, has had an impact on where Black students can access an education. Post-Apartheid South Africa saw racial integration in South African schools and a centralised education system. However, inequality, racial antagonism and coloniality still exist today. One of my research participants was in school during Apartheid, two participants were among the first few Black students to attend school after 1994, and the rest were in basic education in the last 15 years. Unfortunately, their experiences of racism are very similar to those who attended in 1994.

It was bad because it was Apartheid. I was young and not as active as the other kids. I got properly involved around '85. There was the student strike of '85 and no one attended school properly in 1985 in Langa. We were throwing bricks [at the police] that time ... I was in grade 7. The older ones were crazy for the military struggle and went to exile. So us young ones would throw bricks because the older boys if they did the same, white people come to your home at night and take you away. No one would

[23] Grandmother ancestor

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ever know what happened to you. What would happen is, we would be throwing bricks and the soldiers would be inside the Casspir taking photos and then come fetch you at night so that is why it needed to be us little boys ... The political situation really distracted us because some kids lost interest in school. There are some of my friends who left school during the riots and never came back. Like, the last time they saw school was in grade 5. So many people died. (Khayalethu)

Primary school was rough. We were experiencing early post-Apartheid whiteness, immediately after Apartheid so I was that generation ... We were the first group of Black people to go into these schools. They started to take Black kids maybe in 1991 or after Mandela was released. There had been trickles before but in 1994 they were forced to take Black kids. They were very intentional in blocking or capping the intake of children from township schools ... We were what Mama Winnie called the cannon fodder. They tested these ridiculous rules on us. (Gugu)

We were the 80's kids. We had to be grateful that we got out [of the township]. We were not like other Black children, you know what I mean? So don't rock the boat. Realise that it is a privilege to be in this school. Your parents as well, you realise that your parents are spending every last cent to make you fit into this school. So that you are not like everyone else and more importantly so that you do not struggle like them. So you cannot even blame them because they were trying to give you even more than what they had but that meant that don't rock the boat. (Luthando)

The school turned a hundred years in 2018 or 2019 and they only had two Black head students in the hundred years. The first head girl was in 2011 and the first head boy was in my year in 2014 ... Black students are in leadership positions so they can say we are diverse and we didn't exclude them. The leadership is more white but they put a little Black students in for it to look colourful. (Pumeza)

One research participant, Khayalethu, attended basic education during Apartheid, and his experiences of school are vastly different from the experiences above. For him, school in the township was characterised by heavy police violence, protests which turned violent, peers who were killed by the regime, and class disruptions. He tells me that there was one year in the 80's where there were no classes for a whole year. Most of the time, he was on the street fighting the army and throwing stones at the police. He names two of his friends who were captured by the Apartheid state and never returned home, and they do not know where they were buried. Education was characterised by state violence and trauma. It was very hard for me to conduct this interview and it affected my mental health. It also affected my spiritual health because the people he named were channelling through me as I was transcribing and writing the thesis. I have decided not to pull out a quote from this section of the interview, as I do not have clarity from the spirit world or the ancestors about whether I have consent to go into details about their

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story. As living spiritual beings, it is powerful that these entities came through in my research and we did not meet by chance. I want to honour their story and their journeys, but maintain their integrity and privacy until they communicate otherwise. However, it is clear that Khayalethu's navigation of the university is radically different to those who navigated basic education after 1994.

This is important for me to illuminate because I can get enraged and despondent with the current education system; however, the brutality of a racist military state is different than colonial post-Apartheid South Africa. This is not to say that Black children now have it easier, but I seek to demonstrate how the violence and coloniality has shifted from a militarised deadly state to different forms of colonial violence. The intensity of the 1980s is different, yet the high levels of violence and trauma that Lisa reveals about her community is equally traumatic. Most of us live with complex PTSD from experiencing unrelenting trauma in the township.

Similarly, the violence that Black students experience in basic education is valid, unrelenting and dehumanising. I will give specific examples and contexts of coloniality in the sections below. Gugu and Luthando describe the volatile context of post-1994 multiracial schools that saw them as experiments for the new-found democracy. All the anti-racist legislation was tested on them in a social context that was still very anti-Black and clinging tightly to coloniality. Because there was no decolonisation, the laws acted as bandages for deep festering wounds, and Black kids still attend schools that hate them. The existence of racism and coloniality in the narratives of students who were in basic education in the last 5 years is proof that nothing has changed, except that a few Black students are welcomed to fill the transformation quotas, and a few more in token leadership positions. The racial trauma, victimisation and coloniality that make up a great part of this section is evidence that basic education exists within a broader national education system that requires decolonisation on all levels.

Moreover, the 'opportunity' for Black students to enter these elite schools created a dynamic where Black parents felt they could not challenge the violence their children experienced. Black parents are under pressure to provide for their children and pay expensive school fees, and some parents do not have the luxury of attending parent/teacher meetings. Realistically, most Black parents were socialised under Apartheid and most likely lacked the confidence to challenge white authority, especially if they were being 'done a favour'. Therefore, people like

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Gugu and Luthando had to swallow their rage and discontent and 'not rock the boat,' which translates to not challenging white supremacy.

Although I understand Black parents' difficult position, I want to argue that not rocking the boat did not necessarily afford Black students easy access. It is a fear (although valid) that keeps us from resisting white space. Black parents can think they are giving their children more than what they had, yet white supremacy still manages to disenfranchise Black children, as they are still marginalised and do not get opportunities further down the road. Even if these Black children have had the best materially, white supremacy will traumatise them spiritually or psychologically. Black children get close proximity to whiteness but that does not equal humanity or dignity. You get the resources that alienate you from Blackness (white accent/the language/navigate the culture/class privilege), yet all these things remain pointless if you are someone like Luthando who insisted on Blackness because the system brutalised her as a child. Even though Luthando had the best education and had access to (relative) class privilege, when she attended university, the colonial violence made her spiritually sick and she did not finish undergraduate studies.

Structural limitations in township and rural schools

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Schools in townships and rural areas reflect the inequalities and underdevelopment of the communities they are located in. While students may not face the same racial antagonism and colonial school codes of conduct as their urban Black peers, they exist within the broader colonial violence that prepares them for slave labour. While the national government pushes a narrative of equality, the experiences of Black students tell a different story.

The transition in terms of learning was a big problem because in KZN the entire school was a population of 152 learners at the time I left. And in grade 5 we were only ten so in Mpumalanga you are having 40 or 50 people in a class … In primary KZN being Black in school meant that you were going to work for the white man in a farm. So school was not something that was actually promoted. It is either someone is rich and has a lot of cattle or he is going to work for the white man. And this still happens today in KZN. Not many people see examples of people going to Gauteng for university or tertiary. That is why I say it was the best decision made by my gran [to move to Mpumalanga]. The models we had were people who were liked by the boss which is the white man ... In Matric, we did not have a science teacher. The one we had passed away, he got sick and could not attend so we only had our first term with him. A replacement who was a foreigner was found in October during the exams ... so I

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depended on my own learning, friend and other schools. I would continually attend their extra classes as well to benefit which contributed to me being a top student. (Mpilo)

When it was raining we could not go to school. The road would get muddy and we could not walk. Even the river, it would overflood and we would not be able to cross it because some students cannot swim. And if you can swim, then you cross and find that there is only one teacher at school. You leave school at 11 am ... In my village there was only a primary school so we had to walk to another village for high school. It was a long walk, I don't want to lie. There were children who went to school by transport. Children whose parents had money but for us we would walk. We would walk one hour each way. You come back home and you are exhausted. But we got used to it in the end … People with money are able to pass because they can afford study guides. We did not have DSTV so we could not watch that education channel for maths and science. People with money can afford tutors. But we were poor so we could not afford. Now they see us as failures. I think that is what hurts the most. (Vusi)

Maldonado-Torres (2016) argues that the bodies of the colonised and dehumanised are exploited for labour in ways that ensure they remain in economic poverty. The South African basic education system for children in townships and rural areas is one of the worst education systems in the world (Masola, 2016; Spaull, 2014). This is part of the structural design to maintain coloniality and ensure most Black children do not reach university or gain meaningful employment. Mpilo started primary education in a rural school in KZN and later moved to Mpumalanga. Although at face value, it was difficult to move from a school with few students to much bigger classes, he tells me that the reason the classrooms were not full in KZN is because most children were not in school. Most children never made it past grade 5 as they went to work on farms for low wages. This is due to high levels of poverty and the pressure to survive. As a result, the only role models were Black people who were favoured by the white farmers. When he lived in the township, he was existing in a world were Black people went to university and that broadened his horizon. Below, Vusi explains that his move from a township school in PE to a rural school was challenging as it had fewer resources.

However, Mpilo's township school was under-resourced and overcrowded. He did not have a Maths teacher until he had to write exams, but proceeded to have the highest Matric results in the province that year. He was resilient and determined, and attended classes at other schools despite the education system failing him. This is what is enraging when people label Black students as lazy. They do not understand the resilience and structural violence Black students navigate in order to get to the university. Vusi and his peers would walk an hour each way, sometimes in the rain, in order to get to school. Vusi and Mpilo are anything but lazy, as they

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are the epitome of hardworking and determined. On days when it rained, only students who could swim across the river made it to school. This means that, on top of being wet from the rain, students would get wet from wading through the river. Oftentimes, they would find only one teacher present: because there are no proper roads, driving to school endangers the teachers lives. It is diabolical and violent to portray Black students as lazy or failures when they fall through the cracks. I can never unhear Vusi's voice and how it cracked with pain as he articulates how he is not a failure because poverty has hindered him in his education career. These are the same students who fight and push through to claim their place in higher education in pursuit of an escape from these dire circumstances, but when they enter university, they are met with colonial violence and racism, which attempts to destroy their hope for employment to remove them from poverty. My research participants' experiences are very important because they reveal how decontextualized policies and conversations about transformation in education and black subjectivities have become. When one hears the individual stories of Black students, the need to decolonise the education system and the communities in which Black students navigate education, becomes much more urgent than generalised impersonal statistics.

Attitude of educators

Educators in township and rural schools also exist within coloniality and often also propagate coloniality. Most Black children in our communities do not finish school, and therefore it is taken for granted that they will 'not amount to anything'. This is part of the racist stereotyping and othering of Black people as lazy and intellectually inferior, and some educators take this attitude to the classroom. Some of the research participants explained that educators showed very little care for their education.

What I have noticed is that people teach to pay bills and are not really interested in the skills transfer ... I once asked the teachers at my own school why your children are not here if you are confident in your own teaching. (Mpilo)

I don't know how to explain. There is a huge difference between township schools and rural schools. They don't teach us well in the rural area compared to when I was in P.E. They kinda look down on us. They look down on us because their children are in white schools in town. In P.E we used to play sports like soccer and cricket and in the rural areas there was none of that ... Another issue is that we did not finish the syllabus. We would run out of time and they would rush through some sections. Like in maths, we did not do the section of probability. (Vusi)

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They were dealing with kids who came from township schools. Who did not believe they were smart. Who did not believe they could do this. Who did not believe they understood science. Who did not believe they understood biology. Who did not believe they understood the damn curriculum ... We were not given enough attention in township schools. You were just a number. The same forty kids who were at the whole Jewish school, were the same number we had in one class ... Nobody cares about you. If they do, it is usually that one bright boy in the whole grade that gets all the attention. (Gugu)

The racialisation of Black children as lazy or intellectually inferior is evident in Gugu's experience of the challenges white educators faced when they were teaching students who moved from a township school to a white private school. These are the same attitudes that justified racist Bantu Education policies under Apartheid, which believed that Black people were not scientifically inclined. These attitudes permeate the classroom today, but it is not contextualised. Black students do not have maths teachers until the final exams, and this contributes to Black students being unable to grasp the sciences. It is clear that there needs to be racial-sensitivity training for educators in order to mitigate this problem.

To be fair, educators also work in a system that is overcrowded and underfunded, amidst children who are deeply traumatised by their community environments. Therefore, what students might internalise as a lack of care might also be burn-out and the frustration of a crumbling education system. Educators are underpaid and overworked, and this is another factor that might contribute to a lack of motivation. White educators are not necessarily more caring or better educators, but they work in a privileged and resourced environment with children who do not come from traumatised and poverty-stricken communities.

Homophobia in basic education

Homophobia and patriarchy often go hand-in-hand within the coloniality of gender, and this is apparent in the narratives of participants in talking about their basic education. Homophobia includes the enforcing of sexual binaries, but also the rejection of femininity in boys and men. Some of the research participants' early experiences of homophobia was punishment for embodying femininity or being 'soft,' or displaying any alternative masculinities that do not embody violent (often heteronormative) masculinities (Gunner, 2014; Hallgren *et al*., 2015; Msebenzi, 2019). These incidences of homophobia were experienced in white schools and predominantly Black schools, from both peers and educators.

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If we have to go back to our childhood when we talk about our trauma because that is where these things started. Being Black, being different and being gay. Being openly gay at seven, eight, nine, ten years old and being Black. These were identities that was a no no no to. I was oppressed in the system. I was doing my best to fight for myself … We had this one teacher, Mr Robbison who was very racist and homophobic. Having him specifically target me in class and call me Ballerina in front of other children. (Gugu)

Xolisa: In primary school I was bullied for being thin and because I was gay. So I would fight a lot. I used to fight at school and I didn't care.

Wanelisa: Where you 'out' in primary school?

Xolisa: No. I think they just assumed because of the way I acted. Maybe I was flamboyant and out there? I did not act the way other boys acted and I chilled with girls most of the time ... In 2013, I went to a high school called LEAP. I was a teenager now. I got there and I was closed off ... I was scared of what had happened in primary school. I was not sure how a new crowd would receive me. Eventually, in 2014, I told the class during L.O and they were really accepting shame. And the thing that made me share was because my aunt saw a picture of me and my boyfriend on my phone and showed my mother. Nothing bad happened and they were fine. So I shared in class because now at home they knew about my sexuality and here I also want them to know. Then my grades started going up. My principal would keep on asking me why my marks were not the same as primary. I think it was because I was closed off.

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Wanelisa: Were you scared that people would find out about your sexuality?

Xolisa: Yes. And what they would do to me after

Samkelo: The teachers would make sneaky comments about me. I was very comfortable with my feminine side. I was very comfortable ... I was a kid and as a kid you don't know anything about sexuality. I was just projecting what I was feeling inside and then someone out there decided that you are man and you must not behave like that ... Teachers themselves don't understand sexuality and there is the heteronormativity thing ... I tried to change the way I walked, the way I dressed and my voice. I was a pre-teen and my voice was squeaky. I tried to deepen my voice. In high school it became worse because the teachers would do it in public and in front of other students. There is this one incident in

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my Maths class where the teacher asked me to solve a Math equation and before I answered someone said, 'he is a girl' and they all burst out laughing.

Wanelisa: So the school teachers didn't intervene?

Samkelo: No, they contributed to it. I remember in Matric, I decided to get a mohawk. They put me in front of the whole school in assembly and called me Shaka Zulu. It really affected my self-esteem ... I bottled things up and it came back to bite me in my varsity years. It came to a point where I was institutionalised and diagnosed with depression.

I was not teased but they would call some boys cheese. Later on they called such boys Danone, the yoghurt. Boys like me, who seemed to be softies. Boys who were glamour boys or a feminine type of person. I did not really mind. That is a thing about those multiracial schools, they teach you that words cannot hurt you although sticks and stones can break your bones. I was very good at dealing with name calling and in fact I would promote those names to myself ... The college was a Christian school and I attended in 2006. Although it was a while after 1994, because it was isolated and it was a while back, we were still crawling when it came to sexual education. We were still making fun of people who were overtly feminine, crossdresser, men who wore dresses and transgenders. We were unknowledgeable. The school itself seemed to be militant. It had too much order and strict rules and regulations. (Peter)

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When one researches the Black experience, it is important to take an intersectional approach, as coloniality violates the Black being on multiple intersecting levels. Intersectionality can be defined as a 'broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1296). Therefore, individuals are affected by oppression on multiple levels based on their multiple intersecting identities. Gugu articulates how homophobia and racism often were intertwined in his experience in high school. Similarly, Samkelo experienced colourism, tribalism and homophobia at his township high school. He tells me that he was eleven when he first thought of bleaching his skin so that he was not dark. Colourism is the violence people with dark skin experience because of the shade of their skin. The lighter and closer to whiteness a Black person's skin gets, the more privileges and social acceptance they receive from the black and white world. This model is based on the hierarchy of humanity within white supremacy, and is predicated on anti-Blackness. Even in Black communities, coloniality and whiteness still exist.

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Black students' experiences are multi-layered based on their intersecting identities (Ndelu *et al.*, 2017), and homophobia is another addition to the struggle for an equal humanity that Black people face and the violence can come from the Black community. Interestingly, homophobia seems to be a punishment for boys for expressing femininity. This is a direct link to patriarchy and the hatred of women. More concerningly, educators seemed to be victimising and assigning a sexual identity to very young children who might have made sense of themselves outside of heteronormativity (Bhana & Mayeza 2016; Langa 2015; Msibi 2012). Either way, it is clear that educators victimise children based on their religious or cultural views and as public servants, especially when their personal views propagate the coloniality of gender and heteronormativity. This may be a key reason why many queer youth do not finish school.

Microaggressions and othering

A primary aspect of racism is the (seemingly) mundane everyday violence and othering that ensure Black people know they are inferior and exist as an aberration to the norm (Essed, 1991). This happens in discourse about hair texture, language, and even something as fundamental to a person's identity as their name. For us as African people, our names are important and have meaning (Fitzpatrick, 2012). They can reflect what our birth means to our parents or broader families, or our aspirations for our lives. For example, Siphosethu means 'our gift', Andile amayirha' means 'The Amayirha clan has multiplied' and 'Sakhe isizwe' means 'build/dignify our nation'. Naming speaks to the context of one's birth and communal aspirations, and is also a prophecy. When someone violates your name, they violate your identity, your family's aspirations and the prophecy of your life. During colonialism and Apartheid, Black people were often given English names as a way to violate their humanity (Machaba, 2014). This violation continues.

Luthando: I remember Mrs Brenschi, and the 'ky' is spelt with a 'chi' and she called me Lubando and I said my name is Luthando. I remember we were in standard three and we were in the library. She said I cannot pronounce that. So I asked how can you not pronounce that because you can say 'tea' and you can say 'table'. It is a 't' and she said no I am just going to call you Lubando. So I said then I am just going to call you Mrs Baranzi. So she said, Lubando! And I said Mrs Baranzi. She said that is not my name and I said neither is Lubando. It is not difficult. Luthando? Really? It is not even the phonetics, it is just the consonants.

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Wanelisa: I was thinking about it. It is bullshit that white people will say they cannot say Radebe when they can say Vereeniging and groot. Ah! Chomi, It is the same sound! It is also hectic that Black children should be negotiating their identity with adults at school. Negotiating your identity, who you are and how valid it is that people call you by your name!

Luthando: And it is an absurd power dynamic. What assertion of power must you need? More than that, it speaks to a great fear ... a great sickness because you constantly need to reaffirm or reestablish ... as in I cannot let this child grow up not knowing their place in the world.

Wanelisa: That is exactly it, the constant resizing. You need to know you do not belong. There is something wrong about your name

Luthando: You can only belong once you become what I tell you to become.

In South Africa, critical race theory scholars in education assist us to make the connections between legacies of Apartheid and the violent tensions at an interpersonal level in school (Conradie 2015: 292; Soudien 2010: 892). CRT enables me to provide an analysis of both large structural challenges and how racism manifests violently in the mundane everyday experiences (Essed, 1991). These seemingly mundane experiences articulate to Black students that their unworthiness and their names (a huge part of one's identity) are insignificant. White educators also assert their power over young children and create an environment where a child is constantly existing as an other in the space, an undesirable inconvenient othered being. Moreover, Black children (and their multiple intersecting identities) are most vulnerable (Hodgson, 2013). This othering is camouflaged by language barriers; 'your languages are too difficult' and 'your names are difficult to pronounce'. However, many of our names are phonetic and easy to pronounce. Other times, the clicks exist in English and Afrikaans. Nevertheless, any white educator who lives in Africa and will be in contact with Black children should have a basic understanding of at least one indigenous language and be familiar with the clicks of South African languages.

In my case, I learned that my father, my ancestor who is one of my greatest advocates in the afterlife, who died 24 years ago, had a name he used to call me, because it meant something to him. When I Googled the meaning of this name, it said 'to relieve someone of pain'. This name has become sacred to me and has changed how I experienced my father's love in this physical realm. Therefore, if a white person were to disrespect this name, not only are they disrespecting me and my identity, they are also disrespecting my ancestor in the spiritual realm. Racism also

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has spiritual implications because as African people, we vacillate between the realm of the living and the realm of our ancestors. Our names trace our lineages, or we were named after an ancestor, or named by an ancestor. How we are named reflects how we are in community with our ancestors. To violate our names is to violate our spiritual selves and our ancestors.

Teachers targeting students

Black students who speak out or challenge coloniality are often punished and victimised in institutions that uphold coloniality. These students challenge educators who have institutional power and who use that power to victimise students after the confrontation. This is another tenet of coloniality: instead of creating an environment where both educator and learner can learn from each other, it creates an environment where educators undermine learners' embodied knowledge (Florio, 2022). Moreover, the educator exists as all-knowing and therefore misses the chance to learn from the learner (Dziri, 2020).

I had an incident where Meneer[24] Krog came into class and shouted 'stop shouting like bloody Blacks'. As in, he had come into class and asked the class to settle down and it did not settle down and he got angry and said 'stop shouting like bloody Blacks'. I turned around and he was shocked because he realised what he had just said. So I took my bag and left the class and Tsegofatso joined me ... it turned into a big disciplinary hearing and he had to apologise in front of the whole class to us. After he apologised, I asked him if he was sorry that he thought it or he was sorry for saying it out loud? He could not answer me kwavele kwa[25] tense and they said that we should just accept that he has apologised for now. And I was given an option of leaving his class or being transferred to another class and I stayed. Something in me realised that the power dynamics had changed. I realised that this man cannot touch me. Now that played out in a number of ways, I remember I had started my period and I needed to change my pad so I asked if I could go to the bathroom and he said no. So I said well I need to go to the bathroom and he said no you need my permission so I said well you are not giving me permission. That makes no sense so I am just going to go. So I went and he gave me punishment and I remember saying to him, I am not going to do the punishment. He wanted me to write out a chapter in the Afrikaans text book and I came back and I had not done it. He gave me double so I said you can give me triple or quadruple, I still am not going to do it ... I did not connect to race but I saw that I was not being treated like everybody else. I did not have the language that it was because I was this Black girl who was so

[24] Mr in Afrikaans

[25] But it became (translated from isiXhosa)

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defiant. I mean there were other Black girls who were defiant but it seemed like he came down harder on me. When I went to Thomason the experience changed because I realised that at Thomason I would take up debating but they did not let me take up any leadership positions. They would let me be in the photographs but they did not let me speak in the teams. I would go to the debating league but I wasn't actually going to debate. I was going to be part of the public speaking team but I wasn't going to speak. That is when I realised that I had this history of debating and public speaking but I have no actual experience. (Luthando)

What is striking is that this could have been a moment of growth for the white learners who were watching this. There could have been an explanation as to why what he said was racist, so the white children could understand why the Black children were hurt by the statement. This would have afforded the white children an understanding of racism and how utterances that do not seem harmful are actually violent and perpetuate coloniality, so that they could unlearn it should they have the same attitudes. I am in no way suggesting that Black learners become educators about racism, because that is another emotional responsibility and violence, to be expected to inform their oppressors. However, unlearning racism is an integral part of the process; therefore, when an unfortunate incident occurs, schools can create spaces where learners and staff learn, by having an external diversity worker to process the incident and ensure everyone understands why such attitudes are violent.

The incident was shoved under the rug by the school, and there was no opportunity for the teacher to unlearn his harmful behaviour. It is possible that the teacher might not have understood how his utterances were racist; thus, had he been open, he could have also learnt something. However, racism exists in a context where white people believe they have superior knowledge. In the colonial context, riddled with multiple hierarchies (teacher, male, older, white), he could not fathom that he could learn something from his mistakes. Instead, Luthando was constructed as an overly sensitive and difficult individual. The teacher's embarrassment then turned into vindictiveness, and he victimised the same child he was entrusted by the state to educate and protect, making her life difficult and humiliating her by not allowing her to relieve herself. This victimisation is not uncommon in the school system.

Sethu also speaks about a system and network of school teachers at her school who compiled reports of Black girls (especially from the township) who were viewed as problematic. Apparently, Black girls from the townships were characterised as unruly gangs. Identified as one of the 'problematic' Black girls, when she transferred to high school, the same reputation

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preceded her and led to further victimisation by white educators at the school. Apparently, Black girls from the townships were characterised as unruly gangs. Gugu had a similar experience at her primary school, and she tells me that there was an element of classism to her victimisation because she was from the township.

I was also interested in how Luthando made sense of her not being picked to speak in the debating leagues. Most of these schools claim they operate on meritocracy, and therefore there is also a possibility that they justified her exclusion by stating she was not good enough. This is also part of a system that not only excludes Black kids, but justifies that exclusion as being because of the Black students 'inferiority' or their lack of skills. Either way, the message is that the Black learners are lesser than their white peers. Most importantly, Luthando was able to see past the school's justification and recognise the injustices even though she did not have the language. This is why Black learners need to be equipped with an age appropriate language in order to be able to recognise and articulate system and interpersonal racism.

Racism from peers

Within coloniality, white children are also socialised to hold anti-Black attitudes and prejudice. I argue that, when white teachers victimise and discriminate against Black children in the classroom, this normalises anti-Blackness and gives white children permission to do the same on the playground.

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> I remember in grade three, we were playing horsie with these white boys on the playground. You know these memories stay with you. We were playing horsie and they said we must be the horses because we are brown. I remember one of them saying, 'you are dirty like the soil'. That was in grade two or grade three when you are trying to play with everyone. But by grade four we knew not to play with white kids. The white kids are hanging this side and the Black kids are hanging this side. (Gugu)

Children soak up the conversations and attitudes of their environments, and white learners are no different. Superficially, the game of horsie seems innocent; however, the horse is an animal and, in this context, horses serve the human. Therefore, the horse symbolises servitude, and these children saw Gugu as an object to be ridden for their pleasure. One can argue that this is not about race, and that the white learners were comparing Gugu to a brown horse because of the colour of his skin. However, horses come in a variety of colours, including white. Children are just more crude and unfiltered when it comes to their articulation of race hierarchies. Race

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and class are very intertwined in South Africa, and those white learners exist in a world where white people are always the bosses, and people of Gugu's skin colour are mostly in positions of servitude.

Coconuts and Better Blacks

Steve Biko (1969) argued that one of the functions of racism is to divide Black people so they will not unify and challenge the system, and this is also true for Black learners who attended predominantly white schools. One of the ways to ensure Black children do not become a coherent strong dissident voice is to pit Black children against each other and cause hostility.

The black kids whose mothers are maids are hanging separately with the white kids. Now I have become aware of the struggles they were going through because back then we thought they were coconuts who did not want to associate with other Black kids but the white kid's mother is paying for her schools fees and has told her to stick around with only white kids and not us township kids because they will be unruly. And 'I don't want unruly kids in my yard and I won't pay school fees for unruly kids.' Know someone who when you said township, she would say 'ew! What is that' and now she is completely immersed in her blackness. She doesn't have white friends. I even want to dm her and say I am sorry if I hurt you. We were all hurting. I called you a coconut but, you know, you find the next person to oppress. They were calling me gay and a sissy boy so I am going to find the coconut to lash out my anger on. (Gugu)

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I am very fortunate that I have a mother who was strong enough to take me to these schools. I went to multiracial schools from creche. The white race is not foreign to me at all. So I went to those schools and came back to the township, my mother would say 'Peter because of the opportunities you have had, other kids might not view you the same way they view themselves'. It was not my fault that they felt awkward. They are thinking in terms of status. I go early in the morning to the white areas and come back in the late afternoon. I wear a different uniform. Someone might say maybe I mistreated them and I can't say outright no because maybe I did mistreat them and that the white schools are tainted. I have never experienced any fiery and toxic kind of racism … Later on, my father sent me to a Black agricultural college. It was a Christian boys' school. I did not like boys. I did not know if there would be some sort of competition? Or maybe I would be inviting some dominance over me from other boys? I ended up leaving the school because I was getting into trouble. I was ganged up on by some of the boys and one of them stabbed me in the chest. That had nothing to do with sexuality. I came from white schools so I was very sarcastic and I came from township so I was very defensive. I would get into their

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minds. I found fat and short people very amusing so there was this one boy who was built like that and I would bully him until he got fed up and I ganged up on. (Peter)

I was what you would consider a coconut in school ... Now that I think about it, there were Black kids in school but I just was not friends with them. A lot of them had just come in [struggles to find the right words] and I just probably related more with the white kids because I did not have the background yase lokishini.[26] They all caught a taxi together and incoko ibingadibani.[27] So I did not hang out with them. I think as a result, I was considered a really good Black. I was a prefect and I was always in the top classes. In leadership positions. Tokenism, you know? I was also made very aware of the troublesome nature of some of these Black girls and boys. As in, make sure you do not fall into that trap. You are lucky you are not like them. (Luthando)

The schools would widen the class divide of Black learners by electing the middle-class and assimilating them into white culture. They would then be awarded with praise for not being barbaric like the learners from the township. This a tactic that ensures there is no visible coherent dissident voice in the school, while ensuring that the few learners from the township are victimised and silenced. The reward is tokenized leadership positions for middle-class Black learners, who are then indoctrinated into self-hatred, marginal 'betterness' and disdain for poor Black communities.

The township (a Black space) and the people who emanate from there are seen as troublesome and unruly, and learners from the township grow resentful. Anti-Black names like 'coconut' and 'better Blacks' emerge, which exacerbate anti-Blackness and destroy the community. Sethu says, 'they have been pitting us against each other since they started engaging with us. They know that we are stronger together. They know if we love each other and see each other's pain we will stand up against injustice'. These divisions do not allow Black learners to effectively challenge coloniality or voice the violence they experience in these colonial schools.

Although people like Luthando have been reflective of the manufactured divisions and anti-Blackness in basic education, Peter views his disconnect from his peers as a sign that they were intimidated by his proximity to whiteness. His school, his model-C uniform and his mobility are indicators that his peers felt 'awkward' of his (presumably higher) status. He also states

[26] Of the township

[27] Their conversations would gel

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that he never experienced racism at the schools. His narration of his experience reveals that he viewed himself as different from his peers in the township and the Black agricultural college due to his proximity to whiteness. He also attributes some of his personality (sarcasm and defensiveness) to his schooling background. It is clear that white schools have had a huge influence in his life. Unfortunately, whether or not a Black person identifies as Black, coloniality exists in predominantly white schools. Quite possibly, he might have been one of the students who was afforded marginal betterness and tokenized into leadership positions, and therefore did not experience interpersonal violence. However, it is clear from how he expresses himself that coloniality robbed him off the community of other Black children in his community and at the agricultural college.

Devaluing African languages

The devaluing and marginalisation of African languages has been another expression of colonial violence in South Africa, where languages exist within a hierarchy, with English and Afrikaans seen as superior and formal languages to gain knowledge. This means that our indigenous languages and the wealth they carry remain marginalised as dialects. Our languages carry our cultures and indigenous knowledge systems; therefore, to disconnect the Black learner from indigenous languages is to also disconnect them from their culture.

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Gugu: One of my biggest regrets is that through this damn system, I am unable to speak any of our languages as fluently as I can speak English fluently. I cannot speak seTswana fluently, I cannot speak isiZulu or isiXhosa fluently. Even though I understand all the languages in the country and I can speak almost all of them, I am only fluent in English … I don't care about English but I want to converse in seTswana. I want to think in seTswana dammit. I want to dream in seTswana if possible…

Wanelisa: And you think basic education created this problem?

Gugu: Can I read you a quote ... the book is called Book of Memory by Petinah Gabpah [opens novel] And she writes, 'Loyd's written Shona was much better than mine. My spoken Shona is fluent but my writing is frozen at the age of eight which was when I last wrote it in school. This is one of the consequences of a superior education, you see. In this independent, 100% empowered, and fully and totally indigenous Blacker than Black country, a superior education is one that the white would value. And as the whites do not value local languages, the best educated among us have sacrificed our languages at the altar of what the white deem supreme in colonial times. So it remains almost 30 years later. So I have never learned how to write with lyricism or beauty in my own language. I never learnt the proverbs and metaphors that give colour to the language.' The protagonist is an albino woman called

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Memory and the story is set in Zimbabwe. This is me. I cannot write lyrically in any of our languages. I cannot write beautifully in any of our languages. Do you understand that I dream in English? I dream and wake up and jot it down in English which is disgusting [says in disgust and quietly] … I wake up after receiving messages from amadlozi wami[28] and I jot them down in English… The languages! We could not speak vernacular languages at school. But I used to speak my language and they couldn't tell me anything. If I wanted to get something off my chest and I didn't have time to still sit and think so I could translate it in English, I would speak [laughter].

Pumeza: You were not allowed to speak any African languages. Just English … They said this is an English medium school so you have to speak English. Even in the hostel, they would not allow us to speak isiXhosa. Most of the white students would go home on weekends and come back Monday. The superintendent would say that especially on Monday we must speak English because the white parents are around ... when those parents speak their home language when they come. Her and those parents speak Afrikaans ... I got into trouble in grade 12 because I asked so the Black languages are the problem? Because those parents spoke Afrikaans, she spoke Afrikaans and the white kids spoke Afrikaans. She blew it out of proportion and I got into trouble ... It affects you because you end up seeing English as the better language. As the superior language and your language you don't view the same because you were not allowed to speak your language. Or you were indirectly told, your language is not it. You don't value your language because you think English or Afrikaans is the better language. You don't celebrate your language or your culture and you value whiteness. You think whiteness is better than oDarkie.[29]

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Wanelisa: You know what is amazing to me? The incident you are describing when you are in matric when you and your friend resist and keep speaking isiXhosa, is the beautiful ways Black children, Black young people or whoever, even if you do not have the language somehow it resonates that this is disconnecting me to who I am. And you resist and I think that is so beautiful. I remember when I was in grade 10 or 11 and we marched to the principal's office because we did not want to learn Afrikaans as a subject. We said there are Xhosa people in the Western Cape so we want to learn isiXhosa. We don't want to be taught this language as this was a language that oppressed our parents. We hated the language. Today, even today I still hate it.

Pumeza: We were also not given an option and we had to learn Afrikaans. They did not understand why we hated the language even though we did it from prep school. Even now I still refuse to learn the

[28] My ancestors

[29] Township slang for Black people. Can be used as a racial slur when someone who is not Black uses it.

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language. I don't feel bad and the only thing I feel bad about is that I was unable to learn my language. They had the capacity to include isiXhosa but they didn't want to and they kept making excuses.

Language has been one of the ways in which coloniality seeks to disconnect Black people from their community, their culture and humanity. In insisting on learning our own languages, we assert our Black pride and love. Biko writes about the importance of self-knowledge and Black pride. For Biko (1969:50), Black consciousness,

> seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.

In a hostile and anti-Black environment, we choose ourselves. Even as children, Gugu and Pumeza were unconsciously channelling Steve Biko and Black consciousness in a school environment that criminalised our languages. They are a demonstration that, even though white supremacy seeks to disconnect us, our innate knowledge and our ancestors constantly guide us back to them and our community.

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Moreover, the institutionalisation of Afrikaans during Apartheid has also created intergenerational trauma that has made it difficult to accept Afrikaans as a language (Calcott, 2021). Many young people associate Afrikaans with Afrikaner nationalism and oppression. Therefore, even though I and Pumeza have learnt Afrikaans, we are unable to grasp it and speak it. This is intergenerational trauma. Annually on June 16, my mother would tell me about how her friend, ancestor Xolile Mose, was killed in front of her at the uprising in Langa. Afrikaans is a source of trauma and my mind was not able to reconcile the image of ancestor Xolile Mose's young body killed while resisting against being taught in Afrikaans, and my little Black body learning the taal.[30] Quite frankly, the white Afrikaans accent even continues to traumatise me, as I associate it with the cops and state officials who killed Black people in the films depicting Apartheid that I watched on television as a small child.

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[30] Language

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Hair and school code of conduct

Aesthetics and beauty standards also form part of the colonial logic of what is acceptable and desirable in South African schools. This is something that is pervasive in both predominantly Black and White schools. Often, Black hair in its natural state is considered dirty and untidy. This sends a message that who Black people are is unacceptable and ugly.

They thought that because we would move in these white areas, that racism has ended but racism was these damn teachers telling our girls they could have their natural hair and in ponytails. We were violated. The schools said girls have to have their hair in ponytails. White girls could have their hair in ponytails naturally but Black girls would have to relax their hair to have it in ponytails. At some point, Black girls could not do braids or if they had braids they would have to have it in a ponytail and they had to be black. No colours ... Even with boys, because they couldn't force them to have chemicals but they had to have the hair the way they [school] wanted it to be. You had to use an afro comb every day. And there are days when you just wanted your hair to be in its natural form but you couldn't do that. (Gugu)

I had natural hair and I still do. Long natural hair. They didn't want you to, they wanted you to style it in a certain way. They wanted you to tie it if it touched the collar. They would say it's untidy, especially if it was an afro. So you had to put in extensions so you can look proper. Otherwise if it is an afro, then they would say it is untidy or it is dirty and you would get into trouble ... you would get detention. (Pumeza)

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In his chapter *Education as Freedom*, Rick Turner (1980) also argues that schools in Africa were founded on colonial principles that favoured European civilisation. This means that schools, colleges, churches and universities in Africa are sites for the reproduction of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2010). School codes of conduct are one area where this anti-Blackness is enforced. The texture of Black people's hair and afros are undesirable, and learners are forced to use chemicals in order to look 'proper'. Again, this sends a message that who Black people are is not proper or normal. They must remove their hair or use dangerous chemicals so that it is silky and straight, like their white peers.

Moreover, these codes of conduct seem to be much stricter for girls of all races. While they vary in degree according to race, these codes of conduct often are patriarchal and police women's bodies. Like Erasmus (1997) argues, hair is gendered, raced and sexualised, and women of colour often get policed the most. In recent years, South Africa has seen high school

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learners resist these violent codes in schools (Kachipande, 2016). These codes are also heteronormative and cisnormative, as trans learners who are women are often not allowed to wear women's uniform, and vice versa, while queer cisgender learners who do not fit into the gender binary are often problematised, victimised or even expelled by the school.

No language to speak about the trauma

It was striking to me that most students only had the language to speak about racism and colonial violence once they arrived in university. This means that, throughout their schooling career, Black learners experience continuous violence, yet are not equipped with a language to ask for help or taught how to not internalise the violence. For the 12 years of their school careers, coloniality exists as the status quo, and most of the perpetrators are not held accountable.

I mean you look at those things now and you think 'wow' but back then you were so used to it. So used to the culture and you did not question it (Pumeza)

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Luthando: I learned it late. Even then in grade three, I did not associate it with race. I did not associate it with any political nton' nton'. I just had a very strong sense of who I was because my father always gave me a seat at the table. So that was what it was but I did not make the connection with race, do you understand?

Wanelisa: There is a constant self-gaslighting and external gaslighting that happens when you are having to challenge power without the appropriate language to contextualise why that made your body feel disgusting when she calls you Lubando. There is something in your body that made you go argh, no.

Luthando: And to also understand that is a deliberate thing, right? For example, in high school I had a teacher, Mrs Moore who said Lthando and Kokeka with a C and Kokeka with a K for Coceka and Khokela. But I don't even know why they allowed Mrs Moore to teach because she did not get things. She had a Sheldon personality where she knows what she knows and the rest she didn't know. She would even mess up the names of the white girls. So something about her allowed me to give her grace and not correct her constantly. I corrected a few times and she would try and not fight but then she would come back. It was not a dismissal, it is just that she was just not that type of personality. I

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understood that she was not asserting power. It did not come from that place and she was not dismissing me.

Wanelisa: When I think about it, it seems to me that little Black kids need to be given the language to make sense of their experiences and their environment from a very young age. But at the same time, what is age appropriate for them to make sense of the violence of white supremacy?

Luthando: That is the decolonial work other people can do and not the work that I am interested in doing. I will not put my child in a school where they have to find a language or they have to unlearn unnecessary trauma. Her life is going to be traumatic enough by virtue of the fact that she is a Black woman. And more than that I can tell that she has an assertive personality and I can tell that men will try and crush that. That people left, right and centre are going to try and shrink her in many ways. So I am not going to take her to one of those schools. I am interested in more Afrocentric schools that will be teaching in line with who she is rather than teaching her a language to navigate herself in an environment that is designed to go against who she is ... I would seriously consider a community homeschooling with other Black parents and have the same idea of teaching an Afrocentric curriculum.

My conversation with Luthando was very insightful, as she reminded me that our goal must be to create a world where Black children do not have to recover from white violence and coloniality. I believe this is the first prize: a world where Black children are accepted and Blackness is celebrated. However, I also understand that, right now, the majority of Black people live in dire poverty. As such, their children are navigating this colonial education system and are brutally violated every day. Therefore, while people like Luthando work towards that beautiful vision, some of us must be disrupting coloniality now. People from my community do not have class mobility to mobilise for Afrocentric homeschool, because there is no bread and some people do not even have homes.

I see the work as a dance between building towards an Afrocentric future and the disruption of white supremacy today. To be fair, Luthando also articulates that she also believes that her work exists outside of constantly challenging whiteness, yet she commends people who feel called to do the work. She also urges Black middle-class parents to form communities and be active in Student Governing Bodies in order to affect policy change and challenge coloniality in schools.

Miseducation and denial of history

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Fanon (1961) argued that the function of coloniality is not only to subjugate the colonial subject, but also to distort the history of a people. This means people do not know who they are, and cannot trace how coloniality disavowed them. Therefore, people are suspended as ahistorical inferior beings within the colonial imagination.

Pumeza: We did not have history as an elective subject in grade 9. It was the one combined with history and geography. She would tell us how it [historical event] happened and if we had said 'well, that is not all that happened' she would say we are not going to dwell into that. That we must move on. She would just browse through South African history. There was German history and South African history and she would just browse through and focus on German history. Maybe she did not want it to blow out of proportion but we had questions ... Like what she would have done back then? Does she believe in some of the [Apartheid] rules and laws? ... In the hostel, we were not allowed to watch movies like Sarafina. Whenever the movie came on, they would lock the TV room. There is a movie called 12 Years A Slave that we wanted to watch. She would [inaudible] but eventually we watched the movie and everyone was so emotional and we got into trouble. She said that we are not allowed to watch such movies because they bring out such emotions but we were like, we are allowed to have such emotions.

Wanelisa: What do you think was the real reason they didn't want you to watch such movies?

Pumeza: I have actually never thought about the reason. That is why I am saying we are used to brushing things off. When they say this is the rule then you have to follow it. Back then no one wanted to question because no one wanted to get into trouble ... I think after we watched the movie there was a vibe. There was a tense vibe. Going back to what I said, they just didn't want us to know about our history. It is still happening in high schools even now. I doubt it has stopped because it is still the same teachers.

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We only had history in grade 8 and 9. We learned Hitler and I think the last term we learned about Mandela. (Vusi)

The importance of teaching learners local critical justice history in school is important for three reasons. First, it will enable Black students to understand the present socio-political context therefore, allowing all learners to understand that current inequalities exist due to racist laws. When students understand the past, they are able to contextualise the privilege or disadvantage present in various communities. Black learners understand that the poverty and social ills in Black communities exist because of racialised capitalism and the coloniality of gender. Poverty ceases to be personal failure and evidence of inferiority, and instead is seen as structural. White

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learners also need to understand that the economic success and privilege in their communities exist after hundreds of years of economic advancement at the cost of people of colour.

Secondly, teaching African history also enables white people to account for their participation and complicity, such as voting in racist regimes. Like Pumeza demonstrates, white people block any accountability when people ask ‘so what were you doing during Apartheid’. This question does not allow them to distance themselves from the regime, as the regime was voted in by ordinary white people. These conversations also allow for white learners to be accountable for how they benefit from past (and present) subjugation of Black people. However, our national government defends and upholds coloniality, and schools like Pumeza’s therefore get away with policing Black history. Our national government has only one use for history, which is propagating a false narrative of the ANC as the saviours of Black people, and invoking white fear during elections.

Lastly, history is important because it allows Black students to understand embodied trauma and grief around past injustices. For example, had my inability to grasp the Afrikaans language been properly explained as intergenerational trauma, I would not have internalised this as intellectual inferiority or inability to learn languages. It would simply be clear that some of that trauma had been passed down from my mother to myself. Moreover, when learners like Pumeza watch educational films like *12 Years a Slave*, they are able to process and release any intergenerational trauma, or even just be able to feel Black rage at colonialism and slavery. Black people must be allowed to feel their feelings, as Pumeza bravely told her educator. White people and coloniality seek to police and shut down rage and grief in order to minimise white guilt and shame. Those films, and the accurate depiction of white bodies brutalising Black people, causes cognitive dissonance for the white psyche. This is because white people are socialised into viewing themselves as innocent, non-violent and civilised, and Black people as irrationally violent. However, history begs to differ, and history must be told even if it disrupts coloniality and white people’s understanding of themselves.

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Conclusion: Top Achievers

To conclude this chapter, I would like to bring forth the voices of the many Black students who are not represented in the research. My observation is that most of the people I interviewed excelled in basic education, and especially the students who attended township and rural

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schools. They were the few who managed to get good grades and get accepted into the university space. However, the structural inequalities in basic education discussed above meant that there are many Black students who do not get to enter the university space, as they do not meet university requirements.

> It is this thought of us being expected to be exceptional. People do not expect that of themselves to be superheroes. To be doing well mentally, getting straight A's and discoursing online. But they expect this from me because they gave me money. You cannot exist and be ordinary and mediocre. (Katlego)

> I went to a township high school here in Mpumalanga which was all Black. And I was a top provincial student in Maths. (Mpilo)

I do not wish to create an artificial dichotomy between Black students who enter the university space and those who do not. As Katlego has mentioned, there is an expectation that you must be Black, poor and exceptional in order to receive the support you need to succeed. In this section, I wish to simply illustrate that the research participants I spoke to are a minority, and the vast majority of Black students 'fall through the cracks' of an unequal education system. For example, Mpilo was the top provincial student in Mpumalanga in mathematics, despite not having a teacher for most of the year. His community of friends were achieving 100% as an average year mark in physics and mathematics, and their genius and hard work makes it easy to prove that Black students in our poor communities are not lazy.

However, it has become clear to me that most of the Black people from our communities who go to university are the ones who are deemed 'exceptional' or know how to take tests in school. This leads me to ask who will advocate for the rest of the Black learners who fall through the cracks and do not ever set their foot at UCT or other higher education institutions? Who advocates for the children in the township with ADHD or dyslexia, or those suffering from PTSD? The ones pressured to join gangs, or who stop going to school because there is no money to replace their broken school shoes? The ones tired of going to school with no lunch? The trans learners that are forced to wear school uniforms of a different gender, the little Black

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boys called moffies,[31] the little girls touched inappropriately by their male teachers, or those who cannot go to school because they have no sanitary towels? These are also people that deserve to be advocated for, and not left in the shadows of history.

One thing is clear: the education system is failing Black learners. It is a pipeline to slave labour, unemployment or death. Unfortunately, even when Black learners enter higher education, it continues to reproduce colonial violence. The next section discusses Black students' intersectional experiences at various university campuses in South Africa.

[First Soprano lead] **Ndibanga lala ngomqolo** / *I lay on my back*

[A large crowd of Black women and their ancestors following the lead, singing and rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mntanami / I'm struggling for a good life for you, my child

[Second Alto lead]

Oh! Nd'zosebenzela amatyala / *I am working to get us out of debt/troubles*

[rhythmic stomping, rhythmic stomping, rhythmic stomping]

[First Soprano lead]

Mna ndathwala amatyala / *I'm carrying so much debt/trouble*

[A large crowd of Black women and their ancestors following the lead, singing and rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mntanami / *I'm struggling for a good life for you, my child*

[Second Alto lead]

Oh! Nd'zosebenzela amatyala / *I am working to get us out of debt/troubles*

[First Soprano lead]

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[31] Derogatory word for gay men

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Ndingabanga vula imilenze / *When I open my legs*

[A large crowd of Black women and their ancestors following the lead, singing and rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mntanami / *I'm struggling for a good life for you, my child*

[Second Alto lead]

Oh! Nd'zosebenzela amatyala / *I am working to get us out of debt/troubles*

[A large crowd of Black women and their ancestors following the lead, singing and rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mntanami / *I'm struggling for a good life for you, my child*

[Second Alto lead]

Oh nd'ayivula ibayibile / *Oh! when I open my bible*[32]

[A large crowd of Black women and their ancestors following the lead, singing and rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mntanami / *I'm struggling for a good life for you, my child*

[rhythmic stomping, rhythmic stomping, rhythmic stomping]

Ndizamela wena mtanam

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[32] 'Bible' is a euphemism for the vagina. This song is usually sung at celebrations and traditional ceremonies. It is a declaration of love. It speaks about the different hardships Black parents go through to provide for their children. There are different versions of the song and the singer has a choice to change the lyrics. In this version, the lead singer uses different euphemisms to allude to sex work and transactions as a way to provide a good life for her children.

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Chapter Seven: Intersectional Experiences of Black students in Higher Education

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the various ways Black students experience colonial violence and navigate an unequal education system in South Africa. This chapter outlines the continued violence when these students enter the higher education system, which mirrors some of the challenges, outlined in Chapter Four, of working towards policy and institutional decolonisation in the university space. I will discuss how students adjust (or do not) into the university environment, their experiences of the institutional cultures and their peers, how gender and sexuality are navigated, their experience of the curriculum, NSFAS funding and the circumstances that excluded them from university. I also discuss African spirituality and how coloniality affects research participants' spiritual health. When Black students enter university, they do so with a set of expectations from their parents and family that also inform their university experience. I open this chapter with a discussion about the role Black parents played in shaping the research participants' perceptions of the university and the function of a degree.

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7.1 Black parents and conceptions of education

This section discusses Black parents and the role they play in Black students' university experience and subject choices. I am deliberately opening this chapter with a song usually sung in our villages by legions of Black women. I believe that invoking this song will ground the difficult conversation about Black parents in compassion. Our culture, history and spirituality as African people are rooted in song. I do not take for granted that a part of my inheritance is coming from a people whose women create songs to celebrate, encourage, declare love and advise their children about life. Where I come from, this song is an anthem and a declaration of love. The clapping and the footwork anchor the love and the song to the divine. I am about to have a difficult conversation about Black parents and how they fail us as their children, and I want to anchor this conversation in understanding, compassion and admiration for how they

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sacrifice for us. Any relationship of love needs accountability in order to grow and be better. Our relationship with our parents also requires the same.

Making a living vs what makes money

Research participants reported that their parents placed great emphasis on choosing careers that would be able to provide for them in the future. Taking into consideration the exclusionary history of South Africa's education and economic systems (i.e. racialised capitalism), it makes sense that Black parents would emphasise making a living. Moreover, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world (Phiri, 2020). Most Black people live in abject economic poverty, and many students come from poor communities. This could be one of the main reasons why Black parents emphasise careers that are lucrative. As the song that opens this chapter declares, 'ndizamela wena mntanam'. Black parents often sacrifice many things and want a good life for their children. Unfortunately, this love and concern means that participants chose careers they did not have an interest in. This affected how some students navigated the university, as they were studying for careers that they did not necessarily have a passion for. This meant that they were unmotivated and often struggling with their mental health, which clearly impacted on the completion of their degree.

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I should have studied journalism but I was told journalism is not a career. Who is going to pay ... by my own family and not even varsity. I remember my own dad asking me what am I going to do with journalism? I didn't know what I was going to do with journalism but I knew that I wanted to write. You want to be a writer for a newspaper? You are not going to make money! So I chose international studies. I got there and failed. (Gugu)

Xolisa: When I was in high school, I did not know what I wanted to do ... Well, I did know what I wanted to do. I wanted to do poetry, art and dance. I like asking questions after career sessions in class. So one day I asked if these careers would suit me and they laughed at me so hard. They laughed so hard that even the teachers were laughing as in 'Why would you do that?' They told me I would be wasting my brain. Then I was demotivated and looked at what I could study in university. I had even applied for [dance] audition at [university X] but I did not go because I remembered that they had laughed at me.

Wanelisa: ... So what do you think it would take for you to go back to that person you were who was passionate about dancing?

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Xolisa: [long silence and the pain is palpable] I don't think I would ever go back.

I am studying for a BA general but I want to do media and communication because I have been writing since I was 9 years old. I want to write and I have known for a long time that I want to write but I am being told continuously by my mother that no one wants to hear me. Who wants to hear you? What makes you so special? All that negative shit. I had to guarantee that what I had to say was going to feed me. That has always been my mother's issue. How can you guarantee that this is going to feed you? So I do the media, communication and culture thing and I bomb the entire 2013. (Sethu)

I did not like what I was studying. In fact, she wanted me to study it because ndandingayifuni mna iLaw.[33] But she was paying. And Black parents throw that 'you will be a street kid. Get out of my house' so I was like fuck it. (Lethu)

Many parents seemed to specifically discourage their children from pursuing their passions in the Arts and Humanities (Masola, 2016), because these are considered less of a trade. Students are encouraged to study traditional trades like engineering and law. This is linked to how, during Apartheid, Black people could only work in civil servant jobs. The segregated regime needed people to service Black segregated areas and our parents often therefore have very limited ideas regarding careers.

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Also, within capitalism, the Arts are seen as a hobby and for the intellectually inferior. Therefore, Xolisa was laughed at by his classmates for wanting to study dance when he was good at science. There is a ranking, where the sciences are considered more logical but difficult (therefore provide more lucrative careers), and the Arts are gendered and frivolous, unable to guarantee a path out of poverty. This is also reflected in what type of careers get funded: the system of neoliberalism and career discourse within higher education puts an emphasis on careers that will 'build' the economy. The assumption is that the Arts do not boost the economy. Moreover, this places more value on monetary gain than on critical free-thinking people who will add to social justice. In neoliberal capitalism, bodies are only valuable if they add to the economy.

[33] I did not want

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Black parents' responses to mental health[34]

Participants reported that their Black parents do not speak about mental health, or attempt to understand mental health issues when they come up in the family. This has historical roots in two ways. First, Black people have survived slavery and colonialism and regard physical struggle as more valid than mental health struggles. Often, our parents grew up under Apartheid, and continue to experience colonial violence while navigating South Africa. They have lived challenging lives, do not have a mental health diagnosis (which is not to say they might not struggle with mental health), and expect the same resilience from their children. Secondly, because they have often found ways to cope, the trauma is passed on from generation to generation. I believe that some of the mental health problems manifesting in young people today are a result of their life-span trauma, as well as trauma that is passed down.

My mom found out that I did not finish my degree and I was scared of telling her why I was not done. Mental health issues just don't exist in Black families. It is just not a reason for you not to finish ... It is difficult to recover without support. I had a relapse because I did not have support from my family. Having to go through it alone, it was difficult. I won't lie. In Black families they don't take mental health issues seriously. They don't know that it can actually kill you and it feels like physical pain even though it is psychological pain. When it gets to that stage where you are suicidal. I was at that stage ... You have to suppress your anxiety and your depression when you are at home otherwise they will say you have drama. They blame everything on you. They think we are ungrateful and we are not. I know they have worked so hard for me to be here but at some point they have to understand the challenges I am facing. Give me a platform and hear my side of the story. University is not about studying, passing and getting a job. That is not realistic because we face a lot of challenges. Some of us study in places like Bloemfontein where you face racism. (Pumeza)

I remember the first time I wanted to die was when I was fourteen. So there has been a culture of not communicating about where I am at with my mental health. So by then, when my father forced me to go back to university a few days after my brother committed suicide, it was him communicating to me that I had no space to say I feel. He has no time for my mental health because I am about to write exams. Isn't it so that my brother is dead now? So why can't I move on? My mother supporting that also says something to me about her engagement with my internal world. This is the same woman who broke into my journal and punished me for my thoughts. Growing up in an environment like that does not give you the confidence to say, hey guys I'm struggling. When my brother said he was struggling, no

[34] Trigger warning: conversations about depression and suicide

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one hugged him and said I am sorry let us get you better. And when you are better, let's talk about why you began to do drugs in the first place. Everyone made it about them. How could you do this to me knowing I struggle for you? How can you sell my things that I have worked so hard for? Which translates to someone that you value things more than you value my life. (Sethu)

In my family, they like to act brand new about mental illness but they know it is in the family. My one aunt is bipolar. We thought my dad had a heart problem and the doctor said it was anxiety. I have generalised anxiety and major depression. My mom now says, I get it that you have all these things but look at your aunt, she has bipolar but she is doing well. Are you the first one in this world to be anxious? I don't know if I have internalised what she is saying, but I found myself thinking, what if the reason things did not go well is not because of Rhodes Must Fall, [university X] and mental illness? What if it's just me? (Katlego)

Coloniality and neoliberalism creates environments that 'maim, disable, impair' (Mohamed, 2022: n.p.). As Puar (2017) argues, it is difficult for any oppressed people in this current system to not struggle with mental health. Black parents have lived their lives under coloniality and experienced high levels of trauma during Apartheid. Hoosain's (2013) doctoral thesis outlines the negative impact of Apartheid and how the trauma endured has been passed down to younger generations in South Africa. Black parents do not appear to be aware that the mental health problems and trauma they experienced during Apartheid may be passed down to their children, and therefore do not understand why their children are sick. Moreover, the legacies of Apartheid and structural racism Black students face in university affect them negatively. Black parents do not understand that there are many more systemic dynamics in the university that sabotage Black students.

Understandably, it might be frustrating if you live in a system that oppresses you, you have to work hard to pay tuition fees, and then have your child not do well. However, there is a need to educate Black parents that not much has changed since Apartheid in terms of coloniality and systemic racism, and students face even more challenges. Sethu elaborates,

Our parents will fork out 60 000 Rands to take us to university but will not fork out 60 000 Rands to help us start our own businesses. My mother has been so anti the idea of me making money outside the ways she knows of making money. I think that is the fuck up, our parents are raising us for a world that no longer exists. Our parents are using methods their parents used for them. And their parents used those methods because they thought that it would get them through the Apartheid regime. Now our

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parents are using an agenda that is not their and that was given by white supremacist thinking. That what gives us value is accolades and that we can afford a house. They are raising us for a system that is never going to work for us. That world does not exist anymore because now you study what you want to study and you put it together and create a job for yourself. Our parents are raising us to be workers and workers in a system that no longer works. People can live a good and comfortable life recording YouTube videos. They have more time to spend with their kids. They have more time to live full lives that mean something to them. (Sethu)

One can understand that our parents lived through the deprivation of Apartheid and want the best for us. They wish that we must not struggle as they did. However, they did not struggle because they chose a wrong career but because they lived under systemic racism and exclusion. To an extent, Black youth today do too. However, forcing Black students to study careers they do not have a passion for is counter-productive. For example, Gugu's sister studied law at UNISA and did very well, despite the challenges of long-distance learning, because she was passionate about her career. Her passion motivated her to keep going. I know that my passion has motivated me to keep studying and fighting for my education when things were very bad. However, this is not to say that students who are passionate will not be pushed out of the system due to structural violence.

Trauma not dealt with, is passed on (Hoosain, 2013; Mthembu & Eyal, 2018). Black parents require their own intervention about being Black in South Africa today. As a nation, we need to deal with the remnants of the violence of colonialism and Apartheid because they show in our parents today. Then they pass it on to us. However, because some of these historical traumas and ongoing traumas are not dealt with, they manifest in younger generations.

7.2 Intersectional experiences (race/class/gender) in the university space

This section outlines the research participants' challenges navigating various universities in South Africa. I begin with some of the challenges Black students in South Africa navigate in using public transport to get to university from the township, arising from spatial racism. After that, I outline some of the challenges they experience with university residences, colonial institutional cultures, colonial curriculums, financial exclusion and the spiritual violence of coloniality.

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Socio-economic background and travelling hours in University

Some universities are in the city, or in predominantly white areas away from the township. This means that many students have to travel for long hours, under dangerous circumstances, with limited resources in order to get to campus. As mentioned in Chapter Four, this is a direct legacy of the racist and exclusionary city planning arising from colonialism and Apartheid (Clowes *et al*., 2017; Gredley & McMillan, 2021).

I remember during O-week,[35] I stayed for freshers[36] braai. I lived in Gugulethu and I was not in res so I wanted to make friends. I stayed till 7 and I walked to the taxi rank to find that there were no more taxis in Mowbray taxi rank. I had my last R300 and I had to use R250 to take a cab home. That week I had to miss school for the whole week ... At some point getting to campus from Gugulethu needed a lot of money. So for Politics we had to hand in every Wednesday so on Tuesday I would sleep in the computer labs. The most I have slept was from Tuesday till Friday, then my parents sent me money and I could go home. So you sleep at the labs and act like you are working because it is illegal to sleep at the labs. If security finds you there, you are in trouble. You wait for them to do their rounds and you act like you are working and when they are gone you sleep. Then it is 8 and you have a lecture but you smell like yesterday and you are wearing yesterday's clothes. You are tired. (Katlego)

Vusi: I don't even know where to start because everything about [university X] was trash. In the first year, I did not receive NSFAS the whole year. On the one hand my parents are not working and did not have money. So I had to travel from the township with a train because you can dodge the ticket guards if you take the late trains … You have to wake up very early in the morning and the trains are overcrowded. Then again in the evenings they are full because people are coming back from work.

Wanelisa: So what were you eating?

Vusi: I would not eat. I would run to the library during the break and be away from people because I did not have money.

In Montana, it is a long distance to walk to get to the place where I have to take a taxi. Already, going from my house to get to the taxi is a trauma on its own. That walk! (Lethu)

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35 Orientation week is a week of academic and social events aimed at integrating first years students into the university environment
36 Freshers is another word for first year.

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> The lecturers are far removed and are not emotionally invested. They give you the content, they teach you and give you assignments. If you had a problem because your mother is ill, you cannot submit on time because of those things or if you have to travel an hour or two from the township in the morning? They don't care. They are so emotionally cold towards the plight of Black people. (Lisa)

It is important to note that Black students who live off campus and travel from the township live in the same environment of extreme violence reflected in Lisa's description in the previous chapter of murders and gangsterism. Lethu takes a taxi at an intersection that is considered one of the most violent roads in Cape Town. She had to walk from her township to another township to catch the taxi at the intersection. By the time she reaches the taxi, she has escaped possible mugging, rape and death. Women disappear all the time in South Africa and when she says the walk is a trauma, it is not a hyperbole. This is one of the things that is not discussed about the legacy of the Apartheid Group Areas Act, and how it continues to affect students in university (Clowes *et al*., 2017). These are some of the issues that the university does not consider if they set classes for 7am or 7pm.

Moreover, the townships are at the outskirts of the city and therefore transportation is expensive. Some students do not get NSFAS till later in the year, so they cannot afford to attend lectures. As Lisa says, because white lectures are removed from the students' lived reality, they do not understand the hardships and dangers of students. Therefore, students resort to sleeping on campus. If students do not have taxi fare and sleep on campus, this also means that they do not have food. Moreover, institutions like [university X] criminalise students who they did not allocate to residences, who are too poor to afford R300 bus fare, and who consequently sleep in computer labs. Moreover, they use other Black people (campus security) to police and criminalise Black students for their resilience and persistence in trying to get an education. The narratives illustrate that universities are very anti-poor.

Orientating to colonial university spaces

Orientation week is a very important time for a first year's university career as it 'orientates' you to the university and introduces you to who can help you with resources. It is also a time where you can make friends and build a social life. A great number of Black students who enter the university are first generation (Motsabi *et al*., 2020; Scott *et al*., 2007; Van Zyl, 2010).

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Unfortunately, this means that some students miss this time as they do not understand its significance and no one has explained it. Other times, it is because the university has made a mistake processing their residence application and they arrive late, or students are gathering resources to move to another city and arrive for the lectures. This impacts how the student navigates the university.

I first went to orientation before going to check-in at res. I was clueless ... I thought it would be like in high school where you present yourself at reception and then you are shown where you go to class. I went with my close friend, Tshidi, because we were going to do the same course. We got very lost. Things were written in Afrikaans. We were just lost. When I got to res, I was alone and I was not used to being alone. I didn't know anyone because I had only gone to the course orientation and not the res orientation. People had already made friends. (Xolisa)

I did not go to orientation because I was embarrassed that I was older and I thought I knew everything. I did not want to look like a first year or that I just finished high school and I look old. I was 21 or 22 and I had been working at Pick 'n Pay for a few years. (Vusi)

Often, the orientation is a week where new students are hypervisible and vulnerable.
Therefore, it is understandable that Vusi might have been experiencing shame around his age and skipped orientation because of this hypervisibility. During my masters' research, I spoke with a Black student from the township who developed a speech impediment because someone heard her accent and said accusingly, 'how did you get into UCT with an accent like that?' She had to go for speech therapy to undo the damage. Orientation is a vulnerable time for students and can set the tone for a good or bad university experience.

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As discussed above, Xolisa is the first person in his family to attend university, so he did not know the importance of orientation week. He did not even know how he would arrive at the university or where the university was located. He got very lost but he eventually found it. The administration had mixed up his residence application so he arrived late and missed res orientation. He then had no friends and the friend he had arrived with made other friends and so he experienced loneliness. Having grown up in a small house in the township, he suddenly was on his own for the first time. This affected his mental health. This is another cultural factor that universities must consider when it comes to Black students and mental health. If a student

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has lived in a one-room shack and then moves to a different city to live alone, it is a huge culture shock for some students.

Residence

Universities adopt neoliberal capitalist policies and institutional cultures that treat students like customers (Baatjes, 2005; Clowes *et al*., 2017; Motala & Vally, 2017). If you do not have money, you will struggle to access basic services; thus, middle-class students get preference. However, because capitalism is racialised (Burden-Stelly, 2020; Phiri, 2022), the middle-class is mostly white, and poor students (read, mostly Black) are serviced last or not at all.

In 2019, I had a part time job at [university X][37] hotel. My heart broke so much because I was working the dinner shift and a group of first years entered carrying blankets and suitcases at 9pm. It was mostly women and they didn't have a place to stay. I asked myself, why is it always Black students who have no res? My heart broke so much because they will be declined at this hotel so where are they going to go when outside it is dangerous. I cried that day. These are first years, some come from the rural areas and some cannot explain their situation in English. I even spoke to one of them to see if they cannot stay in my flat because I stayed off campus at the time. (Pumeza)

[university X] is very anti-Black and anti-poor in terms of its policies. They give residence based on points (APS).[38] We know that Black kids who come from the rural areas or whatever will get good points but a kid from a white private school, they prioritise such kids. They need to know you can pay and are not dependent on NSFAS. Their policies and systems are very anti-Black. (Cindy)

I only found out later during the Rhodes Must Fall occupation (when the administration came to the occupation and thought that solving our individual problems would end the protest) that I had gotten res.[39] They were waiting for me to pay the initial fee. So that whole time I was homeless, there was a room for me but they did not give it to me because they did not know if I was able to afford it. I was going to be on the waiting list until I had money. (Katlego)

[37] This university is located in a majority white Afrikaans town. It also is one of the universities where Afrikaner nationalism and Apartheid policies were formulated.
[38] An Admission Point Score (APS) is a score calculated from your grade 12 marks
[39] 'Res' is popular term used for university residence

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This was one of the main reasons why students erected a shack at UCT during the Shackville protest. There had been a serial rapist on campus who kidnapped multiple women on campus to rape them at the Rhodes Memorial.[40] At the same time, multitudes of poor Black students were arriving for the semester who had been promised residence, but were homeless on campus due to the administration. Students were in grave danger and the administration was not helping. These situations happen every year on all campuses: the university promises residence to poor students, yet prioritises rich students, and the Black students are homeless (Albert, 2018). South Africa is a very unsafe place for Black students to be wandering around in new cities at 9pm with no home.

Katlego tells me that the administration had promised her res and was told that, because she was not from Cape Town, she would definitely get a room, although it take a couple of weeks. However, she was homeless for three months. The university seems to be oblivious of the plight of students and how they might be surviving in this period of homelessness and transition. Considering the demographics of the research participants, it is likely there are numerous students who are orphans or whose mothers are domestic workers. It took a whole village to organise a ticket for that student to get to Cape Town, and they are counting on a res meal when they get off the 20 hour bus from rural Limpopo, not to have to organise an AirBnB for another three months. These are the structural limitations Black students navigate in the university space, which sets the tone for their career, and eventually become structural exclusions.

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Social/cultural capital

Universities value and best serve students with money, and this attitude also permeates who is accepted by the student body. Students who dress in expensive clothes and drive cars, Black students who attend white schools and have a 'white accent'[41], white people, and people whose families have gone to universities for generations navigate the campus with ease and acceptance.

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[40] This a memorial dedicated to Cecil John Rhodes, located close to UCT upper campus

[41] Language and accent determine how you are treated in spaces in South Africa. It also determines how you perceive your level of intelligence. A white accent emulates an English South African accent, and is therefore deemed intelligent. Black students who attend previously white schools or private schools usually speak with this accent; therefore, it can be a marker of class privilege. Black students who do not speak with this accent are considered less intelligent and are othered (Albert, 2018)

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I did not have the language for it, but even then I realised that the kind of people who would thrive in this environment are private school kids. They prepare them for this … Guess who gets the degrees? My friends from private schools. Well, not just them but what I am saying is that they move through the process and thrive through the process? All of them and my friends who had solid white school education. It was those who had access and money. Those who had brothers, fathers and mothers who could drop them off at the 7am class and pick them up later. People who had that kind of support and I had none of it. (Gugu)

I did not go to university for about three months. Yes, I had been previously working but I could not afford to buy myself clothes. I only returned in October. I did not have clothes and it was very embarrassing to be seen with the same clothes. My peers at university wore nice clothes and they were buying textbooks. My mom begged me. Then another lady who used to work with her bought me some clothes and begged me to go back to school so I returned ... I left because I was always broke. I was hospitalised after a psychotic episode. I thought I was going to study and be able to get money to afford things at varsity. Then there are other people who are middle-class. I did not know people could drive cars to school. I really wish they prepared us. It made me depressed and feel small. I wish they mentally prepared us to meet kids with cars, who can afford to fill the table with lunch so we don't feel small. (Vusi)

I don't really remember O-week because it was so much admin, you know what I mean? I did not participate in any res activities but there was a group of girls I came with from Clifford and we were all at [university X] so that really helped. I did not feel like I had to make new friends or whatever. (Luthando)

I was the first person to go to [university X] in my family. My older brother went to [university Y] long ago when it was a Technikon. [university X] to me was so foreign, so big, so scary and so Eurocentric. So imagine coming from a township school that barely had a library to this big library that you do not know how to use. It was a culture shock to see other Black people who spoke differently to you and how they engaged the text in class. You could see we were from the township and they were Black people from Sandton or Constantia. I did not feel welcomed ... [university X] is not a pleasant place for someone who has been cheated on in their schooling career for the past 12 years. It makes things worse. Yes, it glitters and it looks and sounds amazing when you tell people in the township you attend [university X]. But when you get there ... the air and aura in class lets you know that hey, this place is not designed for you and the kind of foundational education you had. I was just so different. Without even saying where this one is from and that one is from, you could tell that you don't belong. (Lisa)

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For some of us who grow up in poverty, it is a culture shock to attend campuses where you see people have so much material wealth. At the same time, we observe that wealth equals social acceptance and this isolates us. Gugu and Lisa also note that there are certain clues when you enter the university that make you feel inferior or that you do not belong: the accent as a marker of class privilege, the people who can afford lunch every day and the fancy cars.

I was so surprised when I was at UCT to see white teenage peers driving to campus. No one in my family, and only one or two people in my neighbourhood had a car, and here this teenager was driving a Range Rover. It made me feel very ashamed of where I came from, and I internalised poverty as my personal shame. I was resentful that my mother was not rich. I remember, in 2009, I took my roommate home and she could not believe how poor I was. She looked around the empty living room with an old wooden table against the wall and my nephew's small plastic chair on the broken linoleum green floor in horror. When I told her about how my grandfather's land and businesses had been taken by the Apartheid regime and we had been thrown in the township, she sucked her teeth and said, 'I did not know Apartheid was that bad'. We drove back to the residence in her fancy new car; a few months later, her parents bought her an apartment by the beach which looked like a hotel and my friendship (and my inconvenient poverty) was discarded.

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Earlier on, I spoke about how the orientation programme creates hypervisibility for first year students, which is linked to an awareness that being poor makes it difficult for some students to navigate the space. Some students are so poor that they legitimately do not have clothes. When I first heard Vusi speaking about clothes, my thought was 'Surely this is superficial.' However, this seemed superficial because I had forgotten that, when I started university, I also did not have clothes. In my first year, I would get dresses for R20 and tops for R5, because most of my clothes were from older relatives. Therefore, I personally related to Vusi's experience of struggling to be on campus because you do not have clothes. This is very different from 'I don't have nice clothes to compete with other people'. Some of us wore school uniforms (that we would rewash every day) and never had to deal with clothes except on the weekend. People take for granted that having adequate clothes is a luxury not afforded to everyone.

University culture and alcohol[42]

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[42] Trigger warning: This section and the next section extensively discuss sexual violence.

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The university is a microcosm of broader South African culture, and alcohol abuse in universities reflect that of the country. In a survey done at the university of [x[43]], 65% of students used alcohol and 49% of them abused alcohol. Most students are faced with structural violence, the anxiety of academics, peer pressure and sudden freedom. This often leads to a culture of alcohol abuse and dependence (Kyei & Ramagoma 2013; Roelofse & Muswede, 2018). This is something that is hardly addressed in conversations about toxic institutional university cultures.

Res was like a frat house. We were hazed. We were not allowed to use the lift but we needed to use the stairs. We drank during the week and the weekend. Our HK's [resident assistants] were buying the alcohol. We had to pay [res] floor fees once a semester and the haka's would also add money and we would buy alcohol or go out to bond. Everything is centred around alcohol. (Xolisa)

It was a party, literally. My first day of orientation, I was lost and looking for directions and this girl was in her car drinking a Savannah and smoking and this is in the morning. I also wanted to smoke so I looked for a Spaza shop and bought a cigarette and smoked. There were empty bottles on the floor and this was because the bin was full of them so they were on the floor. (Lethu)

I did not drink and I did not smoke at all. Then I got to [university X] and I started drinking. At [university X] I could drink everyday. To have a case of beer because it is always there. I could drink every day for two weeks and no one would check me for it. I just got deeper and deeper into it [depression and anxiety]. (Katlego)

We used to drink a lot. [university X] they can drink. I didn't even make it to the Barn.[44] We had shebeens there at res. There were older women in res who had shebeens in res so I never even had to go drink at the Barn. (Khayalethu)

Residences and orientation week are characterised by social events, and these often introduce students to alcohol. Some students might have been drinking already; however, if they are in a different city dealing with homelessness, money challenges, and not feeling welcomed on

[43] University name omitted to avoid stigmatisation that exists, especially against historically Black universities, that are rooted in racism and coloniality. See Carolissen & Bozalek (2016) on problematic stigmatisation of various universities in South Africa.
[44] A pub on campus

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campus, occasional drinking can lead to drinking without limitations. Social bonding at residences is often funded by the university and also introduces students to alcohol. However, because alcohol abuse is normalised, universities do not regulate alcohol usage on campus (other than formal university events). Alcohol-serving venues and environments have been linked with high incidences of violence against women in South Africa (2012). In university, it is also within these environments where most women students experience sexual violence (Ngabaza *et al*., 2018). It is important to distinguish between scholarship that blames young women for drinking alcohol and being violated (Kheswa & Hoho, 2017), and the point I am making above. I am trying to illustrate that the institutional cultures that promote alcohol abuse as a way of social bonding, add to the alcohol abuse, toxic masculinities, and heteronormativity that result in rape culture (Woodford *et al*., 2012).

Rape culture and violence on campus

The colonial violence and naturalisation of war that exist in South Africa also exist in university spaces. One of the manifestations of this is rape culture (Collins & Gordons, 2013; Dosekun, 2007; Hames 2007; Ngabaza *et al*., 2018; Ngubelanga, 2021). Oftentimes, rape is associated with poor Black men in the townships, and the university space is seen as safe. However, sexual violence happens on campus, whether by staff or by students, in the predominantly white middle-class university towns.

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I went through a lot last year. No, I don't even want to talk about it [silence] ... Relationships, family, friends and I was almost raped. My cousins had sent me to the shops. When I returned, three men almost raped me. After I escaped, I went to the flat and packed my things and returned to Langa. I could not even write exams. I only wrote two papers but I was not in exam mode anymore. (Xolisa)

There are so many challenges you face, especially as a Black female students. You worry about your safety. The trauma that we have to go through. Then you have to balance that with your academics? It's so difficult. (Pumeza)

For me, orientation became a harbour sport for seniors. For predators. They would sit outside waiting for first years and they would take advantage of them. They would call first years' 'fresh meat' ... You get those students who are familiar with varsity. They would offer them services or finances. Especially the comrades, they are devils. You go to them and cry and list your grievances that you are short of registration fees, you don't have registration fees or you don't have accommodation Please help me out.

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I understand that the student council has funds which they dedicate to help students so they would take advantage of that. They would court them and sleep with them. (Ayanda)

Didi Moekena[45] is a sexual predator and is let loose on students. What he thrives on is feminists because he wants to break feminists down to prove that you are just like any other woman. More than that, you ain't shit. We were all always drinking and it would always end with him trying to put his hands in my pants or make crude sexual remarks ... He slapped another woman student in our class who asked another male student to walk him home and Didi Mokoena asked why she did not ask him and the student replied she would not trust him to walk her home and then he slapped her … One particular night he corners me while he is so drunk he can hardly stand. He managed to corner me in a booth where we were sitting at Champs. I am locked in by the wall and he is busy putting his tongue in my ear and saying the most vile things to me. Things he wanted to do to me and things he could do to me. I am trying to get him off and no one is noticing. I hang out with guys so I don't know whether they did not see that I was in the corner and I was crying trying to push him off or they chose not to see. Eventually someone came to distract him, there was no one on the other side so I pushed up the table like it would topple over and I ran to the bathroom. Then I got a call from one of the lecturers asking me not to tell that he had almost stabbed one of his students because it would get him fired. I realised at that moment that if I had said anything that had happened to me, my sexual history would be dragged up. I had been down this road before and I was not going to do it again. (Mercy)

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Finances were one of the reasons I left but I did not feel safe. There was a girl that was killed on campus in res. That was the year that I had wanted to move into res. She was stabbed to death by her boyfriend. I did not feel safe on campus and I did not trust guys on campus ... I saw guys taking advantage of girls at Condom Square.[46] Condom square is the field opposite the Barn. People get drunk at the Barn and have sex there so there are a lot of used condoms there ... Every other week you would hear so and so got beaten up by her boyfriend. On Fridays, it was guaranteed that you would find people's fathers drinking at the Barn. Then you are buying yourself drinks at the bar and there is a man touching my body. It was just not safe ... You could not go to the Barn alone, have a drink and unwind. It had to be a group and it had to be mixed in terms of gender and race to ensure you are safe. When I left the Barn and walked towards the library (if maybe I was getting picked up), the screams and the noises were fucking scary. (Lethu)

[45] Not lecturer's real name

[46] Condom square is a field located opposite the campus bar. It is called Condom square because it is viewed as a space where individuals have sex and discard condoms on the field. Unfortunately, sexual assault incidences also happen at the same place (Ngabaza, Shefer & Clowes, 2018).

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Lethu is clear that, after the woman student's death, she never felt safe again on her campus. This is the main reason she left [university X] and, even though she tried various therapies, including hypnosis, she has not been able to enter [university X] again. She tells me she would rather have a puncture in one of the most dangerous intersections in Cape Town than go to [university X] campus. This is because the woman she spoke about was not the first or the only woman who died at [university X], and this has traumatised her. Like alcohol abuse, the violence that happens on campus is a demonstration of the broader naturalisation of war on women's bodies on campuses, and in South Africa in general. The lack of intervention by the university and security is also a reflection of the lack of accountability by the state and police on issues of sexual violence against women in South Africa.

Similarly, Mercy's experiences with a lecturer at her university illustrate that academics and staff also target and violate students on campus. The lecturer has a reputation of being a predator, and this is evidenced by the other woman in the narrative refusing to be walked home by them at night. The lecturer is not only a sexual predator, but also appears to be physically abusive towards students. Mercy recalls having to be a human shield when the lecturer tried to stab a student, and how the lecturer slapped the woman who refused his offer to walk her home. Didi Mokoena also enjoys institutional protection and is protected by his colleagues who call and ask students to keep silent about his violence. This also communicates to Mercy that, if she reported the sexual assault, she would be further victimised and he would be protected. Many students on campuses experience sexual assault from lecturers and are either too scared of the backlash, or do report it but the academy protects the perpetrator (Nkosi, 2022; Tsholo, 2018). Mercy also recounts how the lecturer targeted feminists, as his perceived way of 'putting them in their place' as rebellious women, and to diminish their power. Despite their political feminist views, he reminded them that they are still women in a colonial patriarchal world. In the colonial world, with the naturalisation of war and violence, women's bodies are always a site of violence (Gqola, 2015; Speake, 2012). These violent institutional cultures are what affects whether university students are able to graduate or not.

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Sexual violence in the university or off campus, like in Xolisa's case, affects students' careers. Xolisa's unfortunate experience also alerts us to the fact that men are also at risk when it comes to rape and sexual violence (Moolman, 2015; Qambela, 2016; Ratele, 2014; Shefer *et al*., 2015; Stemple, 2009). I am guilty of writing about rape culture in a way that invisibilises men's experiences, and protest around sexual violence often centres cisgender heterosexual women.

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Queer women experiencing sexual violence (problematically termed 'corrective rape') or women experiencing sexual violence from other women is often not part of these campaigns (Hames, 2011; Judge, 2011; Matebeni, 2012). Unfortunately, this trauma of almost being violated led Xolisa to miss writing exams.

Some women students may engage in what has (problematically) been termed 'transactional sex' on campus. Since many of these relations are based on unequal power dynamics and relations, it is argued that they contribute to cultures of sexual violence (Shefer *et al*., 2012). Staff, older students and student leadership are some of the individuals who form part of rape culture in the university. Lethu's experience was an SRC academic officer who insinuated that the only way she could get help when targeted by a lecture was if she slept with him. SRC members are continuously reported for abusing their power and committing sexual assault on women on campus (Anderson & Naidu, 2022; Viljoen, 2022). Oftentimes, these SRC members run as candidates of student organisations, which form part of national political parties that also struggle with rape culture.

Sex work

As mentioned in the previous section, unequal power relations during 'transactional sex' can result in sexually violent or coercive spaces. As a result of structural violence, systemic racism and incompetent education, students resort to sex work to be able to survive the university. Even though I did not have many experiences where students spoke about sex work, I think this is an important discussion to have. I argue that, just because other students did not talk about sex work, it does not mean that it is not something that is happening. Sex work is criminalised and taboo due to religious and cultural beliefs; therefore, not many people are comfortable to talk about it. Cindy was also not very comfortable discussing it, as it triggered the abuse that she experienced.

Finances are a problem because I am an orphan child so when I went to varsity, there was no one who was taking care of me from home so I would have to do sex work on the side to meet my other needs. The bursary would pay like 15000 a year and that is not enough to meet basic needs like clothes, groceries etc. I sold sex to older men in the community ... I remember this guy who pointed a gun at me because I did not want to offer my services that day. He wanted to forcefully have his way with me. I have a lot of experiences that were very violent. As much as I did not get a beating, they were very

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psychological. It was somebody driving off with you and leaving you in the middle of two provinces but because you don’t want to sell sex to him. I don't want to open up old wounds but I remember this one time my client said let's go to Joburg for a weekend and then he left me there stranded because I refused to offer my services. I had to organise money to go back to Bloemfontein and then on Monday you have to go back to class. It was a very traumatic experience. (Cindy)

I want to preface this discussion by explicitly stating that I am pro sex work and that I believe in the decriminalisation of sex work. Many sex worker rights organisations, like SWEAT and movements like Sisonke, have argued that decriminalising sex work is a feminist issue and that it will lead to safer working environment for sex workers (Wheeler 2019; Vidima et al, 2021).

In fact, the issues that I raise illustrate the need to decriminalise sex work. I think that universities should be ashamed of themselves, given the resources at their disposal, that students have to do sex work in order to survive. Sex work is very difficult work and often puts the person’s life in danger. Men in South Africa are violent, and sex workers frequently get murdered by clients and the police (Vidima, 2016). Taking into the consideration the violence of coloniality on campus, and the violence in broader South Africa, when one adds the risk of transactional sex and sex work, the opportunities for violation become multiplied. Such trauma and violence can make it more difficult to complete a degree. Students like Cindy are barely out of matric and have to navigate the power dynamics of selling sex to older men in the community in an unsafe context like South Africa.

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Although engaging in sex work does not necessarily mean that a woman is disempowered, the intersection of race/class/gender/age and other inequalities determine how a person navigates sex work. Cindy is an orphan, Black and a trans woman. Sex work is additionally dangerous because it involves clients that are often transphobic, even though they use her services, and she has been mentally and physically abused by clients. Sex work and the safety of sex workers is a feminist and justice issue. Lastly, transactional sex and sex work on and off campus is an issue that is real. It is not only based on money, but also extends to resources, goods, status etc. (see Shefer *et al*., 2012). Since such practices are common, sex work is not a marginal issue. Rather, decriminalisation is a feminist issue and one to be addressed in mainstream higher education discourse.

Transphobia

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As discussed in the theoretical framework, a huge part of coloniality is trying to pigeonhole the diverse human experience into neat narrow gender/sex binaries (Lugones, 2010). This is part of the naturalisation of war on racialised bodies (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). As sites of colonial violence, universities are antagonistic towards the queer community. Student collectives, like the Trans Collective, have created greater awareness about institutionalised transphobia (Patel, 2017). Unfortunately, even the student body is socialised within coloniality in South Africa, and peers also form part of the othering and transphobia in university. There is not an equal representation of trans students' experiences in my research, and for that reason, I have chosen to take a long excerpt from the conversation with Linda to honour her experiences as a trans student.

Linda: When I came to [university X] in 2014, I stayed off campus. In 2015, I went to the SRC and explained that I am a trans person and I am not comfortable off campus. All the safety issues that come with being a trans person navigating a conservative town like [city X[47]] and I was placed in res. I got placed in a unisex res that is divided by corridors according to gender. I was placed in the female corridor. One day I returned from class and I was moved to a male corridor. When I went to ask why my property was moved without my consent, I was told that some of the girls were uncomfortable and did not feel safe with me as a trans woman. Everything started going south. Now you can imagine as a trans woman having to share bathrooms and kitchen with guys? It was a traumatic experience. I started failing my modules because I could not study. My mental health was in shambles. Basic things were a problem. When I was taking a shower, the boys would peep through the door and ask me if I have a vagina? I could not shower. I could not cook in peace ... I started failing. Then I lost my bursary because I could not meet my 50% threshold. And we tried to speak to management with Greyson that this arrangement is not working. Then I ended up owing the university money because my bursary refused to pay because I was failing ... Before then, I tried to commit suicide at res because I was in such a dark space and no one was willing to listen to me.

Wanelisa: So what would a trans-friendly university look like?

Linda: A trans-friendly university would have inclusive residences where people don't have to tick a [gender] box. You can share rooms with whoever you want to share a room with, do you understand? The policies must be inclusive in terms of gender policies, gender discrimination policies because even

[47] City name withheld in order to protect student’s identity

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your [university Y] and [university Z][48] still do not have gender inclusive policies that include trans bodies and gender non-comforming bodies ... a lot of times you will find that trans people have their own struggles after having the Black struggle. [university Y] has policies that give students from rural schools extra points on top of their existing points. I think that they should afford trans students the same. Trans people experience a lot of marginalisation in high school and these kids cannot read because of being trans. At [university X] they have these bursaries for black students. These universities should have the same for trans people or source out funding from these global funds or organisations that are willing to help. To say, we have trans bodies on campus who come from poor backgrounds or who are even disowned. I know that I had trans friends who could only live their truth when they were in Bloemfontein and often they did not want to go home. Even during the holidays, they did not want to go home because it would bring so much violence into their lives and that would affect their mental health because even when they are home, they have to be someone that they are not.

Wanelisa: I love what you are saying about economic justice in the form of bursaries to trans students and gender diverse students. That, if universities say they are committed to including marginalised people, then it should translate into financial help.

Scholars (such as Bennet & Beja, 2005; Bennett *et al*., 2007; Hames 2007; Jagessar & Msibi 2015; Tabensky & Matthews, 2015) have started to challenge heteronormativity in the university space. Queer scholars, activists and student movements, like Fees Must Fall, Trans Collective, Rainbow UCT and others, have challenged homophobia and created spaces for queer students to belong (Gouws & Coetzee, 2019; Khan, 2017; Mbongwa, 2016; Ndelu *et al*., 2017; Xaba 2017). However, issues affecting the trans community and gender non-conforming students are very marginalised. On top of the institutionalised transphobia, trans students like Linda also have to face mis-gendering and being shunned by other students in the space.

Often, we view the university experience as a linear process, where Black students come to the university and experience violence and then they leave. However, Black students come to the university as traumatised beings, due to education, family and community, and then get further victimisation, and then leave to go back to the violence. What this illustrates is that, for some students (in this case a trans person), the university is a space where they escape the violence from home and live their truth. Yet, instead of being a safe space, the university becomes

[48] Historically white universities

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another avenue where students experience further victimisation. So the violence is all-encompassing and unrelenting.

University administration staff

As in high school, coloniality also pits people of colour against each other in the university space. This is part of the divide and rule strategy consolidated during Apartheid, and in some contexts shapes our interactions with each other. In provinces like the Western Cape, this translated into policies that ensure marginal privilege, like geopolitical spaces and 'Coloured labour preference' laws (Goldin, 1984). This interpersonal violence among people of colour also plays out in the university space. Sometimes, the people who administer this colonial violence are other Black and coloured[49] people. This creates a hostile environment where Black and coloured people distrust each other.

I would notice that if you are Black and have good grades and you go to the financial aid office to ask for a bursary, they will never help you. You will sit on those chairs and that lady will throw jabs that you do not qualify for or you won't get it. When a white student with average grades walks in, he may leave with a bursary from ABSA ... I even asked one time, why are we Black students always fighting to get registered and everything. But white students are never here fighting for anything ... it's like the administration people don't want to help and you are so desperate at that time. You are on your wits ends and you are tired but they just refuse. The moment it is a white person, they will climb mountains to help them out. You will even cry tears, as Black person you will cry. You have so much pressure from home to finish the degree. They will fight you just so you can be on the system and study. It is demotivating. At some point I stayed home for a week and then I had to gather strength to go back and fight. (Pumeza)

[university X] is full of coloured people. They side with white people. There was this comment that this one girl made that said, 'Don't forget I am 60% White and 40% Black'. So I was like what does that have to do with anything? You still have some Blackness in you so help me out.. If you are lucky to get a Black person then they will help you. For me, speaking to another Black person is very helpful because

[49] As mentioned in Chapter One, I acknowledge that race is a social construct and that the current race categories used in SA today are deeply embedded in racist Apartheid identity categories. The use of coloured is to honour the experiences of Black students who have experienced prejudice from people of colour who self-identify or are racialised as 'coloured' on campus. It is important to represent the narratives as they were recorded. My intention is not to further propagate colonial racial categories. I do also recognise the deeply painful histories of the term.

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they understand our struggles. But speaking to a white person who doesn't know hunger and being poor, they are less likely to understand. (Ayanda)

In the first year my NSFAS was not paid ... I think it was the university's fault because most of the first years that year did not receive NSFAS, that is why I used trains. I didn't even have the textbooks. No laptops. No nothing. But they expect you to learn and if you do not pass they will say it is your fault ... NSFAS only paid for the second year in April. So all those months I did not have anything. (Vusi)

Katlego: I was in the tut[50] and I broke down. My tutor asked what was wrong and I said I want to go home. I am tired and I want to go home. I explained that I am sleeping in the lab etc. She took me to see a social worker. So she gave me soap and and toothpaste-

Wanelisa: To wash where?

Katlego: She said she will try to speak to the financial aid office to give me an emergency bail out of R1000. If you are struggling they can give you 1000. It is meant for NSFAS students who also support their families and you run out of money and it is meant to tide you over for the next month. Liela rejected my application and said she cannot give me the one thousand because next month I am going to come crying to her again and want another one. It is not sustainable. It is like, why did you come to this school if you know you do not have money?

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In 2007, they wrote me a letter telling me they accepted me. But you could see that it's the Apartheid of the coloured people in the department. I went there and they said, 'No, we have not accepted you' [shouting aggressively]. So I asked why did you write to me? Please give me my results then so I can move on. But I owe R10 000 now. (Khayalethu)

These quotes highlight participants' experiences of humiliation. They underline how some universities are not administratively equipped to administer financial aid from NSFAS on time. Sometimes, we blame NSFAS, when they have sent the money and funds and it is sitting in university accounts. There is a need to expand university systems, and for the government to offer institutional support so that NSFAS can get to students on time.

[50] Tutorial groups

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Another issue is that of racial prejudice and favouritism by administrators on campus. As a country embedded in colonial logic, South Africa is racist. Therefore, the people who administer the university come with their own prejudices and project that onto students. Oftentimes, you have white people as academic and top management, middle-class coloured and Indian people in middle management, working-class coloured and Indian people as administrators (with a minority of Black people), and Black people as outsourced cleaners. This is a legacy of Apartheid, and how labour was racially segregated to further entrench racial hierarchies.

Ayanda's experience illustrates the violence Black students experience from administrative staff who still hold on to Apartheid hierarchies. Part of the racialisation during Apartheid was to create a hierarchy of humanity, which also resulted in 'tribalism' amongst Black people. It is important to note that many people historically racialized as 'coloured' have resisted and continue to resist this coloniality. However, these attitudes remain. Therefore, Black students are met with anti-Black attitudes from other people of colour. The small number of Black people in administration may also adopt unempathetic and anti-Black attitudes, while simultaneously experiencing workplace discrimination. I have been humiliated by Black people in those offices as well, even though they face the same anti-Blackness.

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Most importantly, some administrators may actively sabotage Black students. I have been in situations where administrators would victimise me and not file my applications because they dislike me. I have been in situations where I am teaching and administrators sabotage me because they are resentful that, as a Black woman, I am lecturing. I know that Xolisa was not given his bursary on purpose at [university X]. Katlego's experience of being homeless and in mental breakdown, and an administrator refusing to give her money that the university has put aside for poor students, shows how some administrators intentionally do not help a student in need.

Experiences with academic staff

When I was writing my masters' thesis, I was surprised at how many students stated that white lecturers favour white students, while simultaneously discriminating against or sabotaging Black students. White lecturers form part of the institutional violence that characterises Black students' experience of institutional racism, but it is also important to note that the anti-

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Blackness present in coloured communities shows in the classrooms of such lectures. Black students therefore navigate violence from white lecturers and lecturers of colour.

For example, if you are a Black student who attends all the classes and interacts in class, you can go to the lecture and ask for an extension for an assignment but you won't get it. A white student will ask and they will be given an extension ... In class, the Afrikaans lecturers would do a summary of the lecture in Afrikaans only. Then we would ask for a translation and he would refuse. He would tell us to read the slides. (Xolisa)

I knew coloured people were being favoured when I had a friend of mine and we used to do our assignments together and our sources would be the same and everything but she would get high marks. The only difference between our assignments was that I spoke more English fluently and my grammar was much better. It did not make sense. One day I took both our assignments to the writing centre and took off the cover page. It came back and my assignment was marked higher than hers. I took them to our lecturer and asked him to explain. I was not even trying to be funny about it, I knew that when I get a distinction then I don't have to pay for a module so I could not afford to not get a distinction. Who was going to pay my fees? That old coloured man told me that I was being unnecessarily difficult. So I said, well I will take it to the SRC ... Long story short: I was awarded the writing centre mark. Then I asked to be moved from his class because I had feared that he would victimise me. I was moved but I kept wondering why I was hearing that a lot of Black students were failing just his class. (Lethu)

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Even the lecturers were just so cold. Maybe that is what they are supposed to be? I mean you can't have an intimate interaction with hundreds of students ... But the lecturers were not understanding and they just did not care. Even the white students did not care. They looked at you but they did not see you. The lecturers are far removed and are not emotionally invested. They give you the content, they teach you and give you assignments. If you had a problem because your mother is ill, you cannot submit on time because of those things or if you have to travel an hour or two from the township in the morning? They don't care. They are so emotionally cold towards the plight of Black people. That made me lose confidence in talking to them about my situation ... White people do not have our best interest at heart. [university X] is not designed for us. The curriculum and the people who are giving us the content are white. Very white. I have never received support from white people of [university X]. It was always my Black girls. They are not my friends and they are not eager for my success. They are not eager to see me succeed. They just write on paper and they don't mean it. (Lisa)

Lectures are socialised within colonial South Africa, and many of them grew up under Apartheid, so they hold prejudice. If you were raised in an environment where education

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policies in parliament stated that Black people are only good for slave labour, chances are this socialisation will impact how you mark Black student assignments. Marking in itself is subjective, so unconscious bias comes through. These prejudices form part of the institutional racism that affects Black students and hinders their careers. Like school teachers, lecturers are seldom given diversity sensitivity training that ensures they are sensitive to the socio-political circumstances of Black students and critically aware of their own racist biases. That is why some of them are aloof and insensitive to their students' struggles.

Afrikaans as a language of exclusion

Some universities in South Africa were built for specifically white Afrikaans-speaking students, and were often built and funded with the intention of uplifting 'poor white' Afrikaners through affirmative action and strengthening Afrikaner nationalism (Giliomee, 2003). As such, many of their institutional cultures and histories are anti-Black, and teaching in Afrikaans is a way to uphold their racist origins (Dubow, 1992; Giliomee, 2003; Mhlauli *et al*., 2015). The student movements June 1976 illustrate the long history of the use of Afrikaans as a language to exclude and oppress Black students. In 2015, a movie called *Luister* (Corder, 2015) documented similar issues of linguistic exclusion in contemporary times.

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Some of the classes were taught in English and some were taught in Afrikaans and then we would have a translator. We had a translator for the biochemistry and chemistry class. I don't know, since those classes were the most difficult and then to have a lecturer teaching in Afrikaans?! Like the translators were not in the sciences faculty so some things they did not explain in detail as the lecture would explain it ... I think the lecturers could teach in English but they choose not to ... because of the old Apartheid mentality. (Xolisa)

Ayanda: I did. I struggled because I had no background in Afrikaans. I remember this one time I attended a computer skills class, the lecturer came in and he is white and he greeted us in Afrikaans. I see all the Black students leaving so I said I am going to stand my ground and be brave. I am sitting. And the dude opened up slides and they were in Afrikaans and he started speaking in Afrikaans. And I thought you know what, Fuck you. I am leaving.

Wanelisa: Wow. So do you think there were students who were failing because of Afrikaans?

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Ayanda: Yes, there were students who were failing. The majority of us did not have a background in Afrikaans. I struggled. I downloaded apps to translate some words ... They did not translate. They said this university was built by white people. The leader of the Freedom Front Plus, Pieter Groenewold who has a building named after him, as a major sponsor, if the university abolishes Afrikaans then he will withdraw his funds. He was threatening them. And he has the biggest building so just to show how much power he has.

There is a language policy that was passed two or three years ago that does not allow for them to teach in Afrikaans. It says people must be taught in English but that still has not happened. You still have exclusive Afrikaans electives, you understand? There are Black students who struggle with English teaching and comprehension, so they are basically teaching Afrikaans kids in their home language and Black kids to be taught in a secondary language. They push this Afrikaans narrative. Even in communication, they don't communicate in English but they communicate in Afrikaans. They are not even trying to implement the policy. (Cindy)

The use of Afrikaans functions in two ways: strategically ensuring Black students fail, which results in fewer Black students applying to the university. When there are less Black students, the language policies and racist institutional cultures can prevail. Oftentimes, these are the last spaces where right-wing racist organisations can support and ensure the legacies of Apartheid hatred can still find expression.

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Racism on and off campus

The racial antagonism and anti-Black attitudes at historically white universities also find expression in university towns; the campuses are located in predominantly white areas. It is also important to note that the two Afrikaans universities that have been mentioned previously are located in small university towns where white Afrikaners are the majority, and the university is central to the town. These universities are well-resourced and located in privileged parts of South Africa. As I have demonstrated time and again in the research, coloniality on campus is an extension of what is going on in the larger South African context. Interpersonal racism and structural racism exist in the same way. The external environments where students buy food, toiletries or find off campus accommodation are also anti-Black.

It was hard being Black on campus. Everything. They are very racist, even the lecturers. They don't show it in obvious ways but it is very subtle. You have to take note. I had a Afrikaner roommate in res

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and they [roommate and friends] called kaffir while I was passed out drunk on my bed. They told him that I was very drunk and so this was a perfect opportunity to do whatever he wanted to with me. Like prank me. And I considered them my friends. Sometimes I would lock myself in my room and sleep. Not go outside. Even on my birthday, I switched off my phone and slept so that I don't have to go outside and deal with it. (Xolisa)

Pumeza experienced anxiety because Bloemfontein is an Afrikaans town with endemic racism and violence. She attributes her mental health decline and anxiety to the fact that her university town was so anti-Black.

Bloemfontein is a racially segregated city. It is racist. Fortunately for me I have never experienced it but my friends who went to clubs experienced it. There was an incident where my friend was coming back from campus, he was running and a car pulled over with a bunch of white students. They said to him, 'hey you darkie, what have you stolen now?' And he was like, just because I am Black and I am running doesn't mean that I have stolen something. (Ayanda)

Racism was something that I used to see in movies on TV. We were mixed and we mingled but once I came to Cape Town, I saw that this thing is real. Here you are shown live that we don't want you and you need to go back to the Eastern Cape. It was the first time I experienced racism, especially for us because we are young. I used to work as a cashier at Pick 'n Pay in gardens and that Pick 'n Pay has many white people. If there is me and a Coloured person, the white people will run away from me and choose a lighter person. The management was racist. It was full of white people and they only hire each other into management. (Vusi)

Wanelisa: When you were at [university X], what would trigger you to go into a trance? What was causing your ancestors to come up?

Luthando: I think Cape Town, maybe [university X] but Cape Town in general. I have a very volatile relationship with Cape Town. I think the whole country has a particular trauma but I think Cape Town triggers a specific kind of trauma ... because all of Cape Town is built on top of amangcwaba[51]. So you are walking and all of a sudden you are on a grave.

The interpersonal violence Xolisa experienced with his roommate in res mirrors the antagonism in university towns. White students come from communities that are anti-Black, have attended

[51] Xhosa word for graves

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basic education that victimises black learners, and it is unsurprising that they display hateful values. Moreover, Vusi raises an important point: that structural racism in the workplace exists alongside racism from the customers at Pick ‘n Pay. Luthando gives us a spiritual perspective on Cape Town that I think is also important to consider. From the time of slavery, there are many mass graves of our ancestors, which make her sick when she visits Cape Town. In the Xhosa culture, graveyards are something that you must cleanse from after a funeral. You cleanse death off you so that you do not pass it on. Therefore, for Black people, they are living amidst death and the graves of their ancestors. Thus, it is not surprising that people like myself (with an ancestral calling) would become ill while navigating places like UCT (built on graveyards).

Curriculum

Education under colonialism is weaponized to push ideological principles within the colonial binary, is anti-Black and does not speak to the reality of Black people. At its core, it becomes a vehicle to establish who is human, i.e. white, male, heterosexual able-bodied etc., and uphold him as dominant over other people, nature and animals (Fanon 2008; Maldonado-Torres 2015; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Even today in South Africa, various disciplines (such as psychology, law, and anthropology) still propagate epistemic violence (Carolissen *et al*., 2015; Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Geduld, 2020; Malherbe, 2022; Ratele, 2019). Education is not a safe space for growing, but rather is made difficult in order to weed out the poor and marginalised, by being patriarchal, colonial, unrelatable and, at worst, dehumanising.

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At [university X], they don't negotiate with you students. They don't. For example, we had an issue with one of the modules I failed, Mechanics. We told them that we had a problem with one, two, three. They said that is the point of doing it this [difficult] way. If they make it any different then we are missing the point of the module ... We tried to contact the chairperson of the student council but the faculty of mechanical engineering said they would not do anything about it ... It is an issue of gatekeeping. They know that when they keep these standards some people will not make it (Mpilo)

I was determined to stay in school and pass but something in me yayivele icaphuke[52] because they would say the Sowetan is not a credible source but then the Sunday Independent is a credible source. So I would be like, what makes the Sunday Independent credible? So I started realising these people

[52] Would be triggered and angered (translated from isiXhosa)

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are brainwashing me. When I told my family, it felt like I was being dramatic but for me it felt so urgent. It felt like someone was setting me on fire ... I would go to class but I was always fighting. I was always arguing. It felt like asithethi language enye[53]. Even the Black activists, it felt like they were saying I want a seat at your table. No, but your table is fucked up because your table doesn't acknowledge that there are different types of people in this world ... I left and got a scholarship at AFART[54] and the literature there is Black. All the thinking is Black-centred and Afrocentric and I thrived. I got a full scholarship and I thrived. Then I realised ayisosikolo endisonqenayo[55] but I could not allow you to brainwash me. (Luthando)

It was a foreign concept. It was even confusing in family law. Remember not every Black child grew up with a father. Everything was so far-fetched. There was nothing that related to everyday life. The only time I related was Constitutional Law. I related to that case where this Black woman was refused a plot in a village because she was female. I related because I thought [56]ndingabanyisa if they ever told me I cannot get land because I am a female. I related because it was a Black family. (Lethu)

I thought to myself, I will not go back to university. I saw education as a way to oppress [Black] people. They were teaching us these theories ... Marxist theories. It became too much. I thought I don't want to work for private companies or capitalists. I will open my own business. Then I regretted it after a while when I saw people I knew who stayed living a good life. You could see I did not have a mentor. I had no one ... Marx was not wrong but my problem was that when you have to apply his theories in my life, they are not practical. You know Wani, communism fell and I wanted to adopt socialism ... I left because of these theories. I saw education as something that is going to oppress Black people. I could see that I would then belong to the class that oppressed Black people. I thought about starting a business. These theories confused me and sabotaged me. They must not teach these things. I already hated white people and now they are showing me how the state functions? Colonialism oppresses our African continent! This is what I was calculating in my head. I did not want to associate myself with the state machinery. I thought Marxism was showing how capitalist system work so let me cut myself off from this thing [education]. We had seen these systems active and alive. In 1976, it felt like the world was ending. Shit was hitting the fan and we thought it was the end times. (Khayalethu)

These recollections are the exact opposite of the government mandate to make learning equitable and a part of the social justice mandate. Luthando articulates how, for her, education

53 We are not speak the same language (translated from isiXhosa)

54 An Afrocentric institute located in one of the SA campuses. I have changed the name to protect the identity of the participant.

55 I was not lazy to learn (translated from isiXhosa)

56 I would fuck them up (translated from isiXhosa)

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felt like she was being brainwashed into valuing whiteness while devaluing Blackness. This became the main reason why she stopped attending university. Every day, it felt like she was fighting a new battle, as she felt misunderstood and not represented in the curriculum. Lethu explained how family law does not relate to the dynamics of Black families. She would be taught about divorce while most children in the township come from female-headed homes or are orphaned, and the curriculum did not reflect the communal nature of big African families. This is no coincidence, as colonial education is meant to alienate the Black person from themselves and their communities.

Luthando's experience at the African institute illuminates Biko's assertion that, when Black people leave colonial spaces and are exposed to literature they can relate to, they begin to feel seen and affirmed. Life is pumped back into their being and it restores some of the colonial metaphysical catastrophe. Her experience at the institute revealed to her that she was not academically 'inferior', she regained her confidence and it reignited her love for learning. This supports many of the academic arguments about transforming the curriculum, and how African-centric education can benefit Black students (Dastile, 2013; Ratele, 2019; Sibanda, 2017). As Ratele (2019:xii) puts it, you begin to regain the language of your dreams.

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Mpilo also notes that education is often associated with struggle, rather than a beautiful process of growing and understanding the world. He mentions that various barriers were put in place in the engineering department in order to make things intentionally difficult. When he and his Black peers communicated to the university that these barriers affected his ability to succeed, he was ignored. He concludes that the barriers act as gatekeeping in order to keep certain students out, and the existing race and class structures mean that most of the students weeded out of the system are Black. This is what is meant by structural racism and how it continues to exclude Black students from higher education. These incidences affect the mental health and self-esteem of Black students.

University and mental health

Black students make sense of their mental health in very diverse ways and their mental health histories differ. Some students have had suicidal ideations, anxiety, and depression from childhood, while some students encountered these emotional challenges in the university space.

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However, the naturalisation of war and the violent university space either triggers mental health issues or exacerbates existing illness.

In 2017, I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety disorder and PTSD. At first, I was in denial and then it affected me academically. I could not finish what I started and it escalated to a point where I was sick physically and I was admitted into a psychiatric clinic called Kleidenberg. That hit me so hard I couldn't finish my degree. (Pumeza)

I was writing my mid-year exams and I decided to get an HIV test. The ones that you do in the comfort of your own home. It came back positive. Did I not cry? I cried. I called my friends and they comforted me and stayed the whole night. Bear in mind that I'm writing an exam the next day. The university gives you an option to write a sup, so I wrote it and I failed it. I thought let me go home and I will repeat it next year. In August, things worsened. The person who gave me HIV died and I was like not now. I started having panic attacks. I would faint on campus. I was suicidal. That is when I was institutionalised because I was a danger to myself. (Ayanda)

It all started when I went to varsity. Before varsity I was normal and I was smart. Then when I went to varsity I started having psychotic episodes. I was thinking too much ... I had a psychotic episode in the library and they had to call an ambulance. This was during my second year. I saw a psychologist and they put me on medication ... I am not on medication anymore. It made me numb and I did not have self-awareness when I was dirty. I did not mind. I would not bathe. So I stopped. Even now, I still struggle knowing when I am dirty. (Vusi)

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At that time, I was experiencing a very awkward situation with my family relating to me as a person and my sexuality. And also finances intertwined. I don’t want to say that it is because of that that I did not perform well, but I realised that I was losing my interest in pursuing my education. I was very irritated, annoyed and distressed by the problems because I felt if my family was not involved here, it was going to be tough for me to talk to anybody about these things. (Peter)

That is what they needed to say in order to make sense of it because psychology refuses to acknowledge spirituality ... There are a lot of people, for example my [insert relative] was told she has schizophrenia. When you understand the physical manifestation of someone with ithongo in someone’s body, when you understand when it is untrained [trails off] that is why usiya ephehlweni[57] so that you can learn how to control it. So that you can negotiate your body with the spirits that you share your body with. So that

[57] Go to initiation school (translated from isiXhosa)

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you know what the triggers are for you. You will not see me drink in public spaces and traditional spaces because ndizoveske ndicaze abantu.[58] I know certain things activate ithongo and we ancestors get activated by certain things. And also how to fight for my body because it is mine, not yours. That is where schizophrenia comes in. That is where bipolar comes in. A lot of people abane thongo are said to be bipolar. But that is only because they refuse to learn, or even to see spirituality as valid outside the language of mediums and crystals. They have the language but the minute we articulate things in our own language, it becomes invalid. (Luthando)

Ingulo yam iqale ubonakala[59] the year I dropped out … or the year I got academically expelled because I did not drop out. It affects everything, you know. If you look back since you were a child, I notice that I have always been different. I also notice ngabantu abamhlophe[60] that sinengqondo yemveli so it is not necessarily the content esixakayo, [61] but because it affects our psycho-emotional field, we find ourselves either not wanting to show up or showing up to the spaces and deciding not to be there anymore because of the energy. So as umntu womoya you find that your emotional state is not always ok. As I have gone through the journey, I have found that your body or the physical plane is the body's way of telling you that something is amiss. (Sethu)

Vusi, for example, started experiencing mental health issues because of institutional violence, and because he had to navigate his first year with no funding. The pressure led to a psychotic episode in the library. Other students experienced mental health issues due to their sexuality. Peter did not want to elaborate on what exactly happened between him and the family but his mental health suffered because they did not accept him. Some students were active in student protests, and the university and state violence affected their mental health. Similarly, the coloniality on campus affected their spiritual health. Luthando and Sethu discuss how the campus and its violence caused spiritual discomfort, which was mistaken for bipolar or depression. In South Africa, Western psychology has been critiqued for its pathologization of African cultures and spirituality (Ratele, 2018). People with a spiritual calling often navigate the world along with their ancestors, who are trying to fix intergenerational trauma caused by coloniality. When Black students navigate campuses that want to further indoctrinate them into coloniality, the students get sick. The environment and the healing work of their ancestors

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58 Give people psychic readings (translated from isiXhosa)
59 Sickness (translated from isiXhosa). In this context, it is to be afflicted with illness due to an ancestral calling
60 People with an ancestral calling (translated from isiXhosa)
61 Makes us fail (translated from isiXhosa)

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becomes spiritual warfare. This then gets manifested as mental illnesses. I will expound on this issue in the next section.

University and the ancestral calling

This research takes spirituality, and particularly African spirituality, seriously. Our continent had its own spiritual landscape before Christianity was introduced via colonialism. Therefore, it is important to examine how whiteness and coloniality affect the spiritual wellbeing of African people. This has led me to question, how does coloniality affect the spiritual wellbeing of Black students who navigate violent university contexts?

I applied late for res and I was rejected. I went to live with my dad's family that I had never met in a township nearby my university ... I became close with my cousin. She used to be at [university X] but she dropped out because she had a calling. She had to focus on it because it was making her struggle with school. She wouldn't write exams. She would save her assignments on a USB but when she needed it, the USB would disappear. Or she would be walking on campus and then her legs would go numb and she wouldn't be able to walk. So she had to focus on it. (Xolisa)

On a philosophical level, my ancestors were showing me that this was indoctrination. Because I am a spiritual child, I could see it so clearly that I could not look away. On a practical level, if it was successful then they would lose me. That is why my severe breakdowns happened in Matric, in my third year at [university X] and in my third year at [university Y]. When I fought for my life the hardest. The thing is, it is not that abantu abadala abafuni abantwana babo bafunde[62]. They just can't take us into these schools without giving us some fundamental base. Lento uyibeka phezulu kwe-understanding that usiya phaya, you are not going there to become one of them … When I was in Lwandle, I had started to utshisa impepho[63] and ufunda isiXhosa.[64] So they allowed me to finish because it was bringing me closer to them. What AFART did was it showed me Black intellectuals and Black ways of thinking so it was bringing me closer to them. But what [university X] was doing and what [university X] was doing was dangling whiteness as this carrot in front of me and it was taking me away from them. So if I finished, they would lose me ... It is not a coincidence that we are in the middle of all these protests. This militancy. The difference between our parents and how we approach activism is that we are not buying into Christianity anymore. Not even because we don't feel like it, as in abantu abadala bafikile.[65]

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[62] Our ancestors don't want Black people to get an education (translated from isiXhosa)

[63] Burn sage (translated from isiXhosa)

[64] Learn the xhosa language (translated from isiXhosa)

[65] The ancestors are making their presence felt now (translated from isiXhosa)

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They have found ways to speak to us. They have found ways to Ukukhanyisela[66] a small few who understand English and who have been to these schools. They have found a way into the language because it was happening before but there was no way into the language. iThongo lifikile[67] because bekuku dala ngoko.[68] We have to look at this witchcraft law that existed, yes it is outlawed but there is nothing to rectify it as recourse. We don't have spiritual policy as far as schools go in a way that speaks to traditional spirituality. So these are things that are coming up now. (Luthando)

Ingulo yam iqale ubonakala[69] the year I dropped out … or the year I got academically expelled because I did not drop out. It affects everything, you know. If you look back since you were a child, I notice that I have always been different. I also notice ngabantu abamhlophe[70] that sinengqondo yemveli so it is not necessarily the content esixakayo,[71] but because it affects our psycho-emotional field, we find ourselves either not wanting to show up or showing up to the spaces and deciding not to be there anymore because of the energy. So as umntu womoya you find that your emotional state is not always ok. As I have gone through the journey, I have found that your body or the physical plane is the body's way of telling you that something is amiss. A lot of us will be told we are irrational or siyathanda uqala ucuku in social settings. But in the university, the university is like a social experiment in how it is set up. We are all put in there and we are all fed knowledge. We find ourselves, and falling apart and putting ourselves together over and over again. My first emotional breakdown was, well not my first because the first time I wanted to die I was fourteen, but my first in university was 2013. I fell apart, I stopped attending, cocooned and fell into a deep depression. I could not get out of bed for like weeks ... What I have realised is that depression, bipolar and all of those things is an indication that something is not right. Like there are some people who say it is like a sore stain. Maybe not a stain but because you are so open, like a sponge and we soak up a lot of energy, so for us it gets deeper [participant crying] and it gets harder to get out of the hole. Everyone has sad events or events that catalyse deep feelings of sadness within them or irritability or anxiety. In trying to understand myself, I don't know, I could also be wrong, but we are sent here to calibrate the earth back to what it was. And the only way we can do that is through healing. Machines don't feel and machines do what they're told in the ways that need to be done. Human beings are not machines and sentient beings and as such we are connected to everything. So the butterfly effect affects us too. So we might have a day where we have had a perfectly good day in terms of our emotional lives but then you also feel lethargic and umoya wakho engekho grand. And you do not know why ... I think ingulo yam comes from the fact that I am sent here to heal

66 Enlighten (translated from isiXhosa)
67 The ancestors have arrived (translated from isiXhosa)
68 It has been a long while coming (translated from isiXhosa)
69 Ancestral calling (translated from isiXhosa)
70 People with an ancestral calling are ancestrally grounded (translated from isiXhosa)
71 Confuses/defeats us (translated from isiXhosa)

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and in order to heal I need to intuitively feel my spaces and intuitively feel the people that are in my spaces. It made it more difficult for me to show up for myself in certain ways because the feelings got more and more intense and I did not know what to do with them. The school thing, it was not important when it came to my feelings and the need to get up and show up even though I knew I needed to do it. (Sethu)

Peter: This will be the dumbest thing I have said to you today. Honestly, I do not know why I deregistered from university. I cannot point to any particular person or particular situation that was tough enough for me to say I am not continuing with my education. I was being led by other forces, whether spiritual, emotional or psychological.

Wanelisa: We are having an intellectual conversation now but if I were to ask you, from a spiritual perspective, why you felt spirit or God led you to that decision, what would your answer be?

Peter: Wow, uhm [thinking]. That is probably a question that will boggle me for the rest of my life ... If we are going to be talking about God and the spirit, then it was not me who was in control at all. I would have to know the nature of God and his truth to be able to answer your question because I cannot force my mind to try and get an explanation as to what happened as God and I have not reached that moment.

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While it is important to fully understand the structural violence of whiteness, not much has been written about the spiritual violence that is inflicted within the university space. I interviewed healers in different stages of their journey, which allowed me to explore this research question and to discuss their experiences in the research, but I present Peter's experiences to illustrate that individuals with different belief systems are also affected spiritually in the university space. Earlier on in the interview, Peter identified as a Christian and spoke in detail about his relationship with God. Peter also believes that God influenced his decision not to continue with the university experience. His parents worked for the university and he did not have bad experiences in the university space. However, his description of his experience seems like spiritual dissonance. However, whether directly or indirectly, a 'spiritual force' created a dissonance that resulted in him leaving the university. However, Peter's spiritual experience is different from the healers who believe in African spirituality.

I interviewed three healers who were either being initiated, practising, or practising and initiating other healers. The coloniality and the university environment affected their spiritual

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health negatively. The discourse around decolonising the curriculum focuses on the psycho-social impact of colonial education. While this research rarely touches on African spirituality, concepts like the metaphysical catastrophe help us to understand how coloniality might affect spirituality. In line with Ratele's (2018) prolific critique of Western psychology's pathologization of African spirituality and cultures, there needs to be a deeper understanding of how coloniality affects Black students' spiritual selves.

A surface analysis of why Black students who have an ancestral calling do not finish university might argue that African ancestors do not want their descendants to be educated. Upon deeper inspection, colonial education disembodied and alienated the research participants from themselves, thereby also driving a wedge between the Black students and their ancestors. This is the spiritual violence of coloniality, and ancestors often need students to leave the space or they are at risk of not following their calling.

In my journey to accept my ancestral calling as a healer, I argue that the intervention by ancestors is three-fold. Firstly, as Luthando articulates, if a healer is integrated into coloniality, then they are at risk of not following their calling. Neoliberal capitalist and colonial education might lead them to a life where they contribute to structural oppression. This means that, although their purpose in life is to heal the Black community, they end up contributing to the harmful system. Therefore, ancestors need to intervene. Secondly, colonialism has created intergenerational trauma and disconnect in all African people's bloodline. A healer walks with our ancestors into various spaces. Therefore, when we navigate the university space, we bring our elders, who have been violated, into the very systems that hurt them. This is enough to cause spiritual tension for any Black student navigating the space. Moreover, as healers, we are often called to heal the intergenerational violence caused by coloniality, and therefore to be indoctrinated by coloniality is ancestral violence. Lastly, African spirituality and indigenous knowledge systems were suppressed and criminalised during colonialism (e.g. the Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 and Witchcraft Suppression Act 2 of 1895). Therefore, there is a spiritual uprising that demands of us, the children of those who have been suppressed, to lean into embodied knowledge and spiritual knowledge systems to fight coloniality.

NSFAS and financial exclusions

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Apartheid systematically designed education and the economy so that Black people were relegated to slave labour. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter Six, most students are raised by single parents who work low-paying jobs. Therefore, most students are unable to pay their fees.

The university did not communicate with me when I started failing. They had a meeting with my funder without me and told them I was struggling. My funder contacted me and advised me to deregister for the second semester and come back next year ... The following year, they told me that they had reconsidered and are cutting me off. So then I struggled to finance my studies. Luckily, I went to the financial aid office at university and I just cried. This one man came and told me to stop crying and he helped. He saw that in the system, I had gotten a recruitment funding of 54 000 that the university kept from me. But it still was not enough … It was very stressful. Those first two months because I did not have funding, no res. (Xolisa)

The issue of funding, it needs to be more accessible because most of us are falling through the cracks because of these policies and stuff ... They need to be more compassionate. You cannot treat a student who comes from a wealthy family and a destitute background the same. Expect them to pay the same. Universities are expensive, tuition and accommodation is expensive. Life in university is expensive. They need to meet those students half-way. (Mpilo)

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They do this all the time. Even in previous years they do it and people go hungry. That is why we were protesting. We even went to parliament. In parliament they were shocked that we got the money in April when NSFAS paid in January. Students go to sleep without food. They don't pay the whole year but expect us to attend varsity and pass. I did not return to varsity because in 2019 I did not receive NSFAS again so I struggled and failed some modules. In 2020, I did not return because I would have had to appeal and maybe they would respond to me in June. What would I do all those months? I am broke, my parents are poor and so I never went back. (Vusi)

N+2 is the number of years you need to take to finish your qualification and then add two years on top. Let’s say, if you are studying a BSC, which is three years, then they will fund you for five years. Then once you have exceeded your five years then you can no longer apply. When I applied for NSFAS they rejected me because of N+2. I appealed and they used the excuse that I am still registered at Vaal university because I didn't finish that qualification. Now I am at [university X] trying to get a new qualification which is a B. Engineering ... I don't have funding now. Actually, it is not that much. I need to pay 45 000 for my first year tuition. (Mpilo)

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NSFAS poses various challenges for Black students. They pay late or the university financial aid offices only pay students at the end of the year. Students struggle to get to university, miss classes, experience traumatic events within the university (e.g. racism or protests) or outside of it, and struggle with anxiety/depression, which then affects their academics. They get academically excluded, and therefore financially excluded, or they take more years to finish and NSFAS kicks them out of the system. Research and public discourse then blames Black students for being lazy or intellectually inferior, not knowing that most of these students have appealed financial exclusion with NSFAS and were rejected, or that the students fight and beg the universities for years in order to come back and finish their degrees. This is why the language of drop-outs is very harmful, as it blames students for being systematically weeded out of higher education.

[PAUSE]

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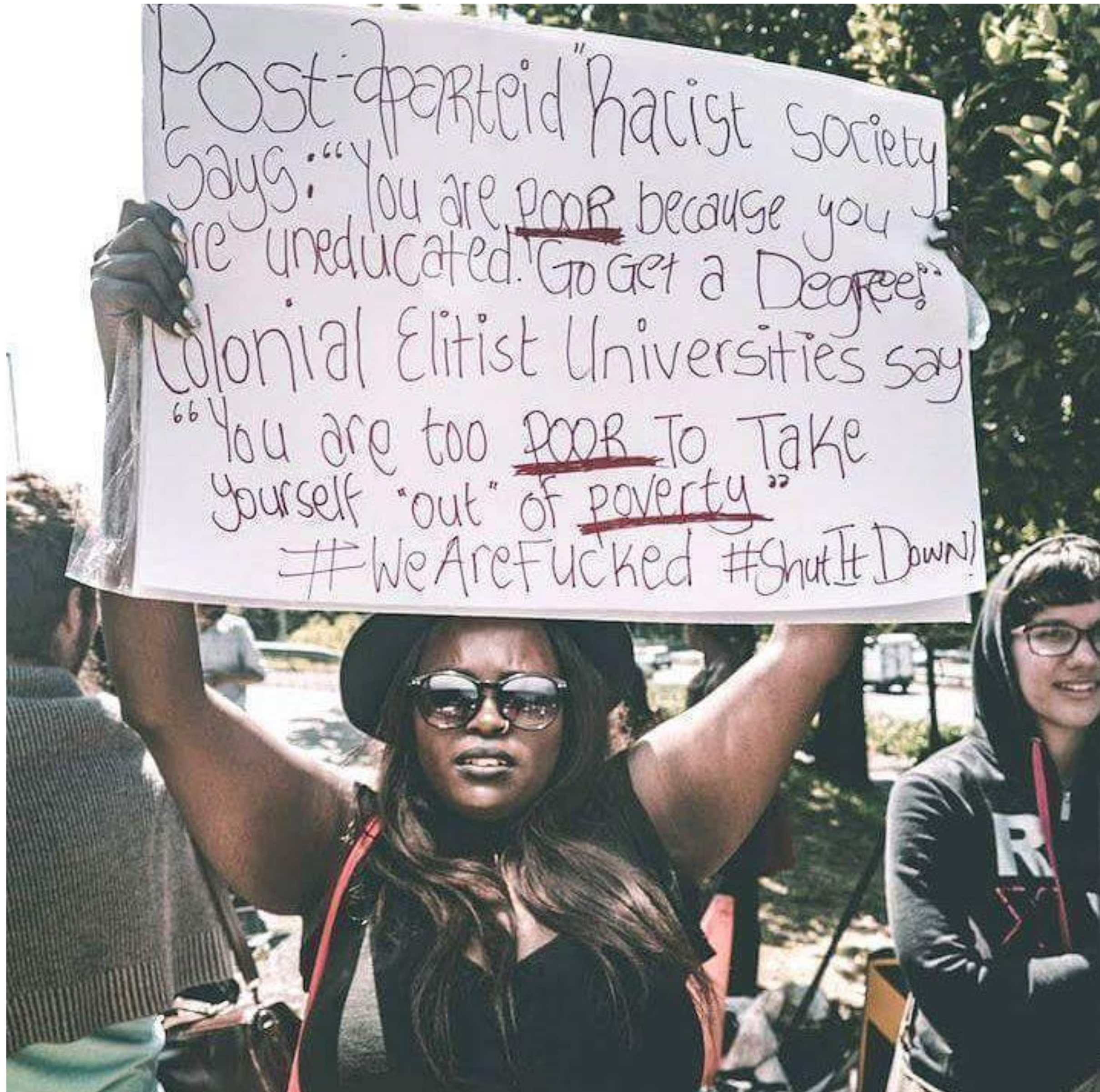

Fees Must Fall Poster saying, ‘Post-Apartheid society says: You are poor because you are uneducated! Go get a degree! Colonial Elitist Universities say: You are too poor to take yourself ‘out’ of poverty. #WeAreFucked #ShutItDown’

7.3 University responses to traumatic events

In the previous chapters, I outlined the difficult family circumstances and community contexts that Black students live in, to illustrate how they experience colonial violence before they enter the university. Similarly, while navigating university, Black students and their families experience trauma as a result of living in a violent country like South Africa. However, universities often respond with more violence or dismiss Black students when they are trying to navigate academia, coloniality and their trauma.

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I spoke to the HOD and explained that I did not fail the module because I wanted to fail. Certain things were happening. Traumatic things were happening and he said 'No, I can't'. Then they brushed me off and told me he has a lot of students to attend to. (Pumeza)

I started at [university X] in 2012 and I was there till 2016. I was excluded at the end of 2016. In 2015, our house was burnt down by protesters. We were homeless and my mother was terminally ill so I had to take care of her. I tried to appeal in 2016 because my nephew (my elder sister's son), another cousin and three of their friends were killed. There was so much going on and I was emotionally exhausted, frustrated and depressed. So I appealed, enclosed two articles that had reported on my house burning and the shooting that killed my nephew. Even when I appealed, we were still moving from one place to another because we did not have the money to rebuild our house. In 2017, I was provisionally reinstated on condition that I pass all my modules and I only passed one. In June I was officially chucked out of the school ... I used to attend these meetings with an SRC member that was helping me appeal. I remember the registrar, something Millay said something to me. I had told them about my high school journey, how I repeated Matric and upgraded so that I can qualify for [university X] and how it has been a struggle and a sacrifice. He came up to me and said, the same way I had struggled to get myself into [university X] is the same I have to struggle to come back and finish my degree. Basically he was saying to me that I used to struggle so I might as well go back and struggle again. [university X] had said that I must go to UNISA for academic rehabilitation but I explained that I had no home, my mother was terminally ill and things were bad. How was I going to study at UNISA without a computer when I don't even have taxi fare to keep attending these meetings? If I was struggling now at [university X] with all its resources? Mmamogheti then suggested that I apply to her organisation that funds girls to study in university. I thought it would be a waste of time and money to do the UNISA thing because things were tough ... I inboxed her on Facebook earlier this and asked for her organisation to help. She said she cannot help me because they don't have money and the money they do have is for girls who are in school. (Lisa)

Often, the university responds with a lack of compassion, dismissing or further victimising Black students when it responds to their crises. This has been an important distinction I have had to make during my analysis. On the surface, while Black students leaving the university space can be attributed to a myriad of external traumatic events, how the university holds space (or not) during challenging times can also make a difference. Institutional support and compassion are a huge factor, and can actually ensure students make it through the challenges and finish their degrees. Truly decolonial universities should be sensitive to the socio-political contexts of Black students, to the ongoing trauma of being Black and poor in South Africa, and have interventions that are meaningful. Most often, the university leaves this labour to be done

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by (a few caring) overstretched academic staff and tutors. My personal experience tutoring and lecturing at [university X] often meant that I also was a social worker, therapist and suicide hotline for my students. The university did not have a mechanism to deal with mental health problems and trauma facing students.

On the contrary, the university often retraumatised students when they needed support the most. For example, Pumeza was going through traumatic events in her life, and the HoD responded to her without compassion. She was seeking a second chance because she had been imprisoned during the FMF protests, had experienced sexual violence in her university town and had suffered with depression and anxiety. These are internal and external issues that required medical and institutional support, but when the HoD informed her that he will not help her because he has other students to attend to, he communicated that Pumeza is less important. This incident illustrates what Puar (2017) argues, which is that some bodies are less important and therefore deemed OK to hurt and maim. Pumeza was also a student but was neglected for 'other students' who were somehow more important than her. In Pumeza's case, these insensitive responses had dire mental health consequences for her. As a result, she fell into a deep depression and told me she was unable to leave the house for a week.

In more serious circumstances, as in Lisa's story, powerful people in management can show disdain and a lack of compassion. Mr. Pillay's response to Lisa was so unfeeling and discouraging that it moved me to tears when I first heard it. I asked myself, is it ethical for the university to employ people who are so contemptuous and unfeeling to the lived realities of us Black students who navigate the university with so many challenges? How can a university staff member tell a student, whose home was petrol-bombed, mother is terminally ill and witnessed the murder of her nephew, that she is used to struggling so she must continue to struggle to obtain her degree? This is why decolonial theory and grassroots understanding of colonial violence is important in the university space; the attitudes exhibited by Mr Pillay, that Black poor students must struggle, are colonial tropes that see the Black body as a legitimate site for struggle and violence. These tropes have a profound material impact on the lived reality of students, and affect their access to solutions that might help them finish their degrees. To 'struggle' is not the natural predisposition of impoverished Black students, and students often struggle with their mental health while forced to struggle for an education. Even though Lisa communicated that going to UNISA would not be 'rehabilitation' but sabotage, because she would meet harsher structural challenges, the administration did not hear her reasoning because

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they took her past structural challenges as evidence that she will 'struggle' and return. Unfortunately, Lisa, and many others like her who beg institutions for support, did not return.

7.4 Communication/information technology

There is a huge digital divide when it comes to communication, technology and information systems in South Africa (DHET, 2017; Shefer & Hussen, 2020). Most Black people who live in poor communities do not have access to computer literacy, and internet access is expensive, while most Black students in basic education do not have access to computer literacy either. Therefore, when they enter the university space, which requires them to use computers, they are often ill-equipped and are behind their peers (Clowes *et al*., 2017).

[Before COVID] Even when you were on campus, without a laptop or a smartphone you couldn't survive [university X] ... Everything is uploaded on their website called Funda.[72] It is an online platform and everything is uploaded there. Lessons and everything. So if you go a day with no data, the next day you find out they have uploaded 50 other things that you need to read. Sometimes you miss out on deadlines or feel pressure on all the things you need to do. So you need to go online every hour otherwise you will miss something if you don't. For example, the two modules that I failed last year, second semester, I was meant to cancel them so the window period when you could cancel them, I did not have data. Because instead of failing a module, you get a window period where you can deregister the module. I got the data at 3pm and the deadline was 12pm. So finance was at the centre of it. (Mpilo)

Ayanda: The reason why I couldn't finish my degree was because NSFAS had not paid my previous year's fees. So immediately when you don't pay fees, they accumulate two hundred rands interest a month into your account. When you try to register, [university X] blocks you from registering ... In the first year, the university said we needed to pay for using the internet. So I owed about R5000 for using the school's WiFi the whole year. NSFAS said to me this is my personal duty so we will not take care of it. So in the second year I got the loan and I was able to register but still the [internet] debt was there and still accumulating interest. In third year, I tried registering but it did not go through.

Wanelisa: So essentially you are not able to go back to school because of WiFi?

Ayanda: Yeah. Imagine? Because of WiFi ... It was five thousand something but because it accumulated interest, it went up to twelve thousand. They add an interest of two hundred rands every month.

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[72] Pseudonym used

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When I look back, it was one of the most depressing times in my life. School was fumbling, I was trying and there was no time to be depressed. You had to get on with it ... How do I even type an assignment on a computer? How do I save an assignment on a computer? Nobody is telling me! Nobody is showing me and you expect me to thrive in that type of environment? I walk into a computer lab and I don't know what to do because I have very basic computer skills in primary school. In high school I never saw a computer again. (Gugu)

I didn't even know I had a student email until I got my mentor. I missed orientation and during orientation you get introduced to many things. (Xolisa)

We used to struggle with computer issues. They were still introducing computers at the time. You have to pay to learn this machine or you have to pay for someone to type your assignments for you. I did not know how to use a computer. And then you find the white kids had laptops or they had computers at home. That was a challenge. (Khayalethu)

Even though most universities have introduced computer literacy programmes, students like Khayalethu, who navigated the university space right after Apartheid, and Gugu, who was in first year in 2007, had to navigate university with no computer literacy. These challenges also play a structural role in whether a student is successful in their academic career.

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It is also evident that, from the time Khayalethu was in university in 1993 to Mpilo's experience in 2019 at [university X], when it comes to access, not much has changed. In fact, the digital divide has gotten worse, as universities have completely digitised their learning to online platforms. Although the computer literacy training has helped some students, the myriad challenges Black students face still mean students struggle with communications, information and technology systems. For example, for students who live in the township, their time and access is limited to a few hours on campus between lectures. These students travel long hours in unsafe environments, and do not have the privilege of staying late to type assignments. Some students do not live in home environments that are conducive or quiet for work, even if they had a laptop.

COVID and online learning

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With the outbreak of the COVID global pandemic, and the move to online learning, the above-mentioned inequalities have worsened (Shefer *et al*., 2020), as universities moved to purely online learning. The effects of the pandemic on Black students, who were already struggling with access to computers and the internet, has been dire, and the impact on higher education and the Black students who were unable to finish their degrees will be felt for years to come.

Mpilo: There are people who are doing very well online, especially the whites. Did you know that [university X] is 80% white? This is just a rough figure ... Yes, they are doing well. Do you know what is so funny about this online thing? At some point they told us that they would give us an hour extra on a test because of load-shedding. But load-shedding in my township is every day. So they think when it is load-shedding in Pretoria then it is a big deal when for us load-shedding is every day.

Wanelisa: So most of the people affected by online learning are Black students when the white students are doing well because they have resources?

Mpilo: Yes, even worse now because most of the white students are affiliated with online tutoring. So there are these online engineering tutoring where you pay R350 a month and you send a question and they reply within five minutes or less. Now lecturers caught some students using the tutoring during tests and everybody was punished. Now they made the next test more difficult and the time is shorter ... They said they will never sympathise with us because some of us are taking advantage of online tutoring. This is an irregularity of the university and their policies. Between you and me, we know nothing will happen to those learners. They will proceed with those excellent marks.

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The move to online learning has further marginalised poor students, while simultaneously creating an unfair learning advantage for their more affluent peers (Landa *et al*., 2021; Pillay, 2021). Moreover, this has also allowed lecturers to implement discriminatory policies that further marginalise poor Black students. Mpilo also believes it is an issue of gatekeeping. He explains that he was much more comfortable with contact learning and he is sure he would have been getting distinctions in this second qualification he was pursuing. However, online learning posed a new challenge as he had no data last year. These small challenges snowball into bigger issues that affect a student's academic career. For example, he was submitting a practical with only 35 megabytes, and someone happened to video call him on WhatsApp and that finished his data. He had a practical that was finished, yet could not submit in time because he had no internet access. Therefore, he was not able to write exams because you are unable to

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write exams if you have not submitted your practical, even though he had good marks on his other tests and he was confident he would have been able to pass the exams.

7.5 Deregistering

One profound conversation I had with research participants illustrated how university systems make it difficult for Black students to stay in university, while simultaneously making it very easy to deregister and leave. I argue that the whole education system makes it hard for Black students to access university, then higher education makes it hard for you to stay and complete your degree. That is the function of structural racism: to create multiple roadblocks, but make it easy for you to leave because no one wanted you in the space anyway.

Gugu: You know what was the easiest thing for me to do at UJ? To deregister. Now that I think about it, it was the easiest process. Nobody sat me down to ask why are you deregistering? What can we do, what can we change now for you to have a better start? Getting my money back for the remainder of the semester and deregistering was the easiest thing. I still remember it was 5400 rands.

Wanelisa: This is structural violence. This is structural oppression. A system that makes it very hard for you to stay and easy for you to leave

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The strategic removal of Black students is not an accident of history or a legacy of colonialism, but present-day active structural oppression. Both basic education and higher education are implicated in the slave labour pipeline. From grade 1, Black students are groomed into slave labour. The national government institutionalising a 33.3% pass mark, a mark that is too low to gain access to university, means that most Black students who beat the odds and make it to grade 12 will never enter the formal university space. This means that those few Black students who pass matric can only work temporary jobs and in manual labour in unjust neoliberal capitalist environments like retail and call centres, while the majority of Black youth are unemployed. The minute number who pass grade 12 and make it into university face systemic racism, and often leave without a qualification. The last and easy step, as Gugu asserts, is deregistering. The overall mandate is, Black people continue to face poverty and indignity.

7.6 Feelings of shame and failure

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We don't allow ourselves the freedom to learn. To struggle to learn. Struggling to learn is a privilege of those who are taught they're entitled to be whatever they want. They're allowed to take as many paths as necessary to learn, without fearing that they're simply not good enough when they fail. Whereas people who've been taught that they're incapable and inferior because of the colour of their skin think that if they fail, they cannot learn; that new skills should come effortlessly or not at all. If you cannot fail, you cannot learn. To be born into a cannibalised people is to fear failure so much that you don't even try, because you ventriloquise racist bureaucrats' imaginings of who you should be. And then you stop trying, and you make yourself invisible. Confirming the lies you were taught (Kharnita Mohamed, 2018: 233).

Black students often internalise structural racism and their inability to finish their degree as personal failure. Decontextualized oppression and racism gets internalised as shame and proof of inferiority by victims of oppression. I often had to counsel research participants, and help them realise that they were victims of a system that orchestrated their demise from the moment they entered the door. This is also the spiritual work of this research: to undo the psycho-spiritual damage of coloniality that leaves research participants with a low sense of self-worth.

Gugu: It was a set up. I even set myself up. I should have taken my journalism because it did not have these maths and economics. You can go places with a journalism degree and you don't have to be just a journalist. I did not know that people in journalism can work in coms.

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Wanelisa: Do you think it is fair to say you set yourself up? Because if you did not know then you did not know.

Gugu: [Pauses] Ok yes.

Wanelisa: It is just that we carry a lot of this shame and it is not ours to carry.

Gugu: Yes, I need to stop saying that. I did not set myself up. It is the system. The system set me up … I [was] completely depressed and disappointed. I write about my depression in my journal. The only thing that saved me from killing myself was that my mother saw that I had changed and she sent me to my dad. My father had a shop and so she sent me there to be busy because I would sleep the whole day

I see myself as dumb now. I think I am dumb most of the time. When someone is talking to me ... you know I used to debate ... Now I think they are more knowledgeable than me. I let them be. (Xolisa)

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It was important for me because I felt like I needed to be back in the university system. I needed to prove that I was not a failure for myself. As much as I understood what it was that did not make me finish, people will make you feel crazy. As in, it is not a valid reason. What do you mean brainwashing? I was not dumb, I was not a failure and I was not this person who had let my family down. (Luthando)

It has always been Black girls who have kept me going and who have been my human shield when I needed one. It was you guys who reassured me that none of this was my fault, or maybe that I was not good enough or I was not studying hard enough or I was not intelligent enough. It was just the system. (Lisa)

Although I have been careful not to characterise research participants as victims with no agency, it is important for me to illustrate how these experiences affected their mental and spiritual well-being. In the next chapter, I write about research participants' resistance in order to celebrate when they have lived in the decolonial difference.

However, it is also important to discuss how systems of oppression and coloniality can be internalised as failure and can fester into personal shame, and these feelings are linked to the function of coloniality, and affect the morale of Black youth. Brown (2006) writes that shame is a psycho-social-cultural construct. For her, shame relates to one's emphasis on emotions, thoughts and behaviours of self, based on proximity to what is considered the norm/desirable/worthy within their environment. Using this definition, we can argue that coloniality within the university context (and in South Africa) results in feelings of shame and unbelonging. Moreover, when students do not finish their degree, it deepens the existing shame and feelings of unworthiness. This impacts whether students might try and go back into the university system to finish their degrees or try new ventures.

This further highlights the importance of qualitative research, policies and public discourse that is compassionate, contextual, truthful and does not shame Black students. Decontextualised research/discourse that does not account for the psycho-social-cultural and spiritual violence of coloniality and white supremacy adds to the existing pain. It is also victim-blaming Black students for structural oppression and state failure to decolonise the university.

Conclusion

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The current colonial university remains a violent space that systematically excludes Black students, who enter the university bursting with bright dreams of transforming their socio-economic circumstances, but soon discover they are unwelcome in the university space. The historical, institutional and interpersonal violence Black students face that is highlighted in this chapter illustrates how education spaces remain colonial, violent and untransformed. While the government has desegregated higher education, its policies have done little to mitigate the violence inflicted on Black students based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, spirituality etc. This violence gets internalised by Black students as personal failure rather than systemic exclusion. Part of my goal with my research was to also outline and celebrate Black students who might not have finished their undergraduate degree. A large part of the celebration is outlined in the next chapter about Black students and the decolonial difference.

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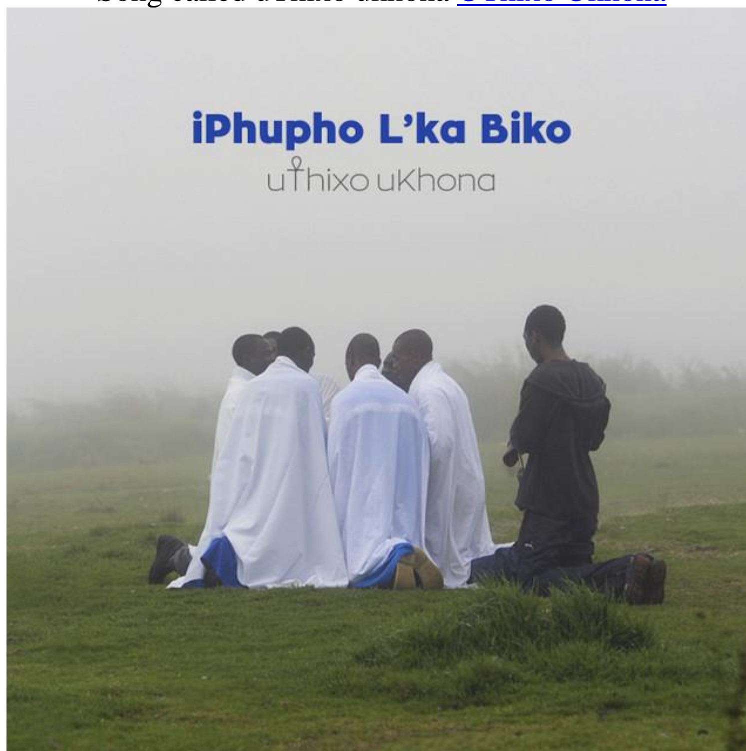
"uThixo ukhona.
(God is real and present)
uThixo ukhona, Majita.
(God is real and present, my friends)
Ungasiboni sisokola,
(Don't be discouraged by our suffering)
Thina sizophumelela.
(We will succeed)
uThixo ukhona.
(God is real and present)
uThixo ukhona, Majita.[73]"
(God is real and present)
iPhupho l'ka Biko.
Song called uThixo ukhona UThixo Ukhona



Chapter Eight: The decolonial difference

The student movements in South Africa have played a vital role in (re)introducing decoloniality into the public discourse. Although decolonial discourse existed, and many Black people live in the decolonial difference, the theory was mostly popular in academia. This chapter discusses the 2015 student uprisings, and how they impacted research participants in the university space. I argue that the movements operated in what is known as the decolonial difference. I also discuss some of the difficulties Black students faced as they challenged coloniality in the university. Importantly, I pull out more narratives that celebrate the courage, resistance and

[73] Majita is a term used to address young men in the township.

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community recounted by Black students during our conversation. I do this to illustrate that, even though coloniality might violate Black students, they are not victims, but powerful survivors.

8.1 Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall

These student movements forced the general public to engage with and question decolonial theory for the first time in post-colonial South Africa. Students, workers and academics aligned their struggles and forced the universities to deal with continued colonial symbolism and curriculums, outsourcing, free education and systematic racism (Gouws & Coetzee, 2019; Nyamnjoh, 2017; UCT: Rhodes Must Fall, 2015). Quite a number of research participants were active in the student movements, and it was therefore important to honour the various ways they have resisted colonialism.

They had a mass meeting at the Plaza where they announced they wanted the statue to come down. That this [statue] is Rhodes blah blah blah. I remember there was this white boy at the day res on campus where students who did not have res could go mingle, he said all this bullshit because Rhodes is the one who donated this land? And I was like, this cannot be right because where did he get it from? [laughter] So I was interested and wanted to know what this is about ... We wanted to have a structured campaign to bring the statue down because Rhodes was bad, then about institutional racism and solidarity with the workers' struggles ... We stayed there for three week. We ate Blackness, you go to sleep hearing all the chats about institutional racism and then you would get angry. It would all get so emotional because you are learning this about yourself, you are learning new words and conceptualising things now. You did that from the morning when you wake up for three weeks and then you expected to go back and catch up on your missed assignments? We occupied it [UCT building] for three weeks. That is when they started asking us what do you need? Res? Financial aid? That is how they got us out of there because they said we sorted you out so if you don't leave we will get [court] interdicts. (Katlego)

There were a lot of Fees Must Fall demands and some of the demands were based on the culture of the UFS. Removal of the colonial statues, renaming the buildings, justice for the workers who got beaten up by Afrikaaners at the Shimla park. One of the demands was that if you are white and have a car, you are not allowed to stay in res so Black students who do not have transport and cannot afford off campus living. (Pumeza)

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It helped in giving Black students a voice. I believe that previously, Black students were speaking out but their voices were not heard. But with fees must fall they would say it is either you hear us or we are shutting down. Now white people are scared of protest so immediately when you protest they start to listen and I think it is because of Fees Must Fall. (Ayanda)

There was a shift in how university processes that they previously had. The Fees Must Fall gave students confidence in addressing issues in unconventional and robust ways. Most of the times when you had a problem they would say send an email to this person and that person. Now if the university and management do not want to work in their favour, Black students disrupt the entire system. If NSFAS is not working, Black students disrupt the entire system. It has afforded Black poor marginalised students in SA a platform to say if we hurt them in the pocket then they will have to listen. I think now if there are any problems in the universities in SA then they are quickly resolved whereas previously you could sit with a case for more than three years. I don't know if you have noticed that after Fees Must Fall, yes there is still racism but it is not so strong because they know that once any student of colour experiences racism then it will spark an outrage. Fees Must fall was a conversation starter, a confidence booster and Black students saying if the universities do not want to work for us then we are going to fuck shit up. (Cindy)

It is important to note that resistance in the university in post-Apartheid South Africa did not begin in 2015. Black students in historically Black universities had always been resisting high fees and slow payment of loans, amongst other challenges. However, it was only because the recent protest affected historically white universities that the media and public took note. The difference is, student movements had started to form national alliances prior to FMF, which culminated in a national movement (Xaba, 2017).

The national movements shut down all South African universities and forced management and the government to deal with neoliberal capitalist practices and patriarchal coloniality on campuses. Fanon (1952:173) asserts that the decolonial being seeks ‘To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act.’ Disrupting universities was decolonial action which asserted political agency. Students were done toeing the line and articulating their dehumanisation in liberal ways that adhered to respectability politics. Although student activists were classified as lazy students who do not want to learn, my research participants’ experiences illuminate the structural violence that students were responding to. For example, Katlego was sleeping in the computer labs when Rhodes Must

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Fall began. This illustrates her hard work ethic and determination to do well in university under very difficult circumstances. Many of the students revolted as a means of survival and a refusal to remain nameless 'drop-out' statistics. This action of resistance is an example of living in the colonial difference.

For student activists, taking over the administrative buildings, which are the hub of reproducing coloniality, was their way of disrupting the system. Student movements also became spaces where coloniality was deconstructed, and revolutionary theories like pan-Africanism, Black consciousness, and intersectionality, among others, were introduced. It is also very symbolically and spiritually powerful to turn those buildings into a space where Black students learnt about Black radical thought. Coloniality has an energetic and spiritual component that adds to the metaphysical catastrophe of Black people, which means that the physical spaces where coloniality is administered also carry the same spiritual energy. Therefore, to populate the space with debate and Black radical thought from ancestors, like Biko, Fanon, and Audre Lorde, also does the spiritual work of ushering in the positive affirming energy in the space. This also contributed to a feeling of belonging on otherwise hostile campuses.

The occupation of the university administration block served as a political action, and as a space where homeless students could sleep and have a meal. It is in these spaces of community and care where the decolonial work of touching the other and feeling the other occurs, amidst the metaphysical catastrophe (Fanon, 2008). Decoloniality also occurs within the acts of kindness and love in the face of the naturalisation of violence. As previously mentioned, colonial neoliberal universities promote individualism; however, decolonial student movements subverted this by creating communities of resistance on isolating campuses. True to the naturalisation of violence under colonial contexts, the government and university responded with violence. The following section discusses the effects of this violence.

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8.2 Psychological effects of violence in student movements

Resisting coloniality and living within the decolonial difference has many devastating consequences. The state and university response to protests was characterised by violence and militarism. Students were brutalised, and this affected their mental health. Moreover, when the protests ended, universities went back to 'normal,' and students had to reacclimate to colonial violence on campuses. Only now, they had been hypervisible, leading to victimisation by the

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administration and some academics, who had labelled them 'troublemakers.' The physical violence and victimisation also affected the mental health of students.

Fees Must Fall contributed to my PTSD because I was arrested in 2017 ... Fees Must Fall started in 2015 and that was my first year. 2015 was a year of learning new things and educating myself because I was so brainwashed by my high school to a point where I did not recognise inequality and racism. I had to unlearn a lot of things and open my eyes that such things do happen ... You know with Fees Must Fall, we gave it our all and it gets to you. Being shot at, chased and so many arrests. You are detained and you are sitting in this hell hole and it gets to you. Then you have to balance your academics so it gets to you. (Pumeza)

We never got back into university successfully after Rhodes Must Fall. Like our mental health, we never did well again ... Sometimes I wish Rhodes Must Fall had never happened. I prefer the feeling of not being unsure about what is happening to me versus knowing that this is happening to me and it is happening because I am poor and Black. Knowing, it plunged me into a hole because I became a prophet of doom from knowing. I remember we looked at statistics of how many students get excluded and we saw that in order for the university to survive and stay rich, they know that that many Black kids won't come back. That is how they don't spend money and don't build more res's. They have a winning formula. So I looked at myself and thought, really really I came here but from the get-go I did not have a 100% chance of succeeding. I have a 60% chance and that really fucked me over. (Katlego)

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Some narratives about the student movements failed to account for the negative effects on students' mental health of the state and universities' violent response. Students who participated in the movements suffered from PTSD, and most have not had counselling for the police brutality they endured, or to deal with the aftermath of the violence unleashed by paramilitaries hired by universities to violate student activists. In addition to the psychological violence, students were learning and becoming sensitive to the systemic ways they were oppressed through political education. For example, Pumeza views her basic education experience as indoctrination that had to be unlearned. Thus, the movement space became one of re-education. Students become sensitised to coloniality in the university. Therefore, when universities went back to 'normal', students were hyper aware of the various ways coloniality existed on campuses.

A study by Greeff *et al*., (2021), done at the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences of North-West University, documents the psychological trauma for students who were not

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involved in the protest. In the study, they make a subtle difference between 'students' and 'protestors' (which others student activists) and provide an account of the psychological trauma police and 'protestors' had on the 'students.' I and many others have written about the violence that happened within student movements and during the uprisings, and I do not wish to present student activists as people or political communities without fault. However, reading this study left me with questions. For example, what was the racial demographic of these participants? What economic background did they come from? How had they been socialised to view Black bodies, and specifically Black bodies that were in defiance or responding to state violence? I ask these questions as a Black student who witnessed a white student run over a Black student with a car at UCT during protest action. Is it a coincidence that their study does not document that Black students at UFS had to go into hiding because they were hunted down by armed Afrikaner students (and their fathers) during Fees Must Fall? Were the students inconvenienced because their experience of university is different from those who were calling for decolonisation? Which student experiences and challenges must be prioritised? It is unhelpful to present a 'student' vs 'protestor' dichotomy, as all those who were involved and experienced trauma were students. It is inaccurate to equate police and university-employed paramilitary brutality as the same as campus shutdowns. This is a creation of a violent Black other.

Along with this, students had finally been given a vocabulary to articulate their exclusion and dehumanisation, which created psychological discomfort. As Katlego articulates, this resulted in feelings of helplessness and being 'plunged into a hole'. She recounts how her racial identity and gender resulted in systemic exclusion because, no matter how hard she worked, when the system is built against you, then you are bound to fail. The feeling of discontent and the lack of decolonisation led to more political action. This led to more violence and victimisation.

Victimisation

Added to the negative psychological effects of violent retaliation by state and management during protests, Black students are victimised and targeted when they exist in the decolonial difference. Coloniality and its administrators will punish any individual that seeks to disrupt and destroy colonial reproductions of violence, to set an example to others who might want to resist in the future. This dates back to colonisation, when settlers would publicly administer 'punishment' on enslaved Africans (Alexander & Kynoch, 2011). Universities targeted a few individuals to punish, instil fear and strategically remove students with influence.

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If there is a racial incident on campus, they try to silence or neutralise you in a sense. If you do not allow them to silence you, then they find a way in the system to kick you out. More especially if you are a Black student. A lot of us Black students who are vocal or who are activists about racism on campus have been put out of the system. (Cindy)

Pumeza: The Shimla park incident happened because the Vice Chancellor had ignored the cries of the workers. They had gone to hand over a memorandum, when they got there he was not there because he had gone to the sports field to watch a rugby match. As students, we took it into our own hands to go there so he could listen to the cries of the workers regarding outsourcing as many people were going to lose their jobs. At first, the confrontation was not violent as we blocked the entrance to the field. After being ignored, we stormed the field after half-time because the Vice Chancellor avoided them and chose to watch a rugby match. When we stopped the match, some Afrikaans boys came to negotiate with the student leaders. I don't know what happened, the next thing white men were beating us and kicking us. They did not care if you were a woman and helpless. A pregnant lady was kicked and had a miscarriage. Even the white parents beat us up and we ran for our lives ... There was no justice. They chose only three people to go to court and the magistrate said they had anger issues and needed to go to counselling. Even the lecturer who had been beating up students did not lose his job. There was no counselling for us. That whole year we attended court and even now I still have court cases.

Wanelisa: Wasn't that dog Jonas Jansger who was the Vice Chancellor at the time?

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Pumeza: Yes and he stays writing books about racism ... We got another Vice Chancellor from UCT and he was more strict. He made an example of Sipho and he was expelled. He later went to Cape Town and stabbed and died there. But after that, no one dared to resist.

Often, people who complain about violence and exclusion are vilified for voicing their discontent. They become the problem, instead of the violent environments creating a change. This process of vilification is an intentional way to ensure that violent spaces maintain coloniality (Ahmed, 2021). The act of systematically removing Black students from the system because they voice their pain is another way to maintain colonial structures. For example, the expulsion of Sipho was a way that management set an example.

Pumeza's recollection of the Shimla park incident demonstrates that the university administration, white students and their parents formed part of the colonial violence. The

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Shimla park incident refers to a non-violent student and worker march that disrupted a university rugby game, after which the white students and their parents (mostly men) assaulted students and workers in retaliation. A pregnant worker lost their unborn child because of the violence. This scenario emphasises my earlier point, that colonial violence and white supremacy that exists in the university space is a symptom of the broader decay in South Africa. Moreover, there is an unequal response and consequences from the university towards Black student activists (legal action, expulsion etc) compared to those towards the white students who beat up a pregnant Black woman till she lost her baby (anger management). The anti-Blackness and violence exhibited at Shimla Park is a microcosm of the general disdain and violence meted out on Black people in the broader country.

Internal violence within student movements

The student movements located themselves within decolonial theory; however, some student activists still wanted to hold on to gender hierarchies, heteronormativity and gendered binaries of difference. As mentioned in Chapter Two, decoloniality is critical of the coloniality of gender and its hierarchies and binaries of human and sub-human (Lugones, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2016). This led to tension between activists who upheld hetero-patriarchal queer antagonist views, cis heterosexual women and LGBTIQ+ activists in student movements (Ndelu *et al*., 2017). Some of the cis heterosexual men in the movement asserted they were African and would not let go of their views that women are inferior. Despite interventions by scholars such as Ratele and Boswell, the queer antagonism, rape culture and violence continued nationwide.

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Trans activists and organisations like the Trans Collective had to intervene against the tokenization, erasure and antagonism of trans activists (Mbongwa, 2016). Cindy recounts her experiences as a trans student activist in Fees Must Fall, and how her fellow comrades refused to support her struggles against trans exclusion and transphobia in the university. For her, it was a betrayal to put her body on the line with fellow Black students, who then refused to be allies to Black trans students. She felt used and objectified as a body to add to protest numbers. Being a trans student meant that she was required to divorce herself from her intersectional identities and only prioritise race and class. When she articulated her needs as a trans student, she discovered her fellow activists were transphobic. Unfortunately, the requirement to split oneself from your authentic self is a fundamental principle of coloniality. Moreover, the violent

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enforcement of gender and sexual binaries or hierarchies is another principle of coloniality. This demonstrates that, while student movements located themselves in decoloniality, some student activists selectively ignored some core principles of the liberation theory. Oftentimes, this has made me ponder the limitations of the decolonial movements in colonial university environments, even while operating within the decolonial difference. How can you effectively decolonise while still accepting the university (with its historical and current colonial implications) as a relevant institution for present-day Africa?

8.2 Rethinking the university

All my conversations with research participants have challenged me in various life-changing ways, and one of the most important conversations was about the relevance of the university space. Some research participants opined that the existence of a university is contradictory to decolonisation. I felt resistance to this sentiment; my chest closed up and I felt this resistance at a body level. Upon introspection, this was triggered by my hierarchical placement as a researcher in the knowledge production university system. Even as a decolonial activist and researcher, I had not thought about creating knowledge outside of the university at the beginning of my research.

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There were many times when I learned something new and when my view of the world was expanded during my research. There were times when my biases were brought to the forefront and I learned new decolonial ways of liberating education. These conversations illuminated how I need to rethink the university and challenge my hierarchical biases in education.

> I think the university needs to stop treating us like subordinates. If the university was a space to empower us, I don't think that undergrad should be a time where we only learn other people's philosophies. I think we should learn other people's philosophies to help impact and implement our own. Learn how to think for ourselves and how to break away from them … It is like prison. It's not a space of rehabilitation. Most often people who come out of prison out of it are worse versions of what they were trying to rehabilitate. A lot of the times you get out more lost than when you got in. The spaces are not trying to help you get in touch with you. You need to be a member of this community and fuck where you come from. Fuck equity and understanding what it takes for you to be a member of this society. There is a real issue in how we have set up spaces of learning in higher educational institutions. We expect people to learn how we teach. Instead of trying to understand how to teach how people learn. We think that to standardise and to systemise is going to help when each of us is different.

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I am not saying I have a hundred million curriculums. What I am saying is, teach each individual case like an individual case. (Sethu)

Peter: Because I am a person who gets bored easily, I realised there are other people like me who will get bored easily. So I developed an adviser's learning programme which takes learning into an experiential and unconventional learning outside of the classroom environment.

Wanelisa: So would you say that your learning style is more experiential, practical and hands on versus sitting in a university lecture that might have made you lose interest a little bit?

Peter: Hmmm [thinking] You are onto something with your observation. Although I have never dwelled on what might have made me leave the university, when I think about it, I have always been a child who grew up very active. I was very active and I'm full of energy. I like exploring and travelling. To see things with the naked eye ... I prefer to learn practically, experimentally rather than be confined to a desk and reading. That is how I learn.

Two themes emerge from these perspectives. Firstly, undergraduate programmes discourage students from authentic knowledge production, rather encouraging the regurgitation of older scholars. Students are treated like subordinates who do not have anything to contribute to knowledge. As a lecturer, this perspective challenged my hierarchy and position of power. When I first heard Sethu articulate this, I thought 'But how could that work? Don't you need the training first?' Later, I realised that she was eloquently articulating the same dismissal and exclusion from knowledge production that I experienced in my undergraduate years. Students carry embodied and other knowledges that can help transform university education.

Secondly, Sethu and Peter's narratives articulate the rigidity and standardisation of learning that does not cater to neurodiverse students. Learning is deeply personal and should reflect the diversity of the student body. Right now, it only caters to a student who is able to sit down and take notes. Many students cannot do this for various reasons, like disability, neurodiversity or trauma. This means that most students, irrespective of race, are not reflected in university curriculum. The conversation about Africanising the curriculum must also decolonise the idea of a classroom and not just what is inside the classroom. How could we understand gender through dance and movement? How could we decolonise the sociology of racialism through cooking in community?

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I had two conversations with Luthando, which lasted about 4 – 5 hours, and in the second conversation, she spoke at length about the limitations of decolonial theory. For her, decolonial theory will always centre whiteness because it is always in resistance to coloniality. She articulated that her healing work exists outside whiteness, and asked important questions about how a university can decolonise when its very function is colonial reproduction. Therefore, how can decoloniality truly liberate Black people when it is always in opposition to or speaking out against whiteness? For her, that very act centres whiteness. If the function of the university was to reproduce whiteness, does the university have a place in the liberation of Black people or a liberated Africa? As a decolonial scholar, these questions are forcing me to think about my work and activism in serious ways. It also requires me to think about the function of my work within the Black community and in the university space.

Sethu insisted that we do not come to the university as clean slates, but with a wealth of embodied libraries, rich with cultural, ancestral knowledge and wisdom. I had to recognise that, even though postgrad has trained me to produce knowledge, I had not unlearned the hierarchies, nor processed the depth of the violence and disembodiment I experienced in undergrad. Moreover, I think the silencing of students' voices and ideas in undergrad forms part of the function of centring and reproducing coloniality. As Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2021, n.p.) opines, coloniality 'is a power structure that subverts, destroys, reinvents, appropriates, and replaces anything it deems an obstacle to the agenda of colonial domination and exploitation.' To accept and encourage diverse student bodies' holistic knowledges would mean to divest from Euro-American whiteness as the authority of knowledge. It would create spaces of community and solidarity, thereby replacing competitiveness and neoliberal individuality.

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8.3 Spaces of resistance, community and solidarity

One of the themes I wished to explore was how students existed within the colonial difference and resisted coloniality. Unsurprisingly, powerful recollections of solidarity and community came up in the retelling of the research participants' experiences, such as students creating communities and being accommodated by other students in residence rooms. Black students would formulate study groups in the township in order to help each other pass Matric. All these beautiful memories became litanies of Black love, community and solidarity.

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Ayanda: I know the struggles of having to find accommodation, my room was big enough for two beds, so I got two more students who did not have money to pay for accommodation to stay for free the entire year. And we have been friends ever since

Wanelisa: So tell me what made you do that?

Ayanda: I knew the struggles of being a Black person and not having money but wanting to better your life with an education.

Mpilo: The one that pushed me further was actually my friend. In the township, when you get your 80% you are celebrated. In grade 11, I got 95% and 90 % for physics and everybody would be celebrating to say you are doing well. So this other friend came to ask me in isiZulu 'you are still getting things wrong even now?' So that question stayed with me. Even getting 90%, this person is asking me if I still get things wrong? After that guy asked me that question, we became friends because I had to find out more about who is asking? So I went to investigate only to find that this person had a clean record in Matric.

Wanelisa: What does that mean, 100%?

Mpilo: It means that the teacher would be lying if he admitted that he had ever marked a mistake in his paper ... and the guy made a bet that he would get a 100% in his final paper.

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There was this gay guy, we used to call him Saydi. He was gay and he also had a physical disability. So this one time I was at the Barn drinking and I felt like going out to smoke so one of my friends' boyfriends said he would accompany me because it was not safe. So Saydi was outside peeing. I literally watched Lu go to Saydi and kiss him. I don't know who saw it but the person saw them kissing and questioned Lu. So Lu pushes Saydi to the ground and Saydi remember has a physical disability. Lu reached out to Saydi and wanted to beat him and I said no I saw you kiss Saydi and then I beat him up. That was the first time I realised I could beat up a man, even though I was drinking heavily. (Lethu)

Biko (1969) wrote that the dispossessed transition from isolated self-hating subjects to decolonising agents and bridges, who serve as connectors between themselves and many others. Moreover, it is in this process that true love and understanding can flourish (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Even though this research challenged me, there were many moments of community and solidarity amidst the colonial violence, which filled me with hope and inspiration.

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Amidst the violence of the system, Black students like Ayanda can hold other Black students up and serve each other in community, while Pumeza exemplifies true humanity and community. As Ayanda states, these communities can turn into long-term bonds. Gugu also said that she used to 'squat' in a friend's room when she had late lectures and it would be too dangerous to travel to the township afterwards. Universities characterise 'squatting'[74] as a criminal behaviour. However, I saw this as a space of communal support for students who did not have residence. These are spaces that have also saved me and enabled me to finish both undergrad and postgrad degrees when I was homeless. These are decolonial spaces.

Much has also been written about queer antagonism on campuses (Bennet & Beja, 2005; Everitt-Penhole & Boonzaier, 2018; Kessi, 2018; Msibi, 2012; Munyuki, 2018; Robertson & Pattman, 2018; Shefer, 2018). I chose to include Lethu's narrative about violence against queer bodies on campus because it also illustrated that heterosexual students can be allies to LGBTIQ+ students. When I was speaking to her, her level of conviction and anger at the injustice was palpable. It is an unfortunate incident; however, I think her using her body to defend a queer student (who also had physical limitations) forms part of Black solidarity. It is equally important to write about the incidents of love, hope and community. Change happens when we understand that community is fundamental to the decolonial turn (Maldanado-Torres, 2007). My research participants proved this community and solidarity multiple times in their personal stories and exhibited moments of using their power.

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8.4 Moments of taking back power

It was important for me to be honest about colonial violence and the struggles of Black students. Equally important, I would continuously pray to my ancestors for clarity to present the ways in which Black students took back their power. One of the things that I learnt during the writing of this thesis was to question morality and who is criminalised within coloniality. In a colonial context, Black people are criminalised for 'breaking the moral code' while they live in a world that is sustained through acts of violence (Ala'i, 2000; Puar, 2017). Moreover, they will be criminalised for trying to survive in a violent system.

[74] When a student allows another student without residence to stay with them

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Me and Melville Smith used to argue a lot ... I realised I was alone here with no family and no one knows me here. No one is going to defend you because they don't give two flying shits about you. We used to argue and he would fail me. Then I said you will see me clearly ... I decided to compile complaints. I said Black students, write your shit. This one Black girl almost did not receive her PHD because of Melville. (Lethu)

When it was time for me to go to high school, I started noticing that my teacher had favourites. I noticed I had failed even though I had passed in June and I was also in the top 5. So I decided to beg my teacher to get me through to high school. He refused and I asked him how I failed when I was in the top 5 in June? But my friend that is not clever who partied in his home had passed. He was holding a stack of blank reports and he told me that I should stop begging and making noise. His mistake was to ask me to take the blank reports to the principal's office. I took two for me and my other friend. I went into the principal's office, locked the door and stamped the school report ... I took my report and registered at another school in Nyanga East. I registered with my mother's maiden name so they would not detect me. The whole year, every time we saw someone like him we would run to hide in the bathrooms. As a result, I failed the year with one mark. I begged the teacher and he failed me anyway. I was like, man, I just want to study and I want to get to varsity soon ... There was this man who lived in my neighbourhood who was a secretary at Luhlaza high school. I knew he gave out illegal reports to people who wanted to study. I asked him for a report and said I will pay him R30 but he said no. One day he had left his house, and I entered through the window and there were the reports. With a stamp too [laughter]. So I took two for me and my friend too. This is how I got into grade 10. (Khayalethu)

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Gugu: In 2007 I returned to my mother. I left my dad's house and I stole money from his shop to pay for a call centre training. I went to Cornerstone. It was R3000 and I used the rest for transport money. After the training, I looked for a job and found a job at Vodacom.

Wanelisa: Reparations! [laughter]

Gugu: Repa-fucking-rations! [laughter]

Some might criminalise Khayalethu and Gugu for their actions, but I see these as actions of taking their power, as epistemic disobedience (Quijano, 1991; Mignolo, 2011) as a way to delink from Eurocentric logic and its institutions, and to recognise the limitations of coloniality, which includes the skewed morality it violently asserts on us. My decolonial perspective reads these recollections as agency and survival. For example, Gugu spoke about her father not being present in her life as a child. After she left university, she started to build a relationship with

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her father as an adult. She worked unpaid at his shop and things were not going well with him. It was during this time that she decided to leave his house and take some money. Therefore, her taking the money from his business was an act of reparations for the free labour and all the years he had not paid child support. Moreover, she used that money to do a course which afforded her a decent job. At the time, the relationship was a disempowering and exploitative space, and this act of rebellion was her taking back her power.

On the other hand, Khayalethu was navigating education during the violence of Apartheid. This included militarised primary school, state brutality (including children like his friends being buried in unmarked graves) and structural racism through Bantu education. Moreover, he was victimised by a Black teacher, yet he persevered to get an education. He used his agency in a corrupt and violent system in order to navigate high school. His actions were not criminal, but a means to survive and stay in the system that wanted to groom him for slave labour.

Lethu's narrative also exhibits power when she refuses to be victimised by a racist lecturer. Lecturers sometimes abuse their power and sabotage Black students' academic careers. I have painful experiences in this respect. During my masters' research, many Black students also explained the same. However, many students refuse to fight back for fear of further retaliation. Lethu displayed great courage and power when she made visible her experience, and compiled the experiences of other Black students. This was her way of taking back her power because she refused to study something she did not like and be on a campus that traumatised her. In the process, she also helped a PhD student who was victimised by this lecturer.

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8.5 Further studies

Many of my research participants are struggling to re-enter the university to finish their qualifications, while some have tried to pursue a qualification at different institutions and have still not been able to finish due to structural racism. However, there have been other students who were successful in their further studies or pursued postgraduate studies without an undergrad. At first, I thought this finding would undermine my study and my findings. However, the diversity of Black students' experiences enriches this research.

It was important for me because I felt like I needed to be back in the university system. I needed to prove that I was not a failure for myself. As much as I understood what it was that did not make me

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finish, people will make you feel crazy. As in, it is not a valid reason. What do you mean brainwashing? I was not dumb, I was not a failure and I was not this person who had let my family down. My mother has invested her whole in my education and making sure that I stand on my own two feet. So I don't have to struggle so why am I going to choose to struggle when she has given me everything to make sure I don't struggle? I go into Makhanda trying to prove a point (Melanie)

I went to PE on Tuesday, drove back to Cape Town and arrived Wednesday and I got an email saying, Congratulations you are accepted, you need to be here by Friday to secure your place in res. I packed my things on Thursday and I have never been so excited in my life. I was happy, excited and I was relieved. Packed my things and drove to PE. The best three years of my life. I am studying what I want to study, I am flourishing academically without flexing and everything is good. I am not in the same space as my mom, I broke up with my ex and this was a fresh start for me ... I started doing the radio station thing and I was interviewing people that I never thought I would breathe the same air in, I am flourishing and I am even being interviewed on SABC news. (Lethu)

With the right support, the right environment and academic/department allies, Black students can thrive (Guiffrida, 2005). Melanie and others disprove the harmful narratives that Black students who do not graduate with their undergraduate degrees are not able to meet the intellectual demands of the university, or they are lazy. I hope this section serves as a testimony to the resilience of my research participants, and also encourages those that did not finish their degrees to know that there are many other avenues to explore. For example, during my research, I spoke with award-winning South African journalist and broadcaster Karabo Kgoleng, who did not finish her undergraduate degree but went on to pursue her dreams. Moreover, she went on to do an honours and is now studying for a masters.

Melanie pursued her masters and is a writer who has been published multiple times, despite not being able to finish her undergraduate studies at two universities. Lethu and Gugu went on to finish qualifications at other institutions. This is evidence that not obtaining a qualification does not mean that one is intellectually inferior or lazy, or that people who obtain their undergraduate degrees are more hardworking and intellectually superior. As mentioned, universities act as gatekeepers to the job market. This determines who gets access to jobs and who is seen as more qualified. However, although the structural exclusions exist, some Black students obtain a qualification often against all odds, as these findings have illustrated.

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Conclusion

Within the spiritual and systemic violence of patriarchal colonialism exist a space of resistance, creativity and hope. This space is known as the decolonial difference. This chapter discussed Black students' resistance against coloniality, and honoured the different ways they reclaimed their power. In order to keep from glamourising resistance, the chapter also outlined the violent ways the system violates Black students who resist colonialism. This chapter also honours the narratives of Black students who obtained their degrees even though they were excluded at their first university. It is important to celebrate these successes and resilience, without using them to shame or silence the real struggles of Black students who have been structurally excluded (Stein, 2018). Black students do not deserve to struggle and fight to get an education. It is my prayer that this research, and the concluding discussion in the next chapter, joins the voices of scholars and contributes toward the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa.

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Picture credit to Xolelo Mboniswa who spray-painted and took this picture, in memory of FMF student activist, our beloved Philela Gilwa, who passed away in 2017. Philela was an amazing and principled activist who inspired and educated many Black students. I received consent to use this picture.

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Chapter Nine: Conclusion

I remember I had so many ideas during undergrad. I had so many thoughts and ideas about how I wanted to change the world. My visions. But I quickly learned that no one wanted to hear my thoughts. I was supposed to read this white man and that white man and no one wanted to hear about all these thoughts. They punished me severely for uttering 'I think'. And slowly my thoughts died. So many graves for my thoughts and ideas. Now I am sitting as an adult trying to thumb-suck new ways and different ways of seeing the world and new solutions for this dilapidated South Africa. We are stuck as Black thinkers while we desperately try and think of a new world. But there are so many graveyards where our ideas and our authentic self went to die. (online diary 21/07/2021)

Introduction

This research examined Black students' intersecting challenges in university and how those challenges impacted their inability to complete their undergraduate degree. I utilised decolonial feminist theory, Black consciousness, intersectionality, African feminism and vulnerability theory to help me understand coloniality in the university space. In Chapter Three, I outlined the history of university education, various segregation policies implemented during Apartheid, and desegregating policies implemented post-Apartheid, and assess their current impact on Black students' lived experiences in university. In Chapter Four, I discussed some of the current challenges faced by higher education institutions, as well as the research findings of scholars working in higher education. I explored how Black students negotiate their way through basic education and the university environment. Moreover, I explored the ways that Black students' intersecting identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, ability etc) were shaped and reshaped by their university environment. Lastly, this research introduced the issues of coloniality, the Black spiritual being and the university space. I explored how coloniality affects Black students' spiritual wellbeing and how this resulted in some students' inability to finish their qualification.

9.1 Main Findings

Social environments and family history

Universities claim they want diverse student populations, yet operate as though all students come from affluent backgrounds, with the cultural capital needed to have a successful

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university career. As a researcher who was raised by a single parent who was unemployed, I understand that your socio-economic background determines how you navigate the university. Therefore, it was crucial to my research to provide an understanding of the families and communities my research participants came from. This was done in an attempt to argue that the colonial violence Black students face in the university was an extension of the broader naturalisation of war in South Africa (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

When we talk about coloniality in the university space, we often do not contextualise it within the broader violence in Black students' homes and communities. I have often fallen into the trap of thinking that, if universities decolonise, then Black students will navigate the university fine. Unfortunately, there is no way to decolonise the university when it is in a country that has never been decolonised. As long as South Africa maintains colonial systems and practices, the university is an appendage of the broader structure. Even if it were possible to decolonise the university, Black students would be still living in a violent, unjust and traumatising home context, and the naturalisation of war would still impact their university experience. The Black students' lived realities presented in this research illustrate this point.

Most research participants came from either single-parent households or were orphaned. None of the research participants came from dual-income homes (even for the two participants who lived with both parents). Moreover, in instances where the students had a parent working, the majority of those parents worked hard menial labour, such as domestic workers or factory workers. Like myself, most research participants survived abject poverty and navigated structural racism in basic education, and it is a miracle they even made it to their first year in university. Our Black communities epitomise the naturalisation of war, and no white lecturer can understand how many of our friends die before matric, or how many of our cousins, siblings and nephews continue to succumb to stab wounds and gunshot wounds while we sit and try to concentrate in lecture halls. The township is pure hell and this is as a result of coloniality, Apartheid legacies and the failures of the ANC government to decolonise.

For example, during the final year of my masters, men in my neighbourhood found out that I was queer. After that, I was unable to walk to the taxi rank and travel to campus. I was scared that they would rape and kill me. It is important that people understand that, when Black students show up on campus, they have survived a war. Every day they survive a war to show up to a university environment that hates them.

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Racialisation, gender and sexuality

This study was particularly interested in the Black identity and my research participants' experiences in the university space. Therefore, it was paramount to explore how research participants understood and made sense of Blackness. Although I did not expound greatly on racialisation and Blackness, I made some observations about how Black students come to identify as Black. For example, a majority of my participants identified themselves as Black or African, although one student asserted they would not continue with the interview if I labelled them Black. These different responses made me reflect on the complexities of the Black identity.

Three out of sixteen participants insisted that they were African and not Black. For them, Black is a colour that does not look like the colour of their skin. Interestingly, when I put out the call, I explicitly requested Black students, so it seems there is an element of identification with Blackness on some level, which made them answer the call to be a part of my research. Moreover, the students had a different understanding of Blackness, such as viewing Black as a colour associated with darkness and negative things, as opposed to Steve Biko's articulation of Blackness as a political identity to unite those oppressed by coloniality.

More importantly, many of the conversations I had with research participants made me realise that, although Black parents do not talk about race, Black children are still externally racialised. Most of the research participants' parents did not talk about race or Blackness while they were growing up at home, yet they had come to identify as Black during the course of their lives, because the external world racialised them. Some Black parents might think our post-Apartheid context is a rainbow nation and there is no need to talk about Blackness; however, societal institutions end up shaping their children's racial identities.

South Africa is a colonial space, and therefore gender and sexuality binaries are internalised and enforced, and this includes participants' Black communities. Most of the queer students were raised in heteronormative contexts where queerness was not accepted. Women participants also stated that being a woman put you in danger and made you a target in South Africa. Interestingly, some of the research participants who are healers complicated the idea of a gender and sexual binary. For them, they housed different spiritual entities, with different genders, within their bodies and so they were much more fluid than the other research participants.

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Basic education

One of the main findings of this research is that basic education is just as colonial and violent as higher education. For example, the legacies of inequality in education initiated during colonialism, and solidified during Apartheid in previously white universities and Black universities, also exists in primary and secondary schooling. Former Model-C schools are highly resourced, while schools in the townships have a lack of resources. For example, one of the research participants did not have a maths teacher for three terms in matric, which negatively impacted his final year of schooling, and also impacted how he coped during university. Moreover, the colonial cultures of upholding whiteness, violence and militarisation of education also exist in basic education.

The research participants recounted many experiences of homophobia, racism and colonial institutional cultures in high school, which were consistent with binary and hierarchical ideas of coloniality. The participants experienced homophobia in both previously white and Black schools. Queer students were routinely targeted queer antagonism and bullying by educators and peers. Participants also recounted experiences of racism. Black students who questioned and refused to integrate into white schools were targeted and punished, and I was alarmed by how many students received this treatment from educators. Their Blackness was policed, and often school policies around language and uniform exhibited anti-Black values. This interpersonal and institutionalised violence facilitated an environment where Black learners rejected themselves.

Tertiary education

As mentioned before, basic education is a microcosm of the coloniality and anti-Blackness that exists in the country more broadly. Even though there have been protests at schools, like at Pretoria Girls high school (Mnthali, 2020), there has not been a student-led movement that can alert the public to the deep levels of violence Black students experience in historically white schools. However, the violence does exist. On the other hand, student movements, like Fees Must Fall, have ensured colonial violence in the university space gets the attention it deserves.

A myriad of challenges exist in higher education, due to the university, government and our parents. Most Black parents of the research participants grew up, attended school and have lived their lives under Apartheid. This means that they were socialised under coloniality, and have therefore internalised ideas about what it means to be successful. Some parents put an

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emphasis on careers that will provide an income, and forced the research participants to enter careers they were not passionate about. This also affects whether Black students will finish their degree due to a lack of motivation. While understanding the difficulties of Black parents, and showing compassion for the economic trauma of Apartheid, it is important for Black parents to understand that their actions often lead students to not finish their university qualification.

Moreover, my findings illuminate that systemic racism and coloniality are the main reasons why Black students do not finish their degrees. Black students do not have the cultural capital and technological resources to navigate universities that operate primarily online. Housing and residence shortages mean that students from the township travel far under dangerous conditions in order to get to campuses. White academic staff often are not sympathetic to Black students when they are unable to meet deadlines or show up in the same way as affluent students. Some students have to sleep in computer labs, or not bath or eat, to meet the difficult university standards.

University administration and NSFAS often also have a snowball effect on Black students' experiences in university. On their own, university administrative systems are highly bureaucratic and the staff are often anti-Black. The added incompetence of NSFAS has dire consequences for students. Some students only receive funding at the end of the year, and this means that their studies are affected. One research participants had to participate in sex work in order to support herself. Our families are already living in poverty, and therefore Black students do not receive support, and may also be supporting their families. When Black students struggle due to NSFAS, the funding scheme excludes them the next year for their low marks, or the university excludes them.

As a microcosm of greater South Africa, social ills like rape culture, queer antagonism, alcohol abuse, ableism and domestic violence exist on campuses. Black students often cope with the stresses of university and the hostile environment by abusing alcohol. Moreover, some institutional cultures also promote alcohol abuse. Domestic violence and rape culture are also rampant on universities campuses. Female first year students are often preyed upon by older male students, and student leaders often require sexual favours when students need interventions regarding systemic racism. GBV is also a huge pandemic on campuses, and one student left UWC after another woman was killed by her boyfriend in a university residence.

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One of my research questions was whether coloniality affected the spiritual wellbeing of Black students. The majority of the participants who answered in the affirmative were healers who practised African spirituality. For them, the coloniality and anti-Blackness within the curriculum created a spiritual violence, and the curriculum alienated them from their ancestry and ancestors. The colonial origins of the university also mean that the university space is spiritually violent. It is the very space that oppressed our ancestors, and killed our ancestral lineages and indigenous knowledges. Therefore, when Black bodies enter such a violent space, a spiritual rapture and spiritual retraumatization happens. Unfortunately, universities are in denial about coloniality, and are therefore unable to respond with sensitivity to the needs of the Black students. Instead, Western psychology pathologizes Black students, and the university pushes them out.

Decolonial difference

This chapter was an absolute joy to write, and it gave me hope while writing the research. Earlier in my research, I realised that I mentally characterised most research participants as victims without agency. This is understandable, as I was struggling with secondary trauma from some of the research participants' encounters with colonial violence. However, it became important to also honour the courage and vulnerability of research participants. Coloniality insists on portraying us as hopeless, and it is the decolonial and spiritual work of researchers like myself to also read hope amidst the colonial ruins. My research participants were not victims but survivors, and often they had resisted colonial violence and contributed to decolonisation in their university campuses. Moreover, some of my research participants had impacted positively on national conversations in the queer community. Some were published authors. The fact that they are alive and have not been killed by the system is in itself proof that they are survivors. Even the participants who are struggling to find their way, my ancestors and I know that they will rise above the colonial violence. They are successful in their own right because a university degree does not award someone value or success.

9.3 Recommendations

It is important for me to consider the implications of my study for policy and practice in higher education. My experience as someone who was a student activist is that both the university and government refuse to actively engage with student leaders on how to create policies that can

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enact meaningful change. When there are protests, which often happen as a last resort after students have been ignored, the state and university are quick to violently quell the unrest without engaging with students on solutions to their problems. Often, student activists are intelligent and strategic individuals and have devised solutions to the challenges they face. The Trans Collective, Decolonise UCT Law and Pathways to Free Education are some student-led movements that offer tangible solutions to some issues in higher education. Universities and the government then hire 'experts' to devise policies that require more institutional administration but do not yield results, and students are only consulted to tick boxes within these processes. As a result, most of these policies gather dust, while students continue to suffer.

When examining the earlier White Papers on Education, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, I discovered our government has not been robust in dealing with Apartheid legacies. Legislation uses euphemistic terms like 'previously disadvantaged' and 'vulnerable' to deal with issues. My argument is, if coloniality and Apartheid were stratified on explicit racial terms, how can the solutions not be similarly explicit? As a result, policies like affirmative action ended up benefiting white women because of the euphemism. I suggest that earlier national legislation that seeks to redress racial inequalities explicitly addresses race in clear and unapologetic terms.

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The discussion about policy and legislation is very complicated, especially when I take into consideration that one of my key findings critiqued the very existence of the university in a decolonial South Africa. The colonial roots and current role of the university are implicated in the suffering of Black people in South Africa. Some of my research participants reported that we need to rethink the university as a gatekeeper of knowledge, reproducer of coloniality, and creator of a dichotomy between 'qualified' and 'unqualified.' In neoliberal racialised capitalism, the above terms gatekeep who can live a dignified life. The narratives of the research participants, and other struggling unemployed youth, is evidence of this. My review of education policies exists within the tension that, while legislation is intended for redress in the university, the institution that legislation is aimed to redress is designed to create inequalities and perpetuate.

Many students struggle to access NSFAS loans, and this affects their participation in the university. Universities have various administrative challenges and struggle to administer the loans at the beginning of the year. Some students only receive the funds at the end of the year

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or the next year. This has been one of the major reasons why students do not do well and are academically and financially excluded. There is a need to expand university systems, and for the government to offer institutional support so NSFAS funding can get to students on time.

My conversation with Cindy about transphobia highlighted the need for economic, sexual and gender justice for Black trans students, and to address transphobia on campus. Trans students need economic justice and funding opportunities because transphobia is a colonial institutional issue. Most trans students do not even get to matric due to the violence they experience from educators and peers in basic education. Both the government and universities need to address this systemic issue, and also fund trans students when they are in university. The Department of Home Affairs makes it difficult for trans people to change their gender marker and get an ID/drivers licence, and it is therefore difficult for students to get part-time work to survive. These are the added institutional violences which require economic justice and institutional redress. Moreover, university residences need trans-inclusive policies and education campaigns that deal with transphobia in residences.

In both basic and higher education, the government needs to ensure that educators get diversity training, and understand coloniality. Educators who target students based on their race or sexuality must face consequences or termination. Right now, teachers victimise students due to their racial prejudice or religious views, but do not face consequences. The overwhelming volume of narratives of victimisation, some of which were not even presented in the analysis chapter, illuminate a huge problem in the education system. These actions result in lifelong trauma.

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Universities are ill-equipped to deal with the reality of Black students' backgrounds and the levels of trauma we face outside of the university. As a consequence, the universities end up re-traumatising students when they experience trauma. If universities are serious about Black students' meaningful participation, they have to have mental health policies and departmental systems that are sensitive to trauma and intergenerational trauma. For example, a university registrar telling a student to 'go back to the township and struggle,' after they recounted their house being petrol-bombed, a terminally ill mother and a family member that was murdered in the same year, illustrates that the staff can be desensitised and uncaring. People in higher management are powerful, and often tasked by the government to enact policies of transformation in the university. Yet, these reported attitudes and behaviour show that often those in power hold anti-poor, anti-Black views, and therefore can never decolonise the

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university. I propose that the university environment needs to be an environment that prioritises an ethics of care in dealing with students.

Moreover, it is pertinent to have policies and engage practices that address the marginalisation of African spirituality. While post-Apartheid laws have largely intended to provide redress for previous harms, like racial segregation in education, there are no policies to undo the marginalisation and demonisation of African spirituality. For example, while most campuses have chapels for Christian students and prayer rooms for Muslim students, there are no spaces for Black students to practise their spiritual beliefs. Moreover, there are no indigenous healers in student wellness centres who might attend to students, or mitigate against the pathologization of African students who require indigenous methods of healing.

9.4 Contribution to existing research

Most of the research that focuses on Black subjectivity in higher education deals with students who are still in the system. There is not much qualitative research that unpacks students who have left the system. I had conversations with participants who left university in 1997, through to participants who were excluded in 2020. This research allowed me to have a historical overview of challenges on campuses directly after Apartheid and understand that, although time has passed, the issues remain eerily similar. Most importantly, this research brought to the forefront the narratives of a population of people who remain ignored and stigmatised in the national discourse.

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Part of my framing was intentional, in highlighting the strength, courage and resilience of my research participants. I insist that, when we discuss students who have been systematically excluded, we do not see them as victims. Brown's definition of vulnerability as courage allowed me to see and celebrate Black students. It takes great vulnerability, courage and hope to dream of a future outside of the disparity of our community contexts. It takes strength to endure coloniality and the unrelenting violence of the university space, and still show up each day for an education, to show up for your future. I reject vulnerability as an added risk/close proximity to oppression. Despite being socialised into an anti-Black world, the gusto and the magic to fight your way through the system makes my research participants conquerors.

Introducing ancestral violence and spiritual violence into my academic work has been difficult and scary. It was difficult because doing so required spiritual accountability, and transformed

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my spiritual life as well. It was scary because I understand that African spirituality is stigmatised and that academia is anti-spiritual; therefore, my work (and, by extension, my spirituality deeply embedded in my healing work) could be dismissed. Even so, I am proud that I am able to qualitatively explore (albeit briefly) the impact of coloniality in our ancestral lineages and spiritual lives. My experience is teaching me that, in university, our authentic self gets beaten out of us by coloniality. When we lose our authentic self, we lose our spiritual self, and thus lose our connection to our ancestors. This is spiritual and ancestral violence. Therefore, this degree and my research has been a reconnection to the ancestral and intergenerational wisdom that I lost in lecture halls at UCT. This is how decolonial research serves as spiritual intervention.

9.5 Ways forward

It is imperative that we pay attention to the language we use within and outside of academia when we discuss Black students who have been systematically excluded from higher education. Passive language and language that victim-blames, like 'drop-outs,' adds shame, and results in an erasure of the complexities and nuances of the challenges faced. It also suggests that students just leave, even though they are systematically excluded, and sometimes actively removed from the university space.

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Moreover, the high unemployment rate in South Africa requires us to decolonise the lie that someone is unemployable unless they have a university degree. High levels of unemployment among university graduates reflect a different story. Undergraduate degrees are the new matric. A few weeks after I finished my Bachelor degree in 2012, I had to work as a domestic worker in Brackenfell because of hunger. Most of us have to reach PhD level in order to get a decent job.

This brings me to my next point: many Black students do not have access to the university space, yet the university acts a gatekeeper into the job market. If most Black youth cannot access the university, and youth with degrees are unemployed, does this mean that the university, which is intended to provide opportunities for employment, has become obsolete? I am suggesting that maybe the work is not to decolonise the university, but rather to create a society where people can make a good living and live a good life outside of coloniality and neoliberal capitalism.

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9.6 Gaps and silences

It is impossible for any study to cover every aspect of a field, and there have been some gaps in my research. Although I was very intentional with recruiting queer research participants, most of the queer participants were cisgender. Although I do present trans students' experiences, I feel that, if there were more trans participants, it would have enriched my research and given more insight into an otherwise marginalised experience.

Moreover, although I speak about mental health issues, an in depth discussion with participants who are neurodiverse (ADHD, autism spectrum, bipolar etc) would have also given me more insight into how Black students with disabilities navigate higher education. Further, although I have started a rich discussion on African spirituality, it is too brief, and could have been explored in greater detail. I purposefully narrowed my research scope to only South African students, because I wanted to give a historical account of colonialism and Apartheid legacies, and how they can be traced in our current context. Because of this, I did not interview Black students from other African countries. They also are racialised Black and experience colonial violence when they are on campus; therefore, this is also a voice that is missing in the research. It would be insightful to understand how coloniality and Afrophobia (xenophobia only directed at Black people from the continent) shape their university experience in South Africa. Lastly, COVID has deepened the existing inequalities in the university (Shefer *et al*., 2022). Taking into consideration that this research was conducted during the COVID pandemic, more insight on how the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities would have enriched the research.

Conclusion

This research examined Black students' intersecting challenges in university, and how those challenges shaped their ability to complete their degree. My research disputes the harmful assumption that Black students do not finish university because they are intellectually inferior to their white peers, or they did not work hard enough. The national government's refusal to decolonise the country, the colonial stronghold of the university, structural racism, and systemic violences strategically remove Black students from the university space. I also explored how coloniality affects Black students' spiritual wellbeing, and how this resulted in some students' being unable to finish their qualification. While I chose to be honest about the

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unrelenting violence Black students face, it was very important for me to also celebrate their abilities and agency to fight the system, take back their power and sustain their hopefulness.

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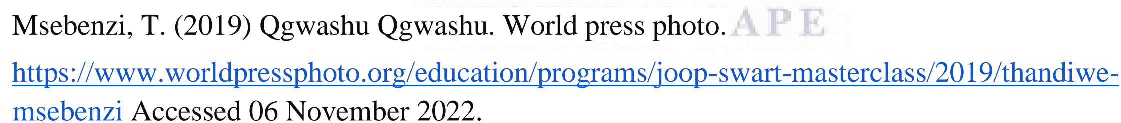

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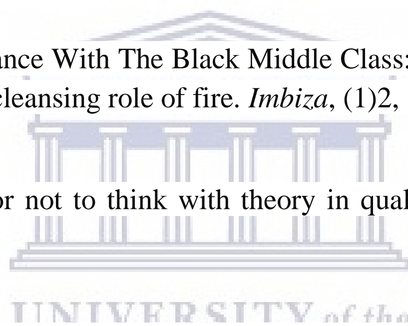

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Appendix A

Consent Form University of the Western Cape

An encounter with the structural and spiritual violence of coloniality: Intersectional understanding of Black students' experiences of exclusion in higher education

Researcher: Wanelisa Geraldin Albert

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. (If I wish to withdraw I may contact the lead researcher at anytime)

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3. I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research.

4. I give consent to be audio recorded during the interview.

5. I agree that the data collected from me may be used in future research.

6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant (*or legal representative*)	Date	Signature
Name of person taking consent *(If different from lead researcher)*	Date	Signature
Lead Researcher (*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*)	Date	Signature

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Copies: All participants will receive a copy of the signed and dated version of the consent form and information sheet for themselves. A copy of this will be filed and kept in a secure location for research purposes only.

Researcher:

Wanelisa Geraldin Albert
0726634244

wanelisa.sayf@gmail.com

Supervisor:

Dr. Tamara Shefer
0219592245

tshefer@icon.co.za

HOD:

Dr. Sisa Ngabaza
0219592245

sngabaza@uwc.ac.za

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

Appendix B

Information sheet

Title of Research: **Intersectional understandings of Black South African students' challenges to successful graduation in higher education**.

Introduction

My name is Wanelisa Geraldin Albert and I am currently a PhD student in the department of Women and Gender studies in the Arts Faculty at the University of the Western Cape. My research aim is to explore the challenges associated with Black students' inability to complete university degree. In order to complete my degrees this research project is part of my degree requirement

What is the study about?

This study seeks to explore the challenges associated with Black students' inability to complete university degree. I will be conducting one on one interviews with 40 Black students who did not successfully complete their degrees from the University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University and Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

What will my participation involve?

If you agree to participate, we will have an in-depth 60-minute interview. I will ask a few open-ended questions that will guide our conversation. You are more than welcome to state the time you are available. Furthermore, I will book a safe venue for the interview however feel free to identify a location that you will feel safe and find convenient for you to have the interview.

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Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your participation in this study will be anonymous. Hence, your real names will not reflect in the study because I intend to use fake names. Your personal information will be kept confidential. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data collected. All information will be stored in secure, locked spaces (physical and online).

What are the risks of this research?

It is unlikely that there will be risks but there is a possibility that you might evoke traumatizing events from you past or at presently during the interview. Therefore, to minimize the negative impact of such trauma, I will take steps to contain the situation by discontinuing the interview and offering to refer you for counselling at Life Line. Life Line offers free counselling and is located at 56 Roeland Street, Cape Town 8001, Peninsula, Western Cape, South Africa. The contact details of the organization, telephone:021 461 1113 , email: info@lifelinewc.org.za will be provided.

What are the benefits of this study?

There is not much research about why Black students do not graduate from university and as a result people tend to blame young people without understanding the various challenges that result in a student graduating from university. Findings of the proposed study will bring new insight into Black students' experiences and the external challenges that cause young people

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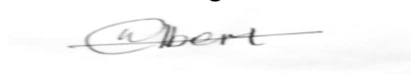
not to finish their degrees. This will bring new insight for future interventions for social transformations in higher education.

Is it necessary to be in this research and can I stop participating at any time?
No, it is not necessary for you participate in the study because it is voluntary. If at some stage, you no longer wish to be part of the study you can withdraw.

Is there any support available in case I am negatively affected by participating in this study?
Yes, you will receive assistance. I will refer you to the free counselling services provided by Life Line (telephone:0214611113, email: info@lifelinewc.org.za) should you be negatively affected.

What if I have questions?
Feel free to get hold of me via email or my mobile phone (provided below) should you have further questions. Should you require to contact my supervisor, her details are provided below. I will also be in contact with you for further questions and clarification I may require.

Researchers details
Wanelisa Geraldin Albert
Private Bag X17, Belville, 7535
South Africa
Cell: 0726634144
Email: wanelisa.sayf@gmail.com
Researcher's Signature:



Supervisor's details
Prof. T. Shefer
Private Bag X17, Belville, 7535
South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 21 9592234
Fax: +27 (0) 21 9591273
Email: tammy.shefer@gmail.com

Tamara Shefer
Professor, Women's and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

UWC Research Ethics Office
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za
Tel: +27 (0) 21 9504111

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/